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CALIFORNIA

## San Bernardino police slammed handcuffed teen to the ground, lawsuit alleges



Erin Cowser, 18, is suing the San Bernardino Police Department, accusing an officer of slamming her on the ground while she was handcuffed. The May 2025 incident outside a Food 4 Less was captured by body-worn cameras and witness videos. (Toni J. Jaramilla)



**By Ruben Vives**

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- An 18-year-old woman sued San Bernardino police after an officer allegedly body-slammed her face-first to the pavement while handcuffed, causing a concussion and injuries.
- Police falsely blamed her injuries on a fight with other teens and maintained the lie despite body-camera footage showing

otherwise, the lawsuit alleges.

- She was leaving a grocery store after being attacked by other juveniles when officers arrived and, without warning, allegedly performed the violent takedown.

An 18-year-old woman has filed a lawsuit against the San Bernardino Police Department, accusing officers of assault and violating her civil rights.

Erin Marie Cowser alleged in a lawsuit filed Friday that a police officer body-slammed her face-first to the ground while she was handcuffed during a May 2025 incident.

Cowser accused the same officer of causing her face to hit the metal floor of his patrol vehicle. She said she suffered a concussion and memory loss, as well as other injuries, including cuts and bruises to her face and body.

“I remember being terrified — and then I don’t remember anything at all,” she said in a written statement. “I woke up hurt, confused, and being told things that I later learned weren’t true about what happened to me.”

Cowser alleged in the lawsuit that the officer and his partner lied multiple times about the use of force that led to her injuries, a charge the department has denied.

A spokesperson for the San Bernardino Police Department could not be reached for comment. But in a statement released two days after the incident, the department said the officer was attempting to handcuff the teen.

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“The officer was only able to place one of her hands in cuffs when she began actively pulling away and attempting to walk off from the officer when the takedown maneuver was used,” the statement read.



Toni Jaramilla, the attorney for Cowser, said in a written statement that the Police Department “failed to correct the false narrative” even when videos proved the officer was lying.

Jaramilla said the incident was captured by the officers’ body-worn cameras and witness videos.

The lawsuit “alleges that after the incident, officers falsely claimed Ms. Cowser’s injuries were caused by other juveniles, repeated those false claims to her family while she was hospitalized and continued the narrative internally,” Jaramilla said in the statement.

According to the lawsuit, Cowser, who was 17 at the time, was with her friends at the Food 4 Less located at Rialto Avenue and North E Street in San Bernardino when a group of teens began assaulting other young people inside.

Cowser was leaving the grocery store when a teen from the group attacked her. A security guard said he saw about a dozen teenagers and used pepper spray to stop the attacks on Cowser and another young person, according to the lawsuit.

Shortly after, San Bernardino Police Officers Jackson Tubbs and Cynthia Guillen arrived and spotted Cowser walking across the parking lot to speak to a friend.



L.A. civil rights attorney Toni J. Jaramilla said body-worn cameras captured the excessive force used by a San Bernardino police officer. (Toni J. Jaramilla)

“Without warning, probable cause, or lawful justification, [Tubbs] rushed up behind plaintiff and without explanation, violently grabbed her by her backpack, yanking her backwards and pinning both of her arms behind her back,” the lawsuit said.

The suit says that Cowser was never told she was under arrest or given any commands to comply when being placed in handcuffs.

At the time, San Bernardino police said Cowser was arrested for trespassing and attempting to fight others.

“This arrest comes following a contact earlier that day at a nearby transit center for similar circumstances,” the department’s statement read.

According to the lawsuit, witnesses told the officers that Cowser was attacked before they had arrived and that she had done nothing wrong.

“As Plaintiff turned her body to hear what her friend was saying, Officer Tubbs, without warning, performed a forceful hip toss, launching plaintiff airborne and slamming her face-first onto the asphalt pavement with such force that her feet flung above her head like a rag doll,” the lawsuit read.

The fall caused Cowser to suffer “a concussion with loss of consciousness and memory, a deep open gash under her chin, a large abrasion on the left side of her face, and blood poured from the wound,” according to the lawsuit.

The suit also alleges that the officers did not provide immediate medical care.

The department said in its statement that a supervisor was called to the scene, Cowser’s injuries were photographed, and she was taken to a local hospital for a medical evaluation.

On the way to the hospital, Tubbs called Cowser’s mother, Tanya Brownridge, and “told her that they were transporting her daughter to the hospital due to her fighting with other juveniles and receiving a ‘little cut from [the] fight on [the] face.’ Guillen never spoke up to correct him. This lie was captured on body-worn video,” the lawsuit alleges.



Erin Cowser, 18, said in her lawsuit that she suffered a concussion and memory loss, as well as other injuries including cuts and bruises on her face and body. (Toni J. Jaramilla)

According to the lawsuit, Cowser suffered “a concussion, closed head injury, blunt head trauma, blunt trauma of face,” and other injuries.

Jaramilla said in the lawsuit that Cowser had a traumatic experience and continues to suffer from “severe emotional distress, anxiety, humiliation and the loss of enjoyment of life.”

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