

CRIME

## \$2M settlement reached, says group suing police and Raleigh after fake drug arrests

BY [VIRGINIA BRIDGES](#) UPDATED SEPTEMBER 30, 2021 8:19 AM



Community members and panelists were critical of Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman's actions in investigating and prosecuting police for excessive force and corruption during a community forum, Sept. 23, 2021. BY ABC11



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The attorneys for 12 people affected by an alleged fake drug scheme involving a confidential informant for the Raleigh Police Department say they have reached a \$2 million settlement in a federal civil rights lawsuit.

“Plaintiffs appreciate the City of Raleigh’s recognition of the trauma and suffering caused by these wrongful arrests and incarcerations,” states a press release sent out just before midnight Wednesday.

The News & Observer left messages for city officials Thursday morning to confirm the settlement.

The settlement responds to the [civil rights lawsuit filed in April](#) seeking policy changes and actual and punitive damages from the city of Raleigh, Officer Omar Abdullah and seven of his colleagues, including a sergeant and a lieutenant.

The lawsuit was filed by 12 people arrested or affected by arrests and jail time that followed a Raleigh police informant contending people had sold him heroin, or in one case marijuana, but providing drugs that turned out to be fake.

The press release was issued by the group's attorneys including Abraham Rubert-Schewel, Emily Gladden and Micheal Littlejohn Jr. It also urged the police department and Wake County District Attorney's Office to adopt recommended changes to prevent others from being falsely accused and jailed.

The lawsuit contends that about 15 Black men were falsely charged in a fake heroin scheme and spent a collective 2 1/2 years behind bars before the charges were dismissed.

The men lost jobs and missed cancer treatments and time with their children, including a newborn, the lawsuit states.

While District Attorney Lorrin Freeman has said there isn't any evidence that shows Abdullah knew the drugs were fake, the lawsuit contends that he and others knew.

The lawsuit doesn't name the informant other than by his nickname, Aspirin. Abdullah and another officer started calling the informant Aspirin after a 2018 deal in which he sold a confidential informant crushed aspirin claiming it was illegal drugs, the lawsuit states.

Dennis Leon Williams Jr., who has been identified as the informant through court documents and interviews, was charged earlier this month with five counts of obstructing justice in the fake drugs scheme. His attorney said he hasn't received the evidence in the case and has no information at this time.

## **TIMELINE**

In August 2018, Raleigh police officers including Abdullah arrested Williams, according to court records. He was charged with selling a counterfeit controlled substance. The charge was dismissed at the end of February 2019, "in the interest of justice," court records indicate.

From January 2019 to Aug. 30, 2019, Williams was in prison serving a sentence

on a Nash County conviction of larceny over \$1,000.

The same month that Williams got out of prison, the lawsuit says Abdullah and David Chadwick Nance successfully sought approval to use an unnamed confidential informant.

From Oct. 21, 2019, to May 15, 2020, the informant contended that at least 15 people sold him drugs that turned out to be fake, the lawsuit states. All of the charges were dismissed by July 30, 2020.

The officers provided marked cash, and the informant bought crack cocaine worth under \$100, the lawsuit states. The informant was homeless and agreed to be a confidential informant to work off pending charges and to make money.

The informant complained about his pay, and Abdullah told him he could make more money if he brought in bigger cases, another officer said, according to the lawsuit.

Abdullah and the informant then conspired to fabricate heroin charges against at least 15 individuals, the lawsuit states.

“Aspirin with the knowledge and assistance of Abdullah hid fake heroin on his body before each alleged buy,” the lawsuit states.

Abdullah claimed he searched the informant before each buy, but never found any contraband, the lawsuit states.

“Aspirin would shield his undercover camera, in violation of RPD procedure, with his jacket so the alleged buy would not be recorded,” the lawsuit states.

Abdullah met alone with the informant before and after the alleged transactions and when he gave him money for his work, which are all also violations of Raleigh police policy, the lawsuit states.

Nance and three other officers told Abdullah “on numerous occasions” that the drugs were brown sugar, the lawsuit states, and occasional field tests on the alleged drugs also indicated they were fake.

Still, Abdullah charged the plaintiffs and others with trafficking and continued to use the confidential informant, the lawsuit states.

Officers reported the fake heroin to a sergeant and a lieutenant but no one tried to stop the arrests or prosecutions, it states.

Defendants also failed to “or severely delayed” informing the Wake County District Attorney’s Office about the negative test results, the lawsuit says.

Freeman said earlier this year that these cases highlighted the fact her office didn’t initially see the pattern of fake drugs from a specific informant and officer, since a half-dozen prosecutors work drug cases.

Changes that followed include drug analysis chemists notifying a representative

in the District Attorney's Office if results could affect pending charges, according to documents obtained by The N&O.

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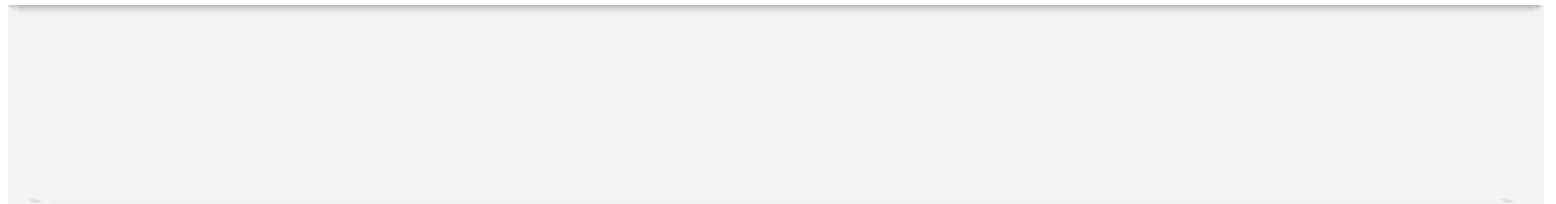
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