Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT REACHES AGREEMENT WITH STEUBENVILLE, OHIO POLICE DEPARTMENT

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Resolving allegations that its police force engaged in a pattern of misconduct, the City of Steubenville, Ohio, has agreed to set up new and enhanced measures for managing its 50-member police department, under an agreement reached today with the Justice Department.

The agreement, which stems from an investigation launched last year, establishes guidelines for training, supervising and disciplining police officers, as well as processing complaints filed with the Steubenville Police Department.

Under the 1994 Crime Bill, law enforcement agencies are prohibited from engaging in a pattern or practice of conduct that violates the constitutional rights of individuals. A provision of the law gives the Justice Department the authority to investigate and seek civil remedies in litigation or by entry of a court-enforceable agreement. Separate criminal laws enable the Justice Department to prosecute individual police officers who engage in such misconduct.

(MORE)

U.S. v. City of Steubenville
PN-OH-002-001

"Police officers in Steubenville and across the country have a very difficult job to do every day," said Isabelle Katz Pinzler, Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. "The measures outlined in today's agreement will help the Steubenville Police Department fulfill its law enforcement duties while safeguarding the rights of residents and others who come into contact with the police."

Under today's settlement the southeastern Ohio city has agreed to take a number of steps including:

- training all its officers on such topics as use of force, integrity and ethics, domestic violence, search and seizure law, cultural diversity, and vehicular pursuits;
- developing detailed use of force guidelines, to help officers avoid escalation of hostile encounters with civilians;
- requiring officers to complete a report whenever they use force against an individual, conduct a stop, search, or seizure, or engage in a vehicular pursuit. The reports will include racial data, and will be reviewed by supervisors and tracked by senior officers to analyze trends;
- establishing an internal affairs staff to review and investigate civilian complaints and other allegations of potential misconduct;
- using the reports of uses of force, stops, searches, and seizures, along with civilian complaints, civil lawsuits, and other sources to identify and track potential problems and to alert managers to possible patterns of misconduct;
- increasing training and supervision for officers with multiple complaints filed against them; and,
- hiring an independent auditor to monitor complaint investigations and compliance with the consent decree, and issue regular reports to the court, the city, and the Justice Department.

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This is the second agreement the Justice Department has reached with a police department under the 1994 law. In February, the Department reached a similar agreement with the Pittsburgh police department.

The Justice Department continues to investigate other police departments around the nation to determine if they are engaged in patterns of misconduct, including police departments in Los Angeles and New Orleans. Last week, Attorney General Janet Reno indicated that, in the course of a pending criminal civil rights investigation in New York City, the Justice Department was gathering information to determine whether to open a pattern or practice investigation there.

"Today's agreement is a result of local and federal officials working together to design a plan that will benefit the citizens of Steubenville," added Pinzler.

The agreement is expected to be filed this week in U.S. District Court in Columbus and still must be approved by the court.

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