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Disabled woman's lawsuit alleges excessive force

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An 18-year-old developmentally disabled woman filed a federal civil rights lawsuit Friday against the Alameda County sheriff's office, saying deputies used excessive force when they tackled her and shocked her with a stun gun at a Castro Valley mental health center.



Sapreena Fowler, who has the mental capacity of a 4-year-old, was forcibly restrained during a confrontation Feb. 8 at Redwood Place, an inpatient mental health rehabilitation center at 18949 Redwood Road, said the suit filed in U.S. District Court in San Francisco.

Fowler, an Oakland resident, spent two nights at Santa Rita Jail in Dublin and was charged with resisting an officer and battery against a law-enforcement officer. The charges were eventually dropped.

"In over 20 years of prosecuting civil rights cases against police, this is one of the most shocking abuses of a vulnerable person I have seen," said Fowler's attorney, Michael Haddad.

Sheriff Greg Ahern said Friday that the deputies "acted in compliance with proper procedures and policies" to restrain Fowler and "protect others from being hurt."

In their reports, Deputies Misty Johnson and Rosario Robson wrote that they were at the facility on an unrelated call and spotted an agitated Fowler "being aggressive and combative with staff members."

The deputies tried to contact Fowler, but she tried to fight them and spat on them, authorities said. Robson used her stun gun twice to shock Fowler, and she was taken into custody.

Both deputies wrote that they vomited as a result of being spat on but that they suffered no physical injuries.

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