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JUSTICE NEWS

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Friday, August 19, 2011

Justice Department Opens Investigation into the Antelope Valley Stations of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

LOS ANGELES – The Justice Department has opened a civil investigation into allegations of discriminatory policing by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) members based in the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale, Calif. The investigation will focus on allegations that the Lancaster and Palmdale stations of the LASD are engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination on the basis of race or national origin in violation of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, and the anti-discrimination provisions of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act.

The Justice Department will seek to determine whether there are systemic violations of the Constitution or federal law, including the Fair Housing Act, by deputies of these LASD stations. The investigation will focus on allegations that the LASD has sought to identify during routine traffic stops individuals who use Housing Choice Vouchers, commonly known as Section 8, to subsidize housing costs for low income families. In addition, the investigation will examine allegations that the LASD has conducted warrantless searches of African-American families' homes under the auspices of housing authority compliance inspections, and that housing authority investigators based in the Lancaster and Palmdale sheriff's stations have been accompanied by sheriff's deputies as they conduct routine housing contract compliance checks. At times, it is alleged that the deputies approach the Section 8 recipient's home with guns drawn and in full SWAT armor and conduct searches and questioning themselves, unrelated to the housing program.

In addition, the Justice Department has an ongoing investigation under the Fair Housing Act of the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, as well as of the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles, to determine whether there has been a systematic effort to discriminate against African-Americans and Latinos.

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During the course of the investigation of the LASD, the Justice Department will consider all relevant information, particularly the efforts that LASD has undertaken to ensure compliance with federal law. The Justice Department has taken similar steps involving a variety of state and local law enforcement agencies, both large and small, in jurisdictions such as New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia and Louisiana.

This matter is being investigated by attorneys from the Special Litigation Section and Housing and Civil Enforcement Section of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. The department welcomes any information from the community. If you have any comments or concerns, please feel free to contact the department at 1-877-218-5228 , or via email at community.antelope@usdoj.gov.

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