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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On Thursday, March 8, Investigators from the Merced County District Attorney's Office and the Atwater Police Department arrested Atwater resident Valentina Ortiz, 33, on embezzlement charges. The arrest followed service of an arrest warrant issued by Merced Superior Court Judge Brian McCabe. Ortiz's arrest culminated a lengthy investigation of her involvement in real estate fraud, stemming from her previous employment as an escrow officer in the City of Atwater.

"This investigation was brought to us by the suspect's former employers after they discovered she manipulated escrow files and accounts," said Deputy District Attorney Mark Bacciarini. Ortiz allegedly falsified payment claims in a number of customer escrow files. After the escrow company's customers signed the sales or refinancing documents, Ortiz then voided the false claims and embezzled the funds for her own use.

Ortiz, a Notary Public, is also alleged to have notarized a number of real estate documents bearing forged signatures. Ortiz's arrest is one aspect of an ongoing investigation by the District Attorney's Real Estate Fraud unit. According to District Attorney Investigator Jesse Valdez, there were at least ten escrow files affected by Ortiz's embezzlements. The company that Ortiz worked for has thoroughly investigated the files that Ortiz handled and is confident it has discovered the extent of her embezzlement. "This company's efforts on behalf of its clients should not be overlooked," Valdez said. "The company spent a tremendous amount of time and effort discovering what she did and where the money went. Successful investigation of real estate fraud would be nearly impossible without the cooperation of ethical professionals in the industry," Valdez added.

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