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ON POLITICS IN THE GOLDEN STATE

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Former inmate Frank Lucero, shown in 2009, has won a \$585,000 settlement from California to end his lawsuit alleging inadequate medical care. Lucero lost an eye while in prison after his cornea burst. (Francine Orr / Los Angeles Times)

By Paige St. John

September 12, 2013 | 2:20 p.m.

This post has been updated.

SACRAMENTO -- The state has paid \$585,000 to a former inmate who alleged he lost his eye to poor medical care while in prison.

Frank Lucero was in the state prison at Chino in 2008 for a parole violation when pressure inside his eye, which was stricken with glaucoma, caused the cornea burst. He alleged that prison officials had taken away his pressure-relieving medication and had failed to send him to see an eye doctor despite growing pain.

After the cornea burst, Lucero was taken to an outside hospital, but returned again to the prison for two weeks before surgeons removed the eye as well as connective tissue he would have needed for a transplant. Lucero now wears a prosthetic eye in the empty socket. He finished his prison term and now lives in Arizona, his lawyer said.

Lucero sued the state corrections department, alleging a violation of his civil rights, as well as the court-appointed agency put in charge of prison medical services after judges ruled that California's care was so poor it was responsible for unnecessary deaths.

The prison doctor who initially saw Lucero continues to work at the Chino prison, state medical officials said.

[Updated 2:50 p.m. Sept. 12: "We reviewed the care provided to this patient by our physicians and our review concluded there was no malpractice involved," said medical spokeswoman Joyce Hayhoe, who noted that Lucero dropped malpractice claims in court.]

As part of the settlement agreement, Lucero agreed to drop the doctor from the litigation in order to avoid the case being reported to the state medical board, said Lucero's lawyer, Ron Kaye of Pasadena.

Kaye said the settlement offer was made three days before the case was to go to trial in June, and the settlement check arrived last week. "For me it is a great victory," he said. "You don't find these individual victories in the prison system often."

A spokeswoman for the corrections department declined to comment on the settlement, referring questions to the medical receiver's office.

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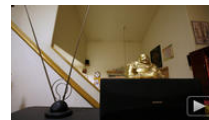
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