



NEWS FROM

OFFICE OF THE CITY ATTORNEY

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CITY OF OAKLAND SETTLES 'RIDERS' CIVIL RIGHTS SUITS

Oakland, CA—At a news conference in City Hall this morning, City Attorney John Russo and Police Chief Richard Word announced the global settlement of *Delphine Allen et al. v. City of Oakland*, also known as the “Riders” civil rights cases. They were joined by City Council President Ignacio De La Fuente, Councilmember Larry Reid, City Manager Robert C. Bobb, other prominent City officials, and plaintiffs’ counsel in making this important announcement.

“This has been a bleak chapter in Oakland’s history. Now a page is being turned. We have successfully collaborated with plaintiffs’ attorneys, the Oakland Police Department, and the Federal Court to create institutional and operational reforms which will serve the Oakland Police Department well in the 21st century,” said City Attorney Russo. “While other cities have had similar reforms forced upon them by the U.S. Department of Justice, in Oakland we have voluntarily developed and adopted reforms which represent the recommended best practices in law enforcement.”

As part of the settlement agreement, 119 plaintiffs and their attorneys will receive \$10.9 million, an amount that includes all damage payouts, attorney’s fees, and costs (see attached fact sheet).

In addition to the cash settlement, the City of Oakland has volunteered to institute operational reforms in the police department. The five-year settlement agreement will be overseen by an independent monitor, to be agreed upon by the parties. The monitor will audit the department’s compliance with the settlement agreement and report to the Federal Court on a regular basis.

Police Chief Richard Word, who guided Police Department participation in the negotiations, stated, “The people of Oakland expect and deserve the finest service possible from their police officers. This settlement agreement is part of a more comprehensive effort to provide a level of protection and service that meets the highest standards of professionalism and integrity. Compliance with the settlement agreement will be the baseline, not the ultimate standard, by which the Department’s commitment to excellence will be measured.”

For more than a year, staff from the Police Department and the Office of the City Attorney have worked with the plaintiffs' attorneys to develop a mutually agreed-upon, court-approved settlement agreement. The systemic reforms include:

- Acquisition of a sophisticated, computerized early warning system to improve detection of officers exhibiting at-risk behavior;
- Increased field supervision of patrol officers by adding more sergeants on patrol;
- Improved citizen access to the internal affairs complaint process and improved internal affairs investigations;
- Improved reporting and investigation of use of force by officers; and
- Improved training and supervision of field officers.

Most of the reforms are patterned after consent decrees that the U.S. Department of Justice has entered into with several law enforcement agencies across the United States, including police departments in Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Steubenville, Ohio; and the New Jersey State Police.

The settlement agreement is intended to promote police integrity and professionalism and to prevent conduct that deprives individuals of their rights, privileges, or immunities protected by the Constitution of the United States.

By way of background, in their lawsuit filed in Federal Court in December 2000, 119 plaintiffs, represented by attorneys John Burris, James Chanin, and John Houston Scott, claimed that four Oakland police officers known as the Riders violated their civil rights. Allegations against the four officers included false arrest, planting evidence, excessive use of force, falsification of police reports, and assault and battery. In most instances the plaintiffs' criminal charges were reviewed by the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, which determined that in the interest of justice, the charges against the plaintiffs should be dropped and they should be released from custody.

These incidents were alleged to have occurred from 1996 until July 2000 when rookie officers stepped forward to report the misconduct. The Oakland Police Department immediately placed the four officers on administrative leave and launched an extensive internal affairs investigation that concluded that they had committed serious violations of department policy. Upon conclusion of the investigation, the officers were promptly fired. The investigation eventually led to ongoing criminal prosecution by the Alameda County District Attorney's Office. The Riders criminal trial is currently underway in Alameda County Superior Court.

To view a copy of the settlement agreement or to find fact sheets regarding specific aspects of the agreement, visit the Office of the City Attorney's website at: www.oaklandcityattorney.org.

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