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LA Cops Claim 'Code Of Silence'

BY CBSNEWS.COM STAFF CBSNEWS.COM STAFF
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Dozens of police officers are suing the Los Angeles Police Department, claiming they were harassed or fired after reporting misconduct.

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While the lawsuit is not specifically linked to the department's notorious Rampart corruption case, the plaintiffs allege the "code of silence" led to that scandal.

The 41 current and former officers who filed suit Thursday in Superior Court seek compensation and an injunction prohibiting department officials from retaliating against whistleblowers.

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Attorney Bradley Gage estimated that 300 to 500 officers could eventually join the case if it is certified as a class action.

Department spokesman Don Cox said officials had not seen the lawsuit and could not comment.

The suit claims that officers who reported misconduct were taunted by supervisors, who said things such as **"you better watch your back"** and **"I will demote you and then I will fire you."**

The department also used a pattern of harassment in which managers passed on confidential information about officers being transferred, the suit says.

Some of the plaintiffs claim they suffered discrimination for other reasons, such as gender, race, disability or age. About half the plaintiffs are still officers; others quit, were fired or say they were forced out.

Some of the officers said the situation has worsened since Chief Bernard Parks took over in 1997.

"When the police officers are more afraid of the administration than they are of the bad guys out there, then they have to be careful, they can't say anything," Gage said. **"It's this code of silence that's created out of fear that can lead to corruption within a department."**

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The LAPD is under scrutiny because of the Rampart affair, so called because that is the division where the suspect officers worked. The corruption probe has already resulted in 86 convictions being overturned.

The scandal involves several officers who assaulted, stole drugs from or framed defendants. One of the officers, Raphael Perez, is cooperating with prosecutors in return for a reduced sentence on a conviction for stealing cocaine from the LAPD evidence locker.

In addition to Perez, several dozen officers have been reprimanded and five have been charged with crimes in the ongoing investigation into the Rampart division's CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) unit. Chief Parks disbanded all CRASH units in March.

One of the officers, Nino Durden, was charged in late July with the attempted murder of a suspect.

The Los Angeles District Attorney's office, private attorneys and public defenders

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It revised its February estimate of 6,000 to an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 cases.

In March, a board of inquiry concluded that poor supervision and a clique culture encouraged officers to break the rules and caused the widespread corruption scandal.

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