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Justice Department Releases Investigative Findings on the Alamance County, N.C., Sheriff's Office

Findings Show Pattern or Practice of Discriminatory Policing Against Latinos

Following a comprehensive investigation, the Justice Department announced today its findings that the Alamance County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) in North Carolina, under the leadership of Sheriff Terry S. Johnson, engages in a pattern or practice of misconduct that violates the Constitution and federal law. The department conducted its investigation, which it opened on June 2, 2010, pursuant to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI).

The Justice Department finds reasonable cause to believe that ACSO engages in a pattern or practice of discriminatory policing against Latinos in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Fourth Amendment, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act and Title VI. ACSO's discriminatory policing activities include:

- ACSO deputies target Latino drivers for traffic stops;
- A study of ACSO's traffic stops on three major county roadways found that deputies were between four and 10 times more likely to stop Latino drivers than non-Latino drivers;
- ACSO deputies routinely locate checkpoints just outside Latino neighborhoods, forcing residents to endure police checks when entering or leaving their communities;
- ACSO practices at vehicle checkpoints often vary based on a driver's ethnicity. Deputies insist on examining identification of Latino drivers, while allowing drivers of other ethnicities to pass through without showing identification;
- ACSO deputies arrest Latinos for minor traffic violations while issuing citations or warnings to non-Latinos for the same violations;
- ACSO uses jail booking and detention practices, including practices related to immigration status checks, that discriminate against Latinos;
- The sheriff and ACSO's leadership explicitly instruct deputies to target Latinos with discriminatory traffic stops and other enforcement activities;

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- The sheriff and ACSO leadership foster a culture of bias by using anti-Latino epithets; and
- ACSO engages in substandard reporting and monitoring practices that mask its discriminatory conduct.

Taken together, these practices undermine ACSO's ability to serve and protect Alamance County's Latino residents and the community at large.

"The Alamance County Sheriff's Office's egregious pattern of racial profiling violates the Constitution and federal laws, creates distrust between the police and the community and inhibits the reporting of crime and cooperation in criminal investigations," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "Constitutional policing and effective law enforcement go hand-in-hand. We hope to resolve the concerns outlined in our findings by working collaboratively with ACSO, but we will not hesitate to take appropriate legal action if ACSO chooses a different course."

The Justice Department's thorough and independent investigation included an in-depth review of ACSO policies, procedures, training materials, and data on traffic stops, arrests, citations, vehicle checkpoints and other documentary evidence. Department personnel also conducted interviews with more than 125 individuals, including Alamance County residents and current and former ACSO employees.

Addressing these findings and creating sustainable reforms will require ACSO to commit to long term structural, cultural and institutional change. In particular, ACSO must develop and implement new policies, procedures and training in effective and constitutional policing. Any reform efforts must also include systems of accountability to ensure that ACSO has eliminated unlawful bias from its decision making at all levels.

The department will seek to obtain a court enforceable, comprehensive, written agreement remedying the violations and incorporating these reforms by attempting to work with ACSO officials.

The Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division conducted this investigation with the assistance of consultants in law enforcement and statistical analysis. Members of the Alamance County community who wish to provide information to the department may call 1-877-871-9726 or email alamance.info@usdoj.gov . For more information on the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, please visit www.justice.gov/crt .

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