

Phoenix's crime stats audited by Feds after claim

by William Hermann - Jan. 26, 2011 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Auditors from the U.S. Department of Justice are reviewing Phoenix Police Department reports to determine the veracity of an allegation that kidnapping and home-invasion statistics were overblown in an effort to get a federal grant.

Police Cmdr. Chuck Miiller said the department used the statistics as part of an effort to land a \$1.7 million Justice Department grant to get more manpower for kidnapping and home-invasion investigations.

The department in its 2009 grant request said that there were more than 300 kidnappings and home invasions in 2008. It requested funds "to assist with border-related violent crimes" in Phoenix.

Phoenix Public Safety Manager Jack Harris said the department never attempted to inflate kidnapping numbers.

"Crimes are classified into different categories by detectives . . . (showing) if it's a robbery or a theft, (and) kidnapping and home invasion are no different," Harris said. "We've gone over (the statistics) multiple times and can back up every number with a report."

In an August 2010 memo to the Police Department Integrity Committee and the City Manager's Office, Phoenix police Sgt. Phillip Roberts made several accusations regarding

what he viewed as wrongdoing in the department. One allegation involved a lieutenant with whom he had come into conflict. Another said that some suspects had been held for more than 24 hours without an initial court appearance mandated by law.

But Roberts also said the department had "inflated kidnapping statistics to unlawfully obtain federal government stimulus monies."

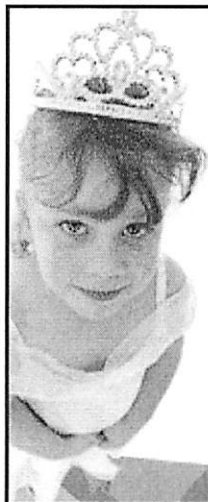
Contacted about the memo, Roberts would only say, "I have been advised by Phoenix police that I cannot comment on this." Mark Spencer, president of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association, a police union, said PLEA has been looking into the matter.

Spencer said PLEA had requested the departmental reports in question, were provided with 260 of them and had done their own analysis of the reports.

"They do have legitimate border-related kidnappings," Spencer said. "But they have many that are not."

"Out of the 260 reports, 78 percent of the reports presented by the PPD to obtain

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federal grant money related to border violence and kidnapping were not border-related," Spencer said, basing that estimate on a PLEA analysis of the reports.

Harris noted that when he reported to officials from the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs visiting Phoenix about the high number of kidnappings and home invasions and asked for the grant, "I told them I was asking for funding to increase the home-invasion and kidnapping (detective) unit, (and) I didn't get the money. I did get \$1.7 million for equipment and programs."

An official at the federal Office of the Inspector General confirmed that a complaint had been received regarding the kidnapping and home-invasions statistics, but would not comment on the audit. The official had no timetable for when the auditors would deliver their report.

Harris said he is confident the auditors will find little fault with the departmental reports.

"Our reputation with the Department of Justice and all of the entities that give grants is fantastic," he said. "They like to give us grants because they know that we do what we're supposed to do with the money."

Harris called the notion that he would falsify statistics "ridiculous."

"Why would I jeopardize millions in grants by lying about those statistics?" Harris said. "How many people do you know that commit fraud to get money to help the place where they work? They commit fraud to pad their own wallet."

"The bottom line is we stand by those statistics."

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