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Black Police Officers Sue City, Citing Surveillance

By KEVIN FLYNN

An organization that represents black police officers announced yesterday that it was suing New York City, saying the Police Department had secretly and illegally monitored its political activities by reviewing telephone records and following members.

The organization, 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, said the monitoring was intended to intimidate and silence a group that had been critical of the department, especially of its efforts to recruit minority officers and to adequately discipline police officers guilty of brutality. "We will not be intimidated," said Sgt. Noel Leader, a founder of the organization. "We will not be scared off."

Police officials deny the group's political activities were monitored. They have acknowledged conducting surveillance and reviewing telephone records about the organization, but, they said, only in connection with an investigation into its president, Lt. Eric Adams, for his personal conduct, not his political work. The investigation was closed after 11 months with no finding of wrongdoing.

The group's lawsuit was filed several weeks ago in United States District Court in Manhattan, but the organization said it held off announcing the litigation because it did not want to distract from the city's response to the terrorist attacks.

Reports of the monitoring first surfaced last year in a separate federal lawsuit filed by an officer who said she had been illegally fired after speaking out against racial profiling by the police. During testimony in that case, Deputy Chief Raymond King, an Internal Affairs Bureau commander, said investigators had monitored 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement in connection with an investigation of Lieutenant Adams.

"Surveillances were conducted," Chief King said during his testimony in July 2000. "Phone records were obtained." But the precise nature of the allegations against Lieutenant Adams were never disclosed. Several days later, Lieutenant Adams met with Howard Safir, the police commissioner at the time, to get a better idea of the allegations.

Yesterday he said Mr. Safir never provided him with anything more than a vague account of suspicions that was so lacking in specifics that it led him to conclude that the real purpose of the investigation was to spy on the organization.

Mr. Safir described that suggestion as nonsense. While he said he could not recall the meeting with Lieutenant Adams, he said, "I'm sure that we did present him with whatever allegations there were."

The lawsuit also charges that Verizon illegally turned over the telephone records on the basis of an "administrative subpoena" submitted by police officials, not a court order signed by a judge.

John J. Bonomo, a spokesman for Verizon, said the telephone company only provided information to law enforcement agencies "in accordance with applicable law."

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