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Justice Department Reaches Agreement with City of Springfield to Reform Police Department's Unconstitutional Practices

Settlement Will Resolve Claims That Springfield Officers Engaged in Pattern or Practice of Excessive Force That Deprived Individuals of Their Rights

The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts today filed a complaint and a proposed consent decree with the City of Springfield, Massachusetts, to resolve its investigation of the Springfield Police Department's Narcotics Bureau. This is the first pattern or practice police investigation to be resolved through a settlement under the Biden Administration.

The settlement agreement, in the form of a proposed consent decree, which must be approved by a federal District Court Judge, would resolve the United States' claim that the City and the Narcotics Bureau of the Springfield Police Department engaged in a pattern or practice of excessive force that deprived individuals of their rights under the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution.

Under the agreement, the Springfield Police Department will improve policies and training related to officers' use of force. These improvements will ensure that officers avoid force whenever possible through the use of de-escalation tactics; that officers know when force can and cannot be used; and that officers report all instances where force is used. In addition, the Springfield Police Department will provide better supervision to officers and improve internal investigations of complaints of officer misconduct. When officers violate use-of-force policies, the agreement will ensure that the Springfield Police Department holds officers accountable.

The agreement also provides for the federal judge to appoint an independent monitor, with the title of Compliance Evaluator, based on the recommendation of the parties. The Compliance Evaluator will assess Springfield's implementation of the agreement's requirements and file public reports with the court on Springfield's progress.

"The public's trust in law enforcement is a critical component of promoting public safety," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "Excessive force erodes that trust and makes our communities less safe. This consent decree will rebuild the public's trust by ensuring that Springfield officers who use excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment are held accountable. We look forward to working with city officials to ensure constitutional policing in every corner of the Springfield community and fostering better relationships between law enforcement and the community."

"When communities don't trust or fear law enforcement, it undermines public safety," said U.S. Attorney Rachael Rollins for the District of Massachusetts. "Some within the Springfield Police Department, through their sustained and documented constitutional violations, have tarnished the name of the many upstanding and decent police officers working in Springfield. Today is the first step in repairing the harm and mistrust their misconduct and violence caused. After lengthy negotiations, we are pleased to have reached an agreement that includes significant and sustainable reforms to ensure effective and constitutional policing going forward in the City of Springfield. This is the first police

misconduct settlement agreement entered during the Biden Administration. Our U.S. Attorney's Office will always protect the constitutional rights of Massachusetts residents."

The Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts initiated the investigation of the Springfield Police Department in April 2018 under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This law authorizes the Attorney General to file a lawsuit to address a pattern or practice of conduct by law enforcement officers that deprives individuals of their rights under the Constitution or federal law. In July 2020, the department announced findings that officers in SPD's Narcotics Bureau, which has since been renamed the Firearms Investigation Unit, engaged in a pattern or practice of excessive force. The department found that Narcotics Bureau officers often failed to report use of force incidents. At times officers' reports were inconsistent with available evidence, including video and photographs.

This investigation was conducted jointly by the Civil Rights Division's Special Litigation Section and the Civil Rights Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts. Additional information about the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department is available on its website at www.justice.gov/crt. For more information on the U.S. Attorney's Office's Civil Rights Unit, please visit www.justice.gov/usao-ma/civil-rights.

Attachment(s):

[Download Complaint](#)

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Topic(s):

Civil Rights

Component(s):

[Civil Rights Division](#)

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