

ACLU of Florida, SLC Finalize Settlement with City of Fort Lauderdale in Homeless Encampment Raid Case

Settlement terms include damages in the amount of \$40,120 to be divided among the ten individuals whose property was unlawfully seized and destroyed by the City, ending a year-long litigation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - July 17, 2018

CONTACT: ACLU of Florida Media Office, media@aclufl.org, (786) 363-2737; Kirsten Anderson (SLC), kirsten.anderson@southernlegal.org, (352) 271-8890

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL – The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida and Southern Legal Counsel (SLC) have finalized a settlement in a lawsuit against the City of Fort Lauderdale on behalf of 10 individuals whose property was unlawfully seized and destroyed by city workers in a homeless encampment raid in a downtown park. In May 2017, city workers and police officers arrived at the homeless encampment near Stranahan Park in downtown Fort Lauderdale with front-end loaders and dumpsters to throw away personal belongings of homeless persons who were either not present at the time of the raid or those who were not able to load what they had into bins in the short time the city gave them.

The lawsuit, filed in June 2017, argued that the City of Fort Lauderdale's raid on the homeless encampment violated the U.S. Constitution's protections against unreasonable seizures of personal property, as well as the guarantee of due process. The settlement, signed by the parties and finalized July 13, 2018, agrees to pay \$82,020 to cover damages to the individual plaintiffs, mediation costs, litigation costs and attorneys' fees.

"We're pleased that the City of Fort Lauderdale agreed to settle and that our clients will receive this relief," said Jackie Azis, ACLU of Florida staff attorney. "We hope that this settlement will be a reminder to other cities across the state that they cannot violate anyone's constitutional rights—regardless of if they are poor or homeless."

"While this settlement is a step in the right direction, we believe the city should now proactively work towards addressing the problem of homelessness at the root," said SLC Litigation Director Kirsten Anderson. "Criminalizing homelessness is counterproductive to individuals who are seeking to secure and maintain affordable housing and opportunities to provide for their basic human needs."

"Most of the low and middle income people in our society are only one paycheck from becoming homeless. Once this happens to you, you find yourself alone and scared with no direction and nowhere to turn," said Kevin Rice, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. "While it took over a year to settle the case, these attorneys never gave up. I didn't get my possessions back, however, the award has allowed me the opportunity to obtain housing and get off the street."

A video featuring interviews with many of the plaintiffs describing what they lost in the city's raid is available on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy7qUtDGXZs>

###