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Civic Group Files Federal Lawsuit

Says police spied on its members

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STAFF WRITER

A civic organization of black police officers has filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the police department illegally spied on members of the group beginning in 1998, with the aid of Verizon.

Eric Adams, head of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, said the surveillance took place under the leadership of former police commissioner Howard Safir and led members of the minority community to fear that any conversation with members of the organization might be recorded by police authorities.

"Many people began to believe that to bring us in would also be to bring in the police department," said Adams, speaking at the offices of the New York Civil Liberties Union, which is assisting with the lawsuit. "Our effectiveness was eroded."

The lawsuit seeks to halt any unlawful surveillance, plus $80 million in damages.

Police spokesman Deputy Inspector Christopher Rising referred to the lawsuit, filed Nov. 7 in U.S. District Court, as "at this point . . . mere allegations."

"What we can state is that it is most definitely policy and practice of the NYPD to comply with all facets of the law when conducting its investigations," Rising said.

A Verizon spokesman, John Bonomo, released a statement saying, "When Verizon provides information to law enforcement agencies, it does so in accordance with applicable law."

Adams said his organization learned of the surveillance from the July 2000 testimony of the chief of criminal investigations for the Internal Affairs Bureau. The testimony came during a civil rights lawsuit filed by Yvette Walton, an officer who had been fired for criticizing the police killing of Amadou Diallo.

Deputy Chief Raymond King testified that "surveillances were conducted, phone records were obtained."

King testified police used an "administrative subpoena" to obtain the group's phone records and examine a pattern of calls that could bring individuals under police scrutiny.

He also testified that Internal Affairs investigators followed group members and set up stakeouts.

The surveillance has raised concerns within the black community, which has often relied on the black fraternal organization for guidance on police matters.

Rev. Herbert Daughtry, pastor of The House of the Lord Church in Brooklyn, said he worries that sensitive conversations he has with Adams may be monitored.

"I'm dealing with people confidentially all the time about alcohol problems, drug problems, domestic crises," Daughtry said. "It's not the most comforting feeling that any conversation I had with him [Adams] would also be recorded."

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