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Justice Department Investigates Complaints of Discriminatory Policing Against Section 8 Voucher Holders

Last week, the Department of Justice announced that it has opened a civil investigation into allegations of discriminatory policing by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) members based in the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale, Calif. The investigation will focus on allegations that the Lancaster and Palmdale stations of the LASD are engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination on the basis of race or national origin in violation of federal law, including the Fair Housing Act.

The investigation is to determine whether there has been a systematic violation of federal law based on allegations that deputies of those stations have sought to identify during routine traffic stops individuals who use Housing Choice Vouchers, commonly known as Section 8, to subsidize housing costs for low-income families.

Investigators will look into allegations that the LASD has conducted warrantless searches of African-American families' homes under the auspices of housing authority compliance inspections, and that housing authority investigators based in the Lancaster and Palmdale sheriff's stations have been accompanied by sheriff's deputies as they conduct routine housing contract compliance checks. Allegedly, the deputies sometimes approach the Section 8 recipient's home with guns drawn and in full SWAT armor and conduct searches and questioning themselves, unrelated to the housing program.

In addition, the Justice Department has an ongoing investigation under the Fair Housing Act of the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, as well as of the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles, to determine whether there has been a systematic effort to discriminate against African-Americans and Latinos.

During its investigation of the LASD, the Justice Department said it will consider all relevant information, particularly the efforts that LASD has undertaken to ensure compliance with federal law. The Justice Department reported that it has taken similar steps involving a variety of state and local law enforcement agencies, both large and small, in jurisdictions such as New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and Louisiana.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice