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**CHICAGO POLICE OFFICER SENTENCED TO 40 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR VIOLATING FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS OF A MAN CONFINED IN A WHEELCHAIR**

CHICAGO – **William Cozzi**, a Chicago police officer, was sentenced today to 40 months in federal prison for violating the federal civil rights of a man whom the officer struck repeatedly with a dangerous weapon while the man was handcuffed and shackled in a wheelchair, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Loretta King; and Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Cozzi, 52, of Chicago, pleaded guilty in January, admitting that he used excessive, or unreasonable, force while acting under color of law. He was ordered to begin serving his sentence on Aug. 6, 2009. The sentence was imposed by U.S. District Judge Blanche Manning, who also imposed a \$2,000 fine, two years of supervised release and 200 hours of community service. Cozzi joined the Chicago Police Department in 1992 and was assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> District at the time of the alleged incident. He was subsequently suspended from duty.

Cozzi was charged in April 2008 with depriving the victim of his civil rights. In pleading guilty, Cozzi admitted that on Aug. 2, 2005, while performing his duties as a police officer, he used a “sap” – a dangerous weapon, which is similar to a blackjack – to repeatedly strike the unnamed victim, identified only as “Victim A,” who was handcuffed and shackled in a wheelchair at Norwegian

American Hospital, resulting in bodily injury. At the time, Victim A was awaiting treatment in the hospital emergency room after being stabbed in the shoulder.

“Law enforcement officers may not use unreasonable force with impunity and all citizens, regardless of being in police custody, are entitled to be protected from the use of excessive force,” Mr. Fitzgerald said.

“Police officers are given tremendous authority and responsibility so that they can protect and serve the public trust. Those who abuse that authority face serious consequences,” said Ms. King. “The Civil Rights Division is committed to the vigorous enforcement of federal laws prohibiting this type of misconduct by law enforcement officials.”

Cozzi pleaded guilty while reserving his right to appeal a judge’s rulings last year denying his motion to dismiss the indictment on the grounds that the prosecution was based in part on compelled statements he made to the Chicago Police Department’s Office of Professional Standards and during a police review board hearing.

According to a plea agreement, Cozzi was dispatched to the hospital to respond to the stabbing and approached Victim A who was being loud and verbally abusive while awaiting treatment for the stabbing. Shortly after approaching Victim A, Cozzi placed him in handcuffs and left the emergency room to retrieve leg shackles, which he then placed upon Victim A. With the victim restrained, Cozzi used a sap to repeatedly strike him in the face and body. At the time, Victim A posed no physical threat to Cozzi or anyone else at the hospital, according to the plea agreement.

Cozzi also admitted that he subsequently prepared a false arrest report and misdemeanor complaints stating that Victim A attempted to punch him and two hospital security guards, as well as a false tactical response report stating that he used an “open hand strike” on Victim A but omitted that he struck the victim with a sap.

The Government was represented in court by Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott Drury and DOJ Civil Rights Division Trial Attorney Betsy Biffel.

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