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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ATWATER MAN CHARGED IN REAL ESTATE FRAUD SCHEME

Atwater resident Keith Joseph Ducey, 33, surrendered himself to the Merced Superior Court this morning on \$20,000 warrant issued for his arrest. According to District Attorney Real Estate Fraud Investigator Jesse Valdez, Superior Court Judge Brian McCabe issued the warrant on charges of Grand Theft. The charges stem from an ongoing investigation related to alleged criminal activities of Valentina Ortiz, a former escrow officer employed by Alliance Title.

Ducey, a former Pacific Bancorp loan officer, is alleged to have received unauthorized payments totaling \$4000.00 from an escrow account handled by Ortiz, said Valdez. The unauthorized payments to Ducey came to light following an internal audit of Alliance Title escrow funds disbursed by Ortiz. Valdez noted that Alliance Title began its investigation following its termination of Ortiz.

District Attorney Investigators arrested Ortiz on March 8. She is facing multiple felony embezzlement charges. "This is an ongoing investigation, as evidenced by this second arrest," said Investigator Valdez. "Real estate fraud and conspiracy to commit it make investigation time consuming and difficult. As this investigation continues, it is possible that more arrests will be made," added Valdez.