



# BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### Criminal Charges Filed Against Chico State Hacker

The Butte County District Attorney's Office today charged a 22-year-old Chico man with illegal computer hacking after an extensive investigation confirmed the man had unlawfully accessed multiple computers at Chico State University. The illegal "hacks" then lead to the internet posting of a list of University students who had applied for COVID-19 vaccine exemptions.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the investigation lead to **Alejandro Benitez**, 22, a recent graduate of the University, who worked in the Information Technology Support Services Office on campus. Ramsey said the investigation began when a Sacramento newspaper published an article in August describing a spreadsheet that had been posted on several online forums. The spreadsheet included requests from about 130 students, who requested religious exemptions from the University's vaccine mandate. Student names and personal information were included in 18 of the entries.

Ramsey said the Chico State University Police examined the posted spreadsheet and were able to back trace a trail to Benitez. The police also discovered it was a Chico State professor who had tipped off the media as to the existence of the online posts. The professor told police rather than alerting the University about his discovery, he instead alerted his union and the media with the hope any potential civil rights and privacy violations would be investigated. Ramsey stated the professor would not be facing charges, as his actions were not criminal. Ramsey explained the criminal conduct involved in this case is unlawfully accessing the computers.

Ramsey said it was determined Benitez got the confidential exemption lists by illegally accessing at least two computers assigned to Chico State administrators during the course of his work. Benitez downloaded numerous files from the administrator's computers, which included the spreadsheets with students' requests for religious exemptions.

Ramsey said prior to his posting the spreadsheets on the internet, Benitez attempted to redact the students' personal identifying information by replacing the data in a column with student email addresses with the word "anonymous"; however, Benitez failed to note some of the students' personal identifying information was located in other columns of the spreadsheet.

Ramsey commented, "Benitez is an illegal hacker and a worse redactor."

The Butte County District Attorney's Office has charged Benitez with two misdemeanor counts of Unauthorized Computer Access. He faces upwards of two years in county jail. A warrant will be issued for Benitez' arrest if he does not voluntarily appear in court.