



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

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Office of Justice Programs' Office for Civil Rights Enters into Agreement with the Richland County Sheriff's Department to Ensure Civil Rights Protections for Students

WASHINGTON – The Office of Justice Programs' (OJP) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) today entered into an agreement with the Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) to resolve a compliance review of its School Resource Officer (SRO) program. The agreement was reached in order for RCSD to promptly enact changes to ensure full compliance with federal civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination against students based on race, color, national origin and disability.

The agreement requires RCSD to undertake a comprehensive assessment and overhaul of its SRO program, including:

- Developing policies to minimize school-based arrests and meet the needs of students with disabilities;
- Providing intensive, annual training for all SROs on de-escalation, bias-free policing, and youth development;
- Conducting detailed data collection and analysis; and
- Establishing a community working group to recommend program improvements.

The OJP Diagnostic Center, a technical assistance resource that uses data-driven approaches to help communities address criminal justice and public safety issues, will support RCSD in implementing the terms of the agreement.

“The Office for Civil Rights is committed to working with communities like Richland County to ensure that students' civil rights are protected and school-based law enforcement responses are safe and fair,” said OJP Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason. “By working with our Diagnostic Center to examine their data and identify the appropriate evidence-based practices, we hope these communities can enhance the services school resource officers provide and strengthen their relationships with students and families.”

OCR is responsible for ensuring recipients of federal financial assistance from OJP and the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, such as RCSD, comply with applicable federal civil rights laws. Specifically, OCR's SRO Compliance Review Initiative seeks to diminish the disproportionate impact school-based law enforcement actions have on students of color and students with disabilities by evaluating whether federally-funded

SRO programs comply with these laws. OCR selected the RCSD SRO program for review in May 2015 based on several factors, including data collected by the Justice Department and other federal agencies on the county's juvenile population and arrest rates, school-based arrests, and school-based referrals to law enforcement.

A link to the resolution agreement along with OCR's resolution letter can be found at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/about/ocr/pdfs/RCSD-SRO-ComplianceReview-08102016.pdf.