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## **Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke Announces Consent Decree with City of Springfield, Massachusetts**

Springfield, MA ~ Wednesday, April 13, 2022

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### ***Remarks as Delivered***

Good morning. I am joined by United States Attorney Rachael Rollins, Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno and Springfield Police Superintendent Cheryl Clapprood.

One of the very highest priorities of the U.S. Department of Justice is to ensure that every person in this country benefits from policing that is lawful, effective, transparent and free from discrimination. All communities are safer when people trust that the justice system is transparent and constitutionally sound. And we at the department believe that one of the most effective and important ways we can build that trust is by investigating and addressing patterns or practices of misconduct by law enforcement agencies.

We know this to be true not just from our decades of experience doing this work, but because numerous independent studies have confirmed it. These studies have found that the Civil Rights Division's police consent decrees bring about more effective constitutional policing practices and improved police-community relations. And these studies have also shown that police departments themselves benefit from this work, through better management and oversight practices, improved policies and training and more.

So far in this Administration, the Civil Rights Division has opened four pattern or practice investigations – in Louisville, Minneapolis, Phoenix and Mount Vernon, New York. We are actively enforcing 11 consent decrees, four other settlements and court orders resulting from contested litigation in two cases. We will continue pushing to ensure constitutional policing and to safeguard the civil rights of all people across the nation.

Today, I am proud to announce that, after thorough, good-faith negotiations, the Department of Justice and the City of Springfield have agreed to enter into a court-enforceable consent decree regarding the Springfield Police Department. This consent decree is the first police consent decree for this Administration, and I want to thank Mayor Sarno and Superintendent Clapprood for their cooperation and leadership throughout this process. They are committed to the reform of their police department. I want to thank the officers of the Springfield Police Department, who work hard every day to uphold public safety. And I want to thank the people of Springfield, who are ready to start a new chapter in their relationship with the police.

In July of 2020, the Civil Rights Division and the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts announced the findings of our investigation of the Springfield Police Department. We described systemic problems that led to a pattern or practice of excessive force by officers assigned to Springfield's Narcotics Bureau. We found deficiencies in policies, training and accountability mechanisms. These deficiencies allowed for violent uses of force to go on unreported and unchecked. The pattern or practice of unlawful conduct eroded the public's trust. It undermined the police department's ability to fight crime.

We have worked collaboratively with the City of Springfield and the Springfield Police Department to craft reforms that will fix the problems that we identified. We met with members of Springfield's many communities, including people impacted by police violence, as well as police officers and union officials. We heard many ideas for reform. We spent months negotiating the settlement that we're announcing today. We and the City agreed that fixing the problems at the Springfield Police Department requires a court-enforceable consent decree and a court-appointed independent monitor.

This consent decree sets the Springfield Police Department on a pathway to restoring the public's trust by ensuring that policing is lawful, effective and safer for members of the public and police officers. Among the reforms in the decree are requirements that officers will report all uses of force, including punches and kicks — something which was not previously required in the Springfield Police Department. In addition, officers have a duty to intervene to prevent excessive force. Supervisors will closely scrutinize uses of force to assess whether officers used force appropriately. And Springfield will create a new Force Investigation Team — specially trained investigators who will evaluate the most serious uses of force.

Restoring trust in law enforcement also means giving members of the public a say in how policing services are delivered and we are pleased that Springfield has already embraced community oversight through the creation of the Board of Police Commissioners. The consent decree buttresses and strengthens the work of the Board. The decree requires transparency in the selection process for Commissioners. It ensures that the Board will conduct thorough, timely and fair reviews of complaints from members of the public about Springfield officers. And it gives the Board the tools it needs — including subpoena power, training and a budget — to carry out its work effectively and efficiently.

Real and lasting change does not happen fast. Institutional reform is complex and requires unflagging diligence and persistence. Implementing the requirements of this decree in a way that is truly durable will take years, not months. Throughout this process, we are asking the people of Springfield not to waiver in their commitment to reform. Residents, police officers, union officials and city officials — we need all of you to work hard, and to work together to make this process successful. You all deserve a police department that is effective and that respects the rights of every person.

This reform process will be transparent and will not lose sight of the core goal of constitutional, effective policing. Just this morning, we have filed a civil lawsuit against the City of Springfield, which will put this matter before a federal court. We have filed the consent decree with the federal court and asked the judge to make the decree a court order. After the judge approves the decree, we and Springfield will jointly recommend an independent monitor. We will ask the court to appoint the monitor to serve as the court's eyes and ears during the reform process. The monitor will assess Springfield's efforts in implementing the decree's requirements. The monitor will file public reports with the court every six months. These reports will give the court and the public a clear picture of how the reform process is going. The monitor will meet regularly with members of the public, as will the Springfield Police Department, the Board of Police Commissioners and the Department of Justice. We are interested in your ideas, and we are open to your criticisms. We know that this effort will only be successful if members of the public can see and feel that real change has happened. We are all committed to a transparent process that will build the public's faith in reform.

We are pleased that Mayor Sarno and Superintendent Clapprood have pledged their support of the consent decree. We are hopeful about rebuilding trust between the Springfield Police Department and the communities it serves. We look forward to working with the City and the police department towards our shared goal of constitutional, effective policing.

At this time, I'd like to introduce United States Attorney Rachael Rollins of the District of Massachusetts, who will share further remarks regarding the process that's underway in Springfield.

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**Speaker:**

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke

**Topic(s):**

Civil Rights

**Component(s):**

Civil Rights Division

Civil Rights - Special Litigation Section

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