

For Immediate Release

Contact: Andres Haladay, [andres@uppersevenlaw.com](mailto:andres@uppersevenlaw.com)

**\*\*City of Whitefish Settles Claim for Illegal Seizure of Venezuelan Immigrant\*\***

[HELENA, MONTANA] The City of Whitefish has agreed to a \$90,000 settlement to resolve accusations that the City and its police officers violated Beker Rengifo Del Castillo's Constitutional rights. Beker spent almost a week in federal detention after a Whitefish Police Officer called the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) during a traffic stop.

**“This should send a clear message to law enforcement agencies across Montana that untrained local police officers should not play border cop,”** said Andres Haladay, Senior Staff Attorney at Upper Seven Law. **“When police conduct immigration investigations based on the color of someone’s skin or the language they speak, it violates the constitution, breaches community trust, and wastes taxpayer dollars.”**

In April 2025, Whitefish City Police Officer Michael Hingiss stopped Beker's vehicle. Beker entered the United States legally under humanitarian parole and lives in Flathead County. When Hingiss stopped him, Beker presented a valid, unexpired REAL ID-compliant driver's license along with valid vehicle registration and insurance documents. Beker had no criminal history and was not subject to any federal detainer or order of removal.

Moments later, Hingiss called CPB and stated he was **“out with a male that only speaks Spanish, wondering if you want to check him.”** Hingiss withheld Beker's driver's license until CBP agents arrived and took custody of Beker. Beker was wrongfully held at an ICE facility in Tacoma, Washington, for nearly a week. He was ultimately released without explanation.

Beker's federal lawsuit alleged violations of his Fourth and Fourteenth Amendment Rights for unlawful profiling and unlawful seizure. Beker's Human Rights Complaint alleged discrimination in violation of the Montana Constitution.

The Fourth Amendment prohibits detention without reasonable suspicion of a crime. The Fourteenth Amendment prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and national origin. Montan Human Rights laws prohibit Montana cities from discriminating based on race and national origin.

Upper Seven Law, a Montana-based nonprofit law firm dedicated to holding the powerful accountable, represents the plaintiff.