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Yolo County D.A. Investigates "Professional Plaintiff"

Written for the web by [C. Johnson](#), Internet News Producer



A man who admits making his living filing lawsuits is targeting businesses in Yolo County for their lack of disabled parking spaces. In the process he's come under scrutiny of the district attorney.

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"We just got the lawsuit in the mail with a letter saying either we come up with \$6,000 or we're going to sue you for \$20,000," said Mary Ann

Trongo, a Woodland Century 21 realtor. "Extortion, that's what they call it."

Trongo is one of a dozen business owners in Woodland and Davis to be sued by Mathew Lakota. Some, like Trongo, have since added disabled parking but are being sued anyway. Woodland equipment dealer Mike Grissom is among them. "We just feel we aren't bad people and we ought to have the right to correct a problem without going to court and being sued over it," Grissom explained.

Lakota has filed more than 100 similar suits in Butte County, where a judge ultimately declared him a "vexatious litigant." Lakota now needs prior judicial approval to file suit, which he obtained in Yolo County.

Calling himself an advocate for the disabled, Lakota defends his practice of suing businesses with no advance warning. "It's amazing to me that the Americans with Disabilities Act is now 13 years old," Lakota told News10. "I don't see any reason why I have to offer them the opportunity to do something they were legally required to do."

Lakota contends that he doesn't make any money from his

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lawsuits and threats of litigation. All proceeds, he says, are turned over to a non-profit corporation called "Disabled Access Legal Defense." However, records from the California Secretary of State show the corporation and Lakota share the same address outside Oroville.

In court documents, Lakota claims he's too poor to pay the \$297 lawsuit filing fee, so he's been granted fee waivers.

The Yolo County district attorney confirmed he's investigating Lakota's practices, including the claim of poverty. "We're looking at all aspects of Mr. Lakota's behavior," District Attorney Dave Henderson told News10.

This wouldn't be the first time Mathew Lakota ran afoul of the law. He was convicted three years ago of impersonating a parking enforcement officer and trying to cash checks from parking tickets he wrote. Lakota faces six months in jail if his pending appeal is rejected.



Created: 11/29/2005 5:02:15 PM

Updated: 12/1/2005 12:12:50 AM

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