

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
A Request for an Investigation into the East Haven Police Department

Submitted on March 26, 2009

Leaders from the East Haven Latino community and St. Rose of Lima Church announce the release of a formal complaint to the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division to request an investigation of the East Haven Police Department (EHPD). The complaint documents the stories and concerns of shopkeepers and residents of East Haven, Connecticut and residents of neighboring towns, including more than twenty detailed accounts, alleging that EHPD engages in a pattern and practice of race-based violence and racial profiling against Latinos in East Haven in four broad areas:

1. Race-Based Violence and the Excessive Use of Force

East Haven Latino resident and visitors have been subject to violence at the hands of police officers in arrests, detentions, and otherwise routine operations. Officers have unnecessarily escalated ordinary encounters into violent confrontations, including beating people in custody.

2. Harassment and Intimidation

Latinos in East Haven report frequent police harassment, most commonly through (1) race-based traffic stops where officers often subject Latinos to racial insults and verbal harassment, (2) police stops where officers issue Latinos additional penalties, and (3) police tactics of intimidation at Latino-owned businesses located along West Main Street. East Haven police officers linger outside of Latino-owned businesses, then stop Latinos without reasonable suspicion and arrest them without probable cause. Latino merchants have seen their businesses suffer, and their former customers report that they are afraid to interact with police officers or even drive through East Haven.

3. Tacit Approval of the Department

The accounts documented in the complaint indicate that East Haven police officers have engaged in race-based violence and harassment within the official physical space of the East Haven Police Department, in plain view and earshot of the station's staffing officers and supervisors on duty. When residents directly called the department to report racial profiling, the EHPD dismissed their concerns, effectively chilling subsequent requests for relief from the department.

4. Police Retaliation and Lack of Redress.

Latino merchants and community members reported stories of police misconduct to the press after a priest was arrested while documenting one such incident earlier this year. The EHPD immediately retaliated against those who spoke out through continued harassment and intimidation. The EHPD's tacit approval of such misconduct has caused many Latinos in East Haven to feel that they lack any local recourse.

The complaint presents substantial evidence of a pattern and practice of racial profiling against Latinos in East Haven that requires an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice. The DOJ has investigated other law enforcement agencies in the past and required them to remedy discriminatory practices. The complaint was submitted on behalf of St. Rose of Lima Church by the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale Law School.