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THREE CICERO POLICE OFFICERS ARRESTED ON FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS CHARGES ALLEGING BEATINGS, PLANTING EVIDENCE, AND PERJURY

CHICAGO – Three current police officers in west suburban Cicero were arrested today on federal civil rights charges for allegedly victimizing five individuals in a series of incidents between 2002 and 2004, federal officials announced. A federal grand jury indictment unsealed following the arrests alleges that the officers – acting at times together, as a pair or individually – engaged in physical beatings and falsifying evidence and testimony against the victims, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The defendants, **James DiSantis**, who was deputy superintendent of the Cicero Police Department at the time of the incidents, and **William Peslak** and **Joseph DeKiel**, both then assigned to the department's gang tactical unit, were charged in an eight-count indictment that was returned under seal on Oct. 5. DiSantis, 41, of Riverside, was charged with four counts of committing civil rights abuses and one count of conspiracy. Peslak, 35, of Downers Grove, was charged with three counts of committing civil rights abuses and two counts of conspiracy. DeKiel, 37, of Palos Park, was charged with one count of committing civil rights abuses and two counts of conspiracy.

All three defendants are scheduled to appear at 10:30 a.m. today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Geraldine Soat Brown in U.S. District Court.

All eight counts of the indictment allege that the officers violated the victims' civil rights by "acting under color of law," meaning through their official capacity as police officers. The charges do not allege that the violations had anything to do with the victims' race or ethnicity or that they were discriminated against on any such basis.

According to the indictment, all three defendants combined to abuse the civil rights of an individual, identified as Victim W, of Cicero, on August 10, 2003. Specifically, it alleges that after a traffic stop, DeKiel broke Victim W's nose when he struck Victim W's head against a car. After bringing Victim W to the Cicero Police Department, DeKiel and DiSantis continued to beat Victim W in an interview room, the indictment alleges, and eventually, DiSantis struck Victim W in the head with a handgun. Also in the interview room, Peslak allegedly planted cocaine on Victim W. The officers then ordered Victim W to clean up his own blood using the shirt off of his own back.

On the previous day, August 9, 2003, Peslak allegedly was involved in a beating of another individual motorist, identified in the indictment as Victim D, striking Victim D's head against a car after pulling it over. Peslak and DeKiel then allegedly conspired to present false evidence at Victim D's criminal trial on Feb. 18, 2004, by agreeing to have DeKiel falsely corroborate Peslak's account of the altercation when DeKiel was even not even present during the incident.

DiSantis alone was charged with civil rights abuses involving two different victims on September 3, 2003. Specifically, the indictment alleges that he pulled over a car driven by a homeless individual, identified as Victim P, and struck her in the head. When another individual,

identified as Victim M, observed and attempted to videotape this incident, DiSantis struck Victim M in the head, the indictment alleges.

DiSantis was also charged with striking another individual, identified as Victim C, with his police badge and knocking Victim C to the ground on June 27, 2003, after Victim C refused DiSantis' family access to a Cicero public swimming pool without paying the required fee.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Brandon Fox and Sergio Acosta.

If convicted, each count carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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