

Press Release

LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE ANTELOPE VALLEY'S DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE FINDINGS

In August 2011, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ), Civil Rights Division, initiated an investigation into the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's (LASD) Palmdale and Lancaster Stations in response to potential Fair Housing Act violations. Specifically, the DOJ was investigating whether members of the Sheriff's Department harassed minority residents living in government subsidized housing. This action stemmed from LASD personnel assisting members of the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA) during Section 8 compliance check operations. A joint press conference with Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez and Sheriff Lee Baca was held in Downtown Los Angeles at the Hall of Administration to formally announce the investigation.

On December 8, 2011, attorneys from the DOJ, and staff and subject matter experts visited the Antelope Valley and spoke to community members and deputies. Additionally, they asked for and were granted access to observe deputies as they interacted with the community in a patrol setting. The community interactions and observations occurred over a six day period. At the end of their visit, the DOJ and its experts met with Sheriff's Department executives and identified six areas of concern to the Department; sensitivity about Section 8 issues, segments of the community feeling disenfranchised, concerns about the response times, east vs. west side, maximizing accessibility to the complaint system, racial profiling training, and 4th Amendment issues. The Department immediately began implementing significant changes to its policy and procedures, especially in the areas related to handling requests from the Housing Authority to assist their personnel with compliance checks for Section 8 voucher holders, sensitivity training related to Section 8 issues, bridging the gap between the community and Department, access to Watch Commander's Service Comment forms, racial profiling training through the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance, and 4th Amendment training.

During the course of their investigation, the DOJ made numerous requests for information and LASD cooperated fully by providing voluminous amounts of policies, procedures, and data for their analysis. After almost two years of probing, the DOJ has concluded, "*LASD personnel in the Antelope Valley engage in a pattern or practice of unconstitutional and unlawful policing regarding stops, searches and seizures, excessive force, and discriminatory removal of voucher holders from their homes.*" The Sheriff's Department adamantly disagrees with the DOJ's assertion. We stand resolute in our belief that the Department has not discriminated against members of the public.

The Sheriff's Department has collected data on all pedestrian and vehicle stops since 2000; however, there is no standard way to definitively determine the existence of racial profiling or bias-based policing. Although there is no definitive standard to determine racial profiling, the Sheriff's Department has a policy prohibiting racial profiling and takes significant steps to ensure that it does not exist. Our position concerning data analysis is backed by numerous experts in the field of criminal justice and a DOJ publication, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, "*How to Correctly Collect and Analyze Racial Profiling Data: Your Reputation Depends on It!*"

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“All parties should understand that examining traffic stops is unlikely to address the finer nuances of defining racial profiling. We do not as yet have an accepted, official definition of racial profiling, much less an operational definition that describes exactly what data should be collected, how they should be collected, and what type of analytical results would definitively identify racial profiling. Until a basic overall definition is specified, the examination of data to determine the existence or extent of racial profiling will, of necessity, be open to interpretation by various stakeholders.”

Although we disagree with many of the conclusions in the DOJ report, we look forward to working closely with the DOJ’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Technical Assistance Unit to assess what, if any, changes and proposed recommendations need to be implemented. Sheriff Baca has developed and constantly speaks to LASD employees about the Department’s Core Values, a set of guiding principles that shape the culture and focuses Department personnel on what the public expects from those providing service.

*“As a **leader** in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, I commit myself to **honorably** perform my duties with the **respect** for the dignity of all people, **integrity** to do right and fight wrongs, **wisdom** to apply common sense and fairness in all I do and **courage** to stand against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and bigotry in all its forms.”*

These values provide a solid foundation for constitutional and public trust policing because without the full faith and cooperation of the public, the mission of public safety is severely impaired. The LASD is committed to providing the highest level of service, safety, and security to the residents of the Antelope Valley.