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United States Agrees to Comprehensive Settlement with Suffolk County Police Department to Resolve Investigation of Discriminatory Policing Against Latinos

The Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York announced today that they have tentatively agreed to a settlement with the Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD) which calls for SCPD to implement new and enhanced policies and procedures to ensure nondiscrimination in the provision of police services to Latino communities in Suffolk County. The agreement, which the Department of Justice has agreed to, requires approval of the Suffolk County Legislature before it will be formally executed by the parties.

The United States commenced an investigation of SCPD in 2009 in the wake of the killing of Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian national, who was murdered by a group of teenagers in Patchogue, N.Y., as he was walking home on the evening of Nov. 8, 2008. The United States' investigation, pursuant to the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, focused on discriminatory policing allegations, including claims that SCPD discouraged Latino victims from filing complaints and cooperating with the police, and failed to investigate crimes and hate crime incidents involving Latinos. The United States issued a Technical Assistance letter on Sept. 13, 2011, which recommended a wide range of reforms to improve policing by the SCPD, and primarily focused on promoting trust between SCPD and the Latino community. The County cooperated with the United States' investigation, and has already instituted a number of the recommendations from the Technical Assistance letter. The agreement announced today memorializes those recommendations and commits SCPD to significant changes in how it engages the Latino community.

Specifically, the agreement calls for SCPD to ensure that it polices equitably, respectfully and free of unlawful bias. Other highlights include enhanced training and investigation of allegations of hate crimes and bias incidents, meaningful access to police services for individuals with limited

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English proficiency (LEP), strengthened SCPD outreach efforts in Latino communities, and the development and maintenance of a true Community Oriented Policing Enforcement (COPE) program throughout the county. The United States will monitor compliance with the agreement, which terminates only when SCPD has substantially complied with all of the requirements for at least one year.

“We look forward to working alongside the Suffolk County Police Department and Suffolk County to implement our agreement,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Jocelyn Samuels for the Civil Rights Division. “By working together, our goal is for all Suffolk residents -- existing and future -- to know that SCPD is there to serve and protect them and that they stand equal with their neighbors before the law.”

“All residents of Suffolk County deserve full and unbiased police protection, regardless of national origin, race, or citizenship status,” said U.S. Attorney Loretta E. Lynch for the Eastern District of New York. “When people feel they cannot turn to the police for protection, they have lost one of our most basic rights – the right to feel safe in one’s community. Law enforcement also suffers when it does not hear from everyone under its umbrella of protection. I commend Suffolk County and SCPD for its cooperation with the United States’ investigation and its willingness to ensure fairness and equal treatment for all.”

The case was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael J. Goldberger, Chief of Civil Rights in the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney’s Office; Special Litigation Counsel Laura Coon in the Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division; and Trial Attorneys Silvia Dominguez and Jack Morse in the Special Litigation Section.

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Civil Rights Division

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