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PRESS RELEASE

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**STATE'S ATTORNEY DISMISSES CHARGES IN DRUG CASE INVOLVING
CONVICTED POLICE OFFICER FOLLOWING CONVICTION INTEGRITY REVIEW**

The Cook County State's Attorney's Office today vacated drug charges against a Chicago man currently serving a 14-year prison sentence following a review of the case by the State's Attorney's Conviction Integrity Unit, State's Attorney Anita Alvarez announced today.

Prosecutors moved to vacate the conviction of Ben Baker, 43, who was convicted and sentenced to the 14-year prison term nearly a decade ago for allegedly possessing a large amount of narcotics with the intent to deliver.

According to prosecutors, the decision comes in the wake of the conviction of former Chicago Police sergeant Ronald Watts, who was involved in the case and testified at the trial of Baker in 2005. Watts was convicted in federal court in 2013 for attempting to steal money from a person he believed to be a drug courier and sentenced to 22 months in prison.

"As soon as this case was brought to our attention my Conviction Integrity Unit began an immediate review of this case," said State's Attorney Alvarez. "Based upon our review and the fact that this now convicted officer provided key testimony during the trial of Mr. Baker, this conviction can no longer stand."

Baker was arrested on March 23, 2005 at the Ida B. Wells housing projects. Arresting officers testified at trial that they came upon Baker in a third floor stairwell and that Baker had drugs in his hand. The officers chased Baker to the bottom of the stairs where he was captured and additional narcotics were found. Baker claimed that Watts had threatened him in the past and had planted the drugs on him at the time of his arrest.

At the time of the trial Judge Michael Toomin stated that he did not find Baker to be credible due to a lack of corroboration about his claims about Watt's conduct. Despite multiple investigations, Watts was not implicated in any criminal behavior until 2011, when he and another Chicago Police Officer attempted to steal money from a person they believed to be a drug courier. The individual was actually cooperating with investigators, and Watts' crime was recorded.

The Conviction Integrity Unit was created by State's Attorney Alvarez in February of 2012 with the goal of placing a new emphasis and a stronger focus on the review of cases involving questionable convictions. Since the creation of the unit a total of 14 defendants have had their convictions vacated as a result of conviction integrity investigations.

