

For immediate release:
Aug. 23, 2010

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**FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST COBB COUNTY POLICE
OFFICERS WHO STOPPED AND BEAT LATINO MAN**
Call for Federal Government to Immediately End County's 287(g) Program

ATLANTA, GA – The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG), and civil rights attorney Brian Spears filed a federal civil rights lawsuit today against two Cobb County police officers over the stop, arrest and beating of an unarmed Latino man. They also joined the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR) to call on the federal government to terminate the county's 287(g) agreement due to the civil rights abuses perpetuated by the program.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of Angel Francisco Castro Torres, who was riding his bicycle in Smyrna, Georgia, when he was stopped by Cobb County police officers Jeremiah M. Lignitz and Brian J. Walraven. According to their own account, the officers, who are the named defendants in the complaint, stopped him after observing his race. The officers immediately demanded Castro's identification and questioned his immigration status. He was also beaten, resulting in a broken nose and eye socket, and arrested.

"This case is just the latest in a string that demonstrate that racial profiling is the standard mode of operation in Cobb County, Georgia," said Sam Brooke, an attorney for the Southern Poverty Law Center. "The federal government must put an immediate stop to these civil rights abuses by ending this program."

The officers attempted to cover up the attack by transporting Castro to the Cobb County Jail, which has a 287(g) agreement that turns over locally arrested individuals to the federal immigration system.

"Officers of the law must be held accountable when they go beyond the law -- and beyond the bounds of human decency," said Trina Realmuto, staff attorney at the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild. "Communities should be able to look to the police for protection, not seek protection from the police."

Since July 2007, Cobb County has participated in the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) 287(g) program, which authorizes local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration law. In the first two years of implementing the program, nearly 6,500 suspected undocumented immigrants have been detained.

"The 287(g) program is a national disgrace," said Paromita Shah, associate director of the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild. "It is incomprehensible why the Obama administration continues to support and expand this fatally flawed program when

dozens of reports demonstrate that the program creates a culture of unchecked police power that fosters discrimination and abuse.”

Despite DHS’s attempts to modify the program’s guidelines last year in an effort to reduce racial profiling, a report released by the department’s inspector general identified ongoing, alarming problems including lack of communications, inadequate training and supervising of the local law enforcement members, and few protections against racial profiling and other civil rights abuses.

“These officers stopped Mr. Castro for no other reason than the color of his skin,” said Brian Spears, civil rights attorney and co-counsel. “Riding a bike while not being white is not a crime.”

After being held for four months, Castro was released last week when the two officers named in the lawsuit failed to appear at a hearing regarding the charges they brought against him. He required surgery to repair the damage to his eye.

“The discrimination and abuse that Mr. Castro suffered is far too common in Cobb and other 287(g) counties in the Atlanta area,” said Adelina Nicholls, executive director of GLAHR. “We hear about and document similar abuses every day, but today is different, because we are standing with Mr. Castro and with SPLC and NIPNLG to fight back. We must end these abuses by ending this program.”

In 2008, SPLC published a report, *Under Siege: Life for Low-Income Latinos in the South*, which documents systemic discrimination against Latinos in the region that constitutes a civil rights crisis that must be addressed. One of the examples of the injustices that confront Latino immigrants as they struggle to gain a foothold in the South is the use of these programs that cause widespread fear of the police by all immigrants and Latinos regardless of status.

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The National Immigration Project is a national non-profit organization that provides legal assistance and technical support to immigrant communities, legal practitioners, and all advocates seeking to advance the rights of noncitizens.

For more information, please see www.nationalimmigrationproject.org