St. Louis, Missouri (July 28, 2011) – The St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department exonerated an officer wrongly accused of using excessive force in a highly publicized incident that occurred in the early morning hours of New Year’s Day. Police Officer Dustin Ries was video recorded by a bystander as he fought off an assailant at the Shell Gas Station at Arsenal and I-55. The video went viral on websites like YouTube and the police department responded with a hasty rush to judgment. Ries was benched for months with a desk job as the department made public pronouncements of his guilt before an investigation was even completed.

The Internal Affairs Division referred the case to the St. Louis Circuit Attorney’s office as they prepared to terminate Ries for departmental and criminal violations. But, the Circuit Attorney, after completing a thorough investigation, determined that Ries’s use of force against his attacker, William Ginger, was justifiable and appropriate under the circumstances. Based on witness interviews about the moments that preceded the video, the Circuit Attorney determined that Ginger was “belligerent” and “highly intoxicated” and that there was clear and persuasive evidence that it was Ginger who assaulted Ries. Ginger was subsequently charged by the Circuit Attorney with assault in May.

It took the department nearly three months after the assault charges were filed and almost seven months after the original incident to exonerate Ries. St. Louis Police Officers Association Business Manager, Jeff Roorda, commented, “It is unthinkable that this administration and its bungling Internal Affairs Division would go after a cop’s career and try to put him in jail without completing a thorough investigation. The Circuit Attorney has only a handful of investigators compared to the bloated IAD Division but they did the hard work, got to the facts and saw that justice was done. It’s a shame that that’s not how Internal Affairs does their job.”

Roorda described this incident as symptomatic of a department culture where the officer is always wrong. Roorda points to a department email from Chief Isom to commanders earlier this month establishing a policy that “the customer is always right” and ordering that officers be subjected to formal complaints when someone feels that they receive “poor service.” Roorda responded, “About half the people that our cops deal with are innocent but traumatized victims frustrated with what’s happened to them, while the other half are violent, dangerous criminals. The customer’s not always right; they’re right about half the time. The cops work hard to do their job and they get it right 99% of the time but when they make a mistake in the heat of the moment, perceived or real, the department tries to crucify them. This administration isn’t happy until they get their pound of flesh.”

Roorda pointed to Sergeant Antonio Triplett, the supervisor that instructed Ries not to arrest Ginger because of the high volume of calls resulting from New Year’s Eve celebrations. Triplett announced his retirement this week under the threat of discipline over the incident. “The department defended Sgt. Triplett’s decision again and again until they learned of the Circuit Attorney’s finding. Then, they
decided to go after him instead of admitting that IAD got it wrong. They’ve created a culture in the department where supervisors are afraid to stand behind their men and are expected to go after officers over every petty complaint they can conjure up. This is just wrong, not just for the men and women of the police department but for the citizens they serve. This case isn’t the exception; it’s the rule.”

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