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Tuesday, April 28, 2015

Justice Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Agree to Policing Reforms and Settlement of Police-Related Fair Housing Claims in the Antelope Valley




The Justice Department today announced a comprehensive settlement agreement with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) that will support wide-ranging reforms in LASD's Antelope Valley stations in the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale. The Justice Department and the county of Los Angeles have agreed to enter into a court-enforceable settlement agreement that will require reforms to LASD's data collection, training and accountability systems to improve the quality and effectiveness of LASD's interactions with Antelope Valley residents, and reduce bias in its practices. The settlement agreement also provides for a monetary fund of \$700,000 to compensate persons harmed by LASD's alleged violation of the Fair Housing Act, and a civil penalty of \$25,000 to the United States.

The agreement follows the department's issuing of a findings letter in June 2013 following an investigation which began in August 2011. Sheriff Jim McDonnell, his predecessors and Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles Executive Director Sean Rogan were all cooperative throughout the investigation and began working with the department to negotiate a remedy to the problems revealed by the investigation.

This settlement resolves claims from the department's investigation which found patterns of excessive use of force, biased policing practices, including housing discrimination, and unlawful searches and seizures. LASD has already begun to implement many of the negotiated reforms under the leadership of Sheriff Jim McDonnell. The Justice Department and the county filed the settlement agreement with the United States District Court for approval and entry as an order.

"Constitutional policing and effective policing go hand in hand," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta of the Civil Rights Division. "We are confident that this settlement represents a commitment by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to respect the rights of residents and promote mutual confidence between law enforcement and the community. This agreement puts in place a structure that will foster lawful, bias-free policing in the Antelope Valley, and ensures compensation for persons harmed by past unlawful conduct. We look forward to continuing our positive partnership with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department to implement the



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terms of this settlement agreement and to help restore the community's confidence in fair, equitable, and effective law enforcement."

The investigation was brought pursuant to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act. The investigation concluded that there was reasonable cause to believe that deputies engaged in a pattern or practice of misconduct in violation of the Constitution and federal law. The findings, which were announced in June 2013, include:

- Pedestrian and vehicle stops that violated the Fourth Amendment;
- Stops that appeared motivated by racial bias, in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and federal statutory law;
- The use of unreasonable force in violation of the Fourth Amendment; and
- A pattern of intimidation and harassment by LASD deputies against African-Americans who held Section 8 housing choice vouchers. The goal of that intimidation and harassment, which violated the Fair Housing Act, was to terminate African-American voucher holders from the Section 8 program and to pressure them to move out of the Antelope Valley.

Under the settlement agreement, LASD has agreed to implement comprehensive reforms to ensure lawful policing and restore public trust. An independent monitoring team will oversee the reforms, which LASD intends to implement within four years. In addition, the monitoring team will provide technical assistance and publicly report on the LASD's compliance efforts. The settlement agreement provides for a \$700,000 fund to compensate persons harmed by LASD's alleged violation of the Fair Housing Act, and a \$25,000 civil penalty to the United States. The areas covered by the settlement agreement include:

- Stops, searches and seizures: measures to improve collection and analysis of policing data to identify instances and patterns of unlawful police-civilian contact, such as stops without adequate legal justification;
- Bias-free policing: improved training and supervisory review to prevent and identify biased or discriminatory conduct;
- Use of force: measures to improve the quality of use-of-force investigations and develop a better means to detect and correct problematic force patterns and trends;
- Policies and training: revised policies on use of force, preventing retaliation, supporting officers who report misconduct, and improving the field training program to ensure that officers develop the necessary technical and practical skills required to use force in a lawful and effective manner, with an emphasis on de-escalation and use of the minimal amount of force necessary;
- Internal and civilian complaint investigations: including standards for conducting objective, thorough and timely investigations;
- Supervision: including holding supervisors accountable for close and effective supervision; and providing guidance on effective accountability systems to improve public trust;
- Housing: measures to ensure proper limits on deputy involvement in searches of Section 8 voucher holders' homes for compliance with program rules; and
- Community engagement: including measures to strengthen civilian involvement and feedback in setting policing priorities; public information programs to keep civilians informed of policing activities; requirements for community interaction at all levels of LASD; and establishing community advisory entities to ensure that meaningful feedback is obtained from the community.

This agreement does not resolve the department's claims against the Housing Authority of Los Angeles County, the county of Los Angeles as it relates to the Housing Authority of the county of Los Angeles, the city of Lancaster or the city of Palmdale for related conduct under the Fair

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Housing Act. Those parties are continuing to work toward a resolution.

The investigation was conducted by the Civil Rights Division. The investigation involved an in-depth review of thousands of pages of documents, including written policies and procedures, training materials, and internal reports, data, video footage and investigative files. Department of Justice attorneys and investigators also conducted interviews with officers, supervisors, command staff and city officials as well as spoke with hundreds of community members and local advocates, and worked with experts in police practices.

15-528

Civil Rights Division
Civil Rights - Housing and Civil Enforcement
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