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Journalist and Congressional Candidate Sues Humboldt County and Two Sheriff's Deputies for Abuse of Civil Rights

Eugene, OR — Today, CLDC attorneys representing Green Party Congressional candidate Michael "Gamms" Gammariello filed a federal civil rights lawsuit in California federal court against Humboldt County and two of its Sheriff's deputies for illegal police brutality.

Mike Gammariello is an independent journalist traveling around the United States documenting activists' work through video and print media. He is currently a Green Party Congressional candidate in his home state of New York.

On June 17, 2019, Mr. Gammariello was arrested on public land near Rio Dell, Humboldt County, in northern California, while acting as an observer and video journalist at a long-standing logging protest of an area containing significant old growth forest. Proposed logging and herbicide use by Humboldt Redwood Company (HRC) within the Mattole watershed has for years raised significant and wide-spread controversy—more so now that every intact forest is essential to combat catastrophic climate change. Local law enforcement also has a long history of violating the constitutional rights of forest protectors and acting as the hired goons for private timber industry instead of protecting the local community.

Arriving about two weeks into the demonstration, Mr. Gammariello was at the logging site to work on a long-form video piece about the Mattole old-growth forest logging controversy. When arrested, Mr. Gammariello was wearing his photo credentials labeled "United Nations," issued to him by the International Native Tradition Interchange (INTI), which has consultative status with the U.N. Economic and Social Council. On the evening of June 16, 2019, Mr. Gammariello was standing nearby a group of about 15 forest protectors. A private corporate security guard hired by HRC, standing directly in front of HRC's gate, told the group that if they stood about four feet away from him, they would be on the public land and not on private land, and would therefore not be trespassing. The group complied and Mr. Gammariello stood even further back on the public land in order to videotape the demonstration.

In the middle of the night, about 3:45 a.m. on June 17, the corporate security guard said he was "calling my friends in the sheriff's office." A sheriff's vehicle immediately arrived to discover the group of forest protectors and Mr. Gammariello all on public property on the side of a public roadway. Humboldt County Sheriff's Deputy Conan Moore quickly approached Mr. Gammariello, bypassing protectors who were closer to the HRC gate

(who were not recording). Mr. Gammariello clearly stated "Press," showing his credentials, but Moore responded "I don't care," and, without warning of any sort, grabbed Mr. Gammariello's camera, and knocked him to the ground, face first. Moore then rested his weight on top of Mr. Gammariello with his knee in the back of Mr. Gammariello's neck and head while another kneeled on Mr. Gammariello's legs. Mr. Gammariello explained his press status several times while being arrested. The assault on Mr. Gammariello resulted in a fractured rib and several other bruised ribs; a large contusion to his right eye socket; a three-centimeter laceration on his left upper lip, contusions on his nose, and loosening of a tooth.

Recently, more than six months after the assault, and after Mr. Gammariello filed a tort claim notice that placed Humboldt County on notice that he was planning to sue them, the Humboldt County District Attorney's office informed him they were charging him with two misdemeanors and a violation, in seeming retaliation for his planned lawsuit.

"I was violently assaulted and unlawfully arrested by Humboldt County for documenting an action to defend the Mattole's Old Growth Forest," said Plaintiff Mike "Gamms" Gammariello. "Corporations like HRC are destroying our planet and everyone on it for financial gain while law enforcement protects those private profits with violent force without fear of accountability. We seek accountability and justice, not only for me and my busted face and fractured rib, but for every forest defender who has been brutalized for a corporation's bottom line. No journalist should ever be beat up by police for documenting police; Humboldt County and their deputies must be held accountable for their misconduct."

"When law enforcement does the dirty work for the timber industry, they cannot perform their public duties to protect and serve the people of Humboldt County," said Lauren Regan, CLDC Executive Director and Senior Staff Attorney. "This department has a history of violating peoples' constitutional rights to be free from excessive force and unlawful seizures, in part because they have usually not been held accountable for their abuse. Mr. Gammariello is just one of many activists beaten by Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies in an attempt to intimidate and bully them into silence."

"The Mattole Forest Defense Campaign stands in solidarity with the decision to sue the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department in order to prevent further police brutality for others in the future. The department has a notorious reputation for using excessive force against non-violent forest defenders who have been fighting to save the ancient Mattole forest from being logged for over 20 years, and will continue to do so despite the continued oppressive police response. We demand that the Humboldt Sheriff's Department be brought to justice and held accountable for the harm it causes, the violence it perpetuates, and for its crimes against community members who non-violently stand up to prevent the cutting of priceless forest land and the destruction of habits," said the Mattole Forest Defense Campaign in its official statement.

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*The **Civil Liberties Defense Center** supports movements that seek to dismantle the political and economic structures at the root of social inequality and environmental destruction.*



Photo: June 17, 2019-Michael Gammariello is wrongfully arrested on public land by Humboldt County Sherriff Deputies Moore (at victim's head) and Mendes (at victim's legs).