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Wrongfully convicted Danbury man gets \$170,000 from state

By Nelson Oliveira Published 3:44 pm, Friday, December 25, 2015



Michael Seri Jr. speaks at the funeral for his father, Michael "Tweezer" Seri Sr., in 2014. .

After being accused of exposing himself in the Newtown public library in 2001, **Michael Seri** was convicted, sentenced to six months in prison and labeled a sex offender.

But in 2003, prosecutors dropped the charges against Seri — a Danbury artist, poet and Army veteran — after fingerprint evidence linked the crime to a known sexual predator who had been



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arrested for public indecency at other libraries in the area.

Fourteen years after the wrongful conviction, Seri's battle to clear his record ended this week when the state awarded him \$170,000 in damage

In a decision published Tuesday, Claims Commissioner **J. Paul Vance Jr.** offered his "sincerest apologies to Mr. Seri for the burden that he was forced to endure."

"Mr. Seri, like many of those who have been wrongfully convicted, was forced to endure suffering that is indescribable, and some of the injuries continue even after the accused is found to be innocent," Vance wrote.

Seri, who was seeking \$395,000, claimed the wrongful incarceration prevented him from working and forced him to quit a college course he was taking. After his release, Seri struggled financially, suffered physical and psychological pain, and was barred from seeing child relatives.

"Michael suffered a lot from what happened," said his attorney, **David K. Jaffe**.

As a registered sex offender, Seri was barred from returning to his apartment because his landlord had a young daughter. Since he couldn't live with his siblings, who also had young children, Seri slept in his car until a friend found him an apartment in Danbury.

He also struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder, which became worse after his conviction.

The state awarded him \$370,000 this week, but subtracted \$200,000, which Seri recovered in 2009 by successfully suing Newtown and its police department for mistakes made in the investigation.

Seri could not be reached for comment Wednesday, but Jaffe thanked the commissioner for "considering everything thoughtfully."

"I feel that the decision was thoughtful and fair," Jaffe said. "This will give him closure. He'll finally be able to move on with his life."

Newtown police charged Seri with masturbating in front of a 15-year-old girl, even though the victim described her attacker as a Hispanic man with dark hair, while Seri was white and balding. The girl also failed to pick Seri out of a police lineup.

At trial, witnesses identified Seri as the man they saw on the third floor of the library. Their testimony was bolstered by a fingerprint expert who said he couldn't rule out the possibility Seri's prints were on two library books found at the scene.

In June 2002, as Seri sat in his maximum-security prison cell, a second incident occurred at the same library. A girl studying for a Spanish exam reported she saw a man masturbating. His appearance fit the description the victim gave some 15 months earlier.

A fingerprint expert confirmed that at least one fingerprint on the books matched that of the perpetrator — convicted sex offender Angel Laporte.

In 2003, Seri was granted a new trial, but the charges were dismissed before the trial began.

In his opinion, Vance wrote that Seri's description of the wrongful incarceration as "intense," "frightening" and "scary" actually "fall short of characterizing his awful experience."

Seri's father, Michael "Tweezer" Seri, was a former state representative, Danbury town clerk and World War II veteran. He died last year at 90 years old.

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