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Woman Not Guilty of Traffic Stop Charges

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MANASSAS PARK, Va. - A Virginia woman who claims she was battered, bloodied and bruised by Manassas Park Police last February has finally had her day in court.

Argueda Dominguez was charged with obstructing justice and driving without a license. She went before a judge Thursday who found her not guilty of the offenses.

The incident happened in February. Dominguez was on her way to a mortgage lender to stop foreclosure on her house when she was stopped by Manassas Park Police Lt. Rupert Prinze.

Dominguez says Prinze pepper sprayed her, grabbed her, hit her several times and threw her on the ground when she wouldn't sign a traffic summons.

The 38-year old mother of four is an immigrant from El Salvador. She says she didn't understand the commands. Community members are outraged by what they call brutality and racism. Ricardo Juarez is an activist with Mexicans Without Borders. He says, "I believe even if this is a misunderstanding a problem of communication, this kind of violence can't be justified-- never." During the nearly two-hour court processing, a video tape of the incident was played. Lt. Prinze admitted Dominguez may not have fully understood him. A judge agreed and found Dominguez not guilty. It's vindication for Dominguez. She has always claimed she did nothing wrong.

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Family members say the incident has left her physically, emotionally and psychologically damaged.

Her attorney, John Zwerling, says the incident could have easily been avoided had there not been a language barrier. Zwerling says the city and county have to do more to make sure similar incidents aren't repeated.

"The lesson here for the city is that they need to have Spanish-speaking individuals available whenever there are officers on the street, which means always," said Zwerling.

Dominguez's ordeal has fueled a renewed effort among many in Prince William County's Latino community. They plan to do all they can to hold police accountable.

Dominguez' attorney says she is thinking about filing a civil lawsuit.



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