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Gibson Dunn Files Lawsuit Against City of El Segundo for Racial Profiling Black Residents by the El Segundo Police Department

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Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP has filed a lawsuit on behalf of Keith Puckett, a Black resident of the City of El Segundo, against the City of El Segundo for racial profiling and unlawful detention by the El Segundo Police Department (ESPD). The lawsuit seeks compensatory damages and an injunction barring the City from engaging in unconstitutional conduct and requiring the adoption of appropriate policies and training of ESPD officers. Empirical data collected by El Segundo under the Racial and Identity Profiling Act confirms ESPD is engaged in widespread racial profiling. Most notably, even though fewer than 5 percent of El Segundo's residents are Black, more than 20 percent of all ESPD stops are of Black people. Recently, a documentary film called "Black in Mayberry" premiered at a local El Segundo museum. The film incudes powerful stories of racism experienced by El Segundo residents, many of which were echoed in the experiences of community members Gibson Dunn interviewed while preparing Mr. Puckett's complaint. Mr. Puckett has directly experienced racial profiling by ESPD, having been targeted for his race and unlawfully detained twice in 2021. In one incident, six ESPD officers arrived outside Mr. Puckett's home in the middle of the night and questioned him after having seen a Black man (a guest of Mr. Puckett) outside Mr. Puckett's home. Eventually, the officers said it was all a simple misunderstanding with the Department of Motor Vehicles, and then they left. Less than two months later, when Mr. Puckett drove to a gym to play basketball with his son, an ESPD officer drove past him in the opposite direction. The officer did a U-turn and stopped Mr. Puckett, falsely claiming the light above Mr. Puckett's rear license plate wasn't working. When the officer failed to discover any evidence of wrongdoing, he let Mr. Puckett go. Mr. Puckett reported these incidents to the Chief of Police, City Manager and Deputy City Manager, and has advocated for policy changes to improve the treatment of Black people in El Segundo and reduce the use of blatant profiling tactics. But he continues to meet with resistance and the ESPD practices haven't stopped. Mr. Puckett himself has been followed by ESPD on multiple occasions, and ESPD officers regularly follow, stop, and use displays of force and numbers to interrogate Black residents – including Black children on their way home from school – for no reason. Mr. Puckett is an active community member, who has worked as a parent volunteer, PTA member, recreational youth sports coach, basketball coach at his son's school, volunteer crossing guard, and lunchtime security support member. "Racism by law enforcement is unlawful, unconstitutional and harmful to everyone who experiences it, even when it doesn't involve violence," said Lauren Blas, Gibson Dunn partner and counsel for Mr. Puckett. "Even if it doesn't make national news, it's the kind of harassing, demeaning, insidious conduct that Black people and people of color have to contend with every day. We have brought this action to protect Mr. Puckett's constitutional rights, to hold the City accountable for its unlawful conduct and to compel it to stop racially profiling the residents of the El Segundo community." Blas added, "Mr. Puckett cares deeply about racial justice. El Segundo is his home, and he wants to live there without fearing that ESPD will continue to violate his constitutional rights and the rights of other Black community members. This lawsuit is a final effort to hold the City accountable for its unlawful conduct and to compel it to end racial profiling by the ESPD." The complaint is

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