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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SIGNS AGREEMENTS GOVERNING
USE OF CANINES AND FORCE WITH PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Justice Department today announced the successful resolution of its three-year investigation into the use of force by the Prince George's County, Maryland Police Department. R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, announced the signing of two agreements between the Department, the County, and the Prince George's County Police Department (PGPD). The parties entered into a consent decree governing the PGPD's Canine Section and a memorandum of agreement (MOA) addressing the department-wide use of force.

"Today's agreements underscore the seriousness with which the Justice Department reviews allegations of police misconduct," said R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "Prince George's County and its police department should be commended for reaching a resolution in this matter. This is an example of the success that can be achieved when people come together in the pursuit of a common goal. Today's settlements will yield lasting benefits for the citizens of Prince George's County."

The agreements require widespread reform in PGPD's use of canines and force. In addition to establishing policies governing the use of canines and the use of force, these agreements also establish specific training requirements and accountability practices. Most notably, the agreements will require PGPD to take the following steps:

- reform its use of force policies, as well as its training, reporting, and accountability procedures;

- adopt and implement a "guard and bark" methodology for canines, whereby canines will locate suspects and hold them at bay by barking loudly; use of biting is restricted to specific incidents where necessary for arrest or safety of officers or civilians;

- create a special board to review all firearm discharges;

- operate a system to manage risk regarding officer performance;

- effectively review canine bites and other related activity; and

investigate and review misconduct allegations.

The agreements resolve an investigation first initiated in July 1999, when the Justice Department began reviewing PGPD's use of canines. Subsequently, in October 2000, the Justice Department began investigating broader allegations of excessive force. The agreements announced today fully resolved those investigations.

In order to ensure the effective implementation of the agreements, the Justice Department will continue to monitor the Prince George's County Police Department for the next three years. The Department will also remain involved through the offer of technical assistance.

The Fraternal Order of Police, which met with the Department regarding the settlement, stated, "Based upon our conversations with members of the Civil Rights Division, we are satisfied that the recommendations are consistent with policies implemented by the current police administration. We are confident that the Prince George's County Police Department will be able to satisfy the requirements of the Justice Department. We applaud the current police administration for having the forethought to address most of these issues preemptively."

This Administration has made a particular effort to resolve police misconduct complaints. Since 2001, the Justice Department has entered into 12 settlement agreements resolving law enforcement misconduct investigations - a six-fold increase over the two investigations resolved through settlements during the three preceding years. In 2003, the Justice Department resolved investigations of police misconduct involving the Villa Rica, Georgia Police Department, the Detroit, Michigan Police Department, and the Mount Prospect, Illinois Police Department.