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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
June 11, 2008

Robert Ponce, 34, a former Chico police officer was sentenced to 30 days in county jail and fined nearly \$1000 today in Butte County Superior Court. Ponce on April 9 had pleaded no contest to the crime of filing a false police report. His sentencing was put over until today to allow the probation department to prepare a report for the judge.

Judge Steven Howell handed down the sentence and echoed the probation department's comment that Ponce's "actions violated his department's and the public's trust and was considered a serious violation of the ethical standard expected of police officers." Howell gave Ponce two weeks to turn himself in at the Butte County Jail.

The charge stemmed 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 on-duty 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

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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.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said Ponce's actions had dishonored all honest individuals in law enforcement. "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 cannot 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."