



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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District Attorney Mike Ramsey announced today that Robert Ponce, 34, a former police officer for the City of Chico has been charged with the crime of filing a false police report. The charge stems from a police report Ponce filed in October of 2007, when he was still employed as a police officer. The filing of the report was the culmination of a series of events involving Ponce, a woman who became the object of his desire and a counterfeit one-hundred bill.

The series of events began in August 2007 when Ponce was assigned to investigate the passing of a counterfeit one hundred dollar bill at a Chico convenience store. During that investigation, Ponce took possession of the counterfeit bill, but failed to log it into the evidence unit as required by Chico Police Department policy. Instead, Ponce retained possession of the bill.

In October 2007, Ponce was assigned to investigate a domestic disturbance involving a 39 year old Chico woman. Ponce became enamored with her and over the course of the following two days exchanged telephone calls and text messages with her. At one point, while off duty, Ponce had a brief meeting with her. During that meeting Ponce gave the woman the counterfeit bill.

Later that same day, the woman tried to use the bill to pay for items at a store. The store clerk identified the bill as a counterfeit and confronted her. The woman, who did not know the bill was a counterfeit, told the clerk she was given the bill by a police officer. The clerk called the Chico Police Department to report the incident. At the same time, the woman used her cellular telephone to call Ponce to ask him why he gave her a counterfeit bill. After receiving the call, Ponce responded to the store and again took possession of the counterfeit bill.

The Chico police supervisor on duty that night became concerned about the apparent irregularity of the situation and directed Ponce to write a report, documenting the circumstances surrounding the counterfeit bill. Ponce subsequently wrote and filed a police report pertaining to the matter. However, Ponce intentionally included false information in the report in an effort to cover-up his mishandling of the counterfeit bill and his inappropriate contact with the involved woman.

The Chico Police Department immediately initiated an administrative investigation and placed Ponce on administrative leave. Upon completion of the investigation, Ponce was terminated from employment as a police officer and a request for criminal complaint was submitted to the Butte County District Attorney's Office.

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Ramsey noted that until the circumstances of this matter came to light, Ponce had always been regarded as a exemplary officer. Prior to his employment with Chico Police Department for the past 3 years, Ponce was employed as a Butte County Deputy Sheriff. While with the Chico Police Department he received several awards including the Medal of Courage.

However, Ramsey said Ponce's actions violated his department's and the public's trust and was considered a serious breach of the ethical standard expected of police officers. "I am extremely saddened to see this type of behavior which is so opposite of what we have come to expect of our local officers. I can not readily think of a similar situation in the past. Luckily, the false report did not affect any suspect or citizen, just Ponce's credibility and career." Ramsey said that he had written letters to local attorneys involved with cases involving Ponce inviting them to review their cases with him in light of the allegations against Ponce.

Ponce will be arraigned in Superior Court on March 14, 2008. He faces upwards of one year in the county jail and a fine of \$1,000.