

Department of Justice
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Justice Department Announces Investigations of the Ville Platte, Louisiana, Police Department and the Evangeline Parish Sheriff's Office

The Justice Department announced today that it has opened pattern or practice investigations into the use of investigative holds by the Ville Platte Police Department (VPPD) and the Evangeline Parish Sheriff's Office (EPSO). The investigations will focus on allegations that VPPD and EPSO officers use "investigative holds" to detain individuals without proper cause, and on the adequacy of VPPD and EPSO's training, supervision and accountability mechanisms to prevent unlawful seizures. The Justice Department's investigations will determine whether VPPD and EPSO officers engage in a pattern or practice of using investigative holds in violation of the Constitution and federal law.

"No individual should be detained without proper cause or arrested in violation of his or her civil rights," said Attorney General Eric Holder. "As these investigations move forward, the Department of Justice will work to ensure that the actions of the Ville Platte Police Department and the Evangeline Parish Sheriff's Office are in service of our shared mission, consistent with our common values, and in accordance with the Constitution that we are sworn to uphold." The Justice Department has contacted officials at VPPD, EPSO, the city of Ville Platte and Evangeline Parish, and will continue to work closely with these law enforcement agencies and municipalities as the investigations progress.

"Police officers across the country are called upon regularly to use their law enforcement authority to protect and safeguard members of their communities by investigating criminal activity," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta of the Civil Rights Division. "It is imperative that officers use their authority within the boundaries of the law and the Constitution. We are eager to work together with the Ville Platte Police Department, Evangeline Parish Sheriff's Office and the local municipalities to help ensure that their officers are engaged in law enforcement practices that are consistent with the Constitution."

"All of us who work in law enforcement should be focused on due process every day," said U.S. Attorney Stephanie A. Finley of the Western District of Louisiana. "Each citizen deserves to be treated with respect and in accordance with the Constitution. We will continue to work with all of our local partners to ensure that arrests and detentions are proper and legal, with the goal of having safeguards in place to make sure that similar violations do not occur in the future."

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 prohibits state and local governments from engaging in a pattern or practice of misconduct by law enforcement officers that deprives individuals of federally-protected rights. The act also allows the Justice Department to remedy such misconduct through civil litigation. The Justice Department has conducted similar investigations and has obtained important reforms in police departments and law enforcement agencies across the country.

The Special Litigation Section of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in Washington, D.C. is conducting the investigations. Individuals with relevant information are encouraged to contact the Justice Department by phone at 1-877-218-5228.

Additional information about the Civil Rights Division is available on its website at www.justice.gov/crt.