



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 11, 2025

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

**CITY OF CHICAGO ANNOUNCES LANDMARK GLOBAL SETTLEMENT TO RESOLVE
WRONGFUL CONVICTION LAWSUITS TIED TO RONALD WATTS**

Innovative resolution aims to close years-old cases, reduce legal exposure in fiscally responsible manner while reinforcing the City's reform efforts towards constitutional policing.

CHICAGO - Mayor Brandon Johnson and Corporation Counsel Mary B. Richardson-Lowry today announced a historic global settlement to resolve 176 police misconduct lawsuits brought by individuals whose convictions following arrests by former Chicago Police Department (CPD) Sgt. Ronald Watts, former officer Kallatt Mohammed and other members of Watts's tactical team were subsequently vacated. These lawsuits, some dating back to 2017 and involving conduct that occurred more than two decades ago, have remained open and unresolved, placing a financial strain on the City due to legal costs and overloading the City Law Department's docket of pending cases.

"This is the first time we've reached a comprehensive settlement to resolve wrongful conviction claims," said **Mayor Johnson**. "It's a historic moment that reflects our commitment to accountability and healing."

The global settlement, totaling \$90 million, offers a pathway to closure, reducing the potential for adverse verdicts, lessening long-term legal expenses, easing fiscal pressure, and reinforcing the City's commitment to constitutional policing which leads to greater accountability.

Following a joint investigation by FBI and CPD's Internal Affairs Division, Watts and Mohammed were both federally indicted in 2012, both pled guilty and served time in federal prison.

The plaintiffs—who've collectively spent between 182 and 204 years in custody, both pre- and post-trial conviction—allege they were wrongfully convicted based on fabricated evidence presented by Watts and his tactical team. All convictions arising from these arrests have been vacated. Nearly all plaintiffs were granted a Certificate of Innocence.



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Guided by Richardson-Lowry, a seasoned City attorney and former partner at law firm Mayer Brown, the Corporation Counsel has pursued resolution of aged and costly cases and brought in Deputy Corporation Counsel Victoria Benson to focus exclusively on complex mass torts litigation, ensuring the City's resources are deployed efficiently and strategically.

"The longer these cases remain unresolved, the more expensive closure becomes, driven largely by the potential for extraordinarily large jury awards, rising settlement costs, and mounting attorneys' fees," said **Richardson-Lowry**.

"By confronting litigation challenges head-on, modernizing our approach, and ensuring fiscal responsibility, this global settlement aligns with our vision. Importantly, this settlement resolves approximately 64% of the City's reverse conviction cases, effectively bringing closure to years of complex and costly litigation and ensuring fairness for all parties involved. Our Mass Torts and Complex Litigation Division worked closely with the federal magistrate judges who oversaw the settlement discussions in these cases, as well as plaintiffs' counsel, to facilitate a resolution that was both fair and fiscally responsible."

Through its reform and consent decree compliance efforts, CPD has developed and updated its policies to better detect and prevent the type of misconduct alleged in these cases.

"The cases involved in this settlement do not represent the Chicago Police Department of today," said **CPD Superintendent Larry Snelling**. "In addition to enhanced policies and consistent training, we are continuously implementing safeguards to strengthen accountability and supervision. These safeguards aim to both prevent misconduct and rebuild trust within our communities across the city."

All 180 plaintiffs and their legal representatives have accepted the proposed global settlement to fully settle all their claims, inclusive of attorneys' fees and costs. The proposed settlement will be presented for approval at the Sept. 15 Committee on Finance meeting before being voted on by the full City Council.

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