



Police Reform Through Transparency--FOIA Project

Available

Project Title

Police Reform Through Transparency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Project

Scope of Work

Volunteers will examine police department budgets and, craft FOIA requests concerning police department contracts with law enforcement equipment vendors and consultants, sales materials, and communications.

Timing

Jurisdiction

Contact Information

Lawyers interested in assisting in the FOIA Project should contact Alec Karakatsanis, email alec@civilrightscorps.org.

Description

Police Reform Through Transparency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Project

Background of Project. The Police Reform Through Transparency Freedom of Information Act Project (“FOIA Project”) is part of a larger collaboration between Civil Rights Corps, the Advancement Project, and local grassroots organizers across the United States. The FOIA Project has a simple goal: to increase transparency by informing advocates, civil rights lawyers, organizers, and

journalists about the deep web of ties between police departments and a wide range of for-profit companies, consultants, and non-profits who promote "police reforms" that are actually designed to increase profit and increase the size and budgets of police bureaucracies. Many local racial justice advocates have identified this faux "reform" business as a key obstacle to meaningful racial justice changes to policing in the United States.

Purpose of Project. The FOIA Project will identify key police departments based on the needs of local lawyers and activists, the known existence of profitable "reform" contracts, and an analysis of state transparency laws. The first tranche of police departments identified to date includes Houston, Detroit, and District of Columbia. A second tranche includes Miami, St. Louis, Nashville, Chicago, Minneapolis, Ithaca, Raleigh and New Haven.

Participating law firms will examine police department budgets and, based on budget and other sources of information, craft FOIA requests concerning police department contracts with law enforcement equipment vendors and consultants, sales materials, and communications between police department requisition officials and vendor contacts. The participating law firms will also work with local partners to review and organize the material that they collect. Finally, if needed, participating law firms will also work with the Project Sponsors, local counsel, local advocates, and journalists to litigate any efforts by police departments to block release of the materials.

Project Sponsors: The Project Sponsors, Advancement Project National Offices (advancementproject.org) and Civil Rights Corps (civilrightscorps.org), are currently working with organizers in various ways to support of their local campaigns for fundamental change in the criminal legal system. Their interventions collectively include litigation, communications, campaign strategy, and public advocacy in support of their stated goals. For this new collaboration, of which the FOIA Project is an important component, the Project Sponsors are recruiting lawyers in Houston, Detroit, and the District of Columbia to participate in a series of legal trainings and political education aimed at providing the tools necessary to bring 42 U.S.C. § 1983, Civil action for deprivation of rights, cases against police in support of active campaigns to transform local criminal legal systems. The Project Sponsors will be working with the cohort of lawyers during

the second half of 2021 to train and develop these lawyers, introduce them to organizers in their cities, and orient their ongoing work to be part of a broader local and national movement. The long term goal is to create a new and deep bench of politically engaged lawyers who have the legal skills and vision to continue this work on their own in support of movements in their own community.

How to Get Started. Lawyers interested in assisting in the FOIA Project should contact Alec Karakatsanis, email alec@civilrightscorps.org. Interested lawyers may advise the Project Sponsors concerning which cities/police departments the lawyers are most interested in approaching. The Project Sponsors will attempt to allocate resources depending on the number and location of the law firms that respond to this LFAA Bulletin Board posting.

It is not necessary for a lawyer or law firm to have a physical presence in a given city in order to submit FOIA requests to the police department located in that city. However, participating lawyers should become familiar with the FOIA laws applicable in a given jurisdiction and give consideration to the logistics of commencing FOIA litigation in that jurisdiction.

Project Staffing. The staffing needs for this FOIA Project are currently undetermined and will likely evolve as the Project develops.

Subtasks (0)