



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 12, 2016

DOJ Sues Ferguson to Force Police Reform After City “Rejects” Consent Decree

Department of Justice Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced on Wednesday that the Justice Department is suing the city of Ferguson, Missouri, to force police reform after the city council rejected a costly deal negotiated by federal officials.

The cash-strapped city’s rejection “leaves us no further choice,” Lynch said in her statement, asserting that the residents of Ferguson “have waited decades for justice.” She said in announcing the filing of the suit, “The residents of Ferguson have suffered the deprivation of their constitutional rights — the rights guaranteed to all Americans — for decades. They have waited decades for justice. They should not be forced to wait any longer.”



The deal between the city of Ferguson and the Department of Justice was drafted after formal Attorney General Eric Holder launched an investigation into the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old black man, even after a St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict Darren Wilson, the officer involved in the shooting, and the investigation by the department last year exonerated Wilson in Brown’s death.

In its investigation, the DOJ did, however, criticize the criminal justice system in Ferguson and said that the police department and court system in Ferguson were being used to generate revenue through ticketing, Breitbart News reports. The investigation determined that the police and courts were unfairly targeting the city’s black residents, which comprise approximately 70 percent of the population.

Breitbart News reports that the expensive deal, which Lynch called “fair and cost-effective,” would have required tax increases on Ferguson citizens, as it included pay raises for the police, training, and the hiring of an independent monitor. But the violent rioting by protesters has left the city with a budget deficit of approximately \$2.5 million, making it nearly impossible for the city to accept the deal as it stood.

The city council did agree to accept the reform agreement under the condition that it did not have to increase police salaries and staffing levels. The council also requested more time to comply with the terms of the agreement.

USA Today adds that leaders also “sought to free the city from its obligations under the agreement should Ferguson seek to shutter the police department altogether and enlist another agency to provide public safety services.”

For the DOJ, the city council’s amendments amounted to a rejection of the deal. “Painstaking



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negotiations lasted more than 26 weeks as we sought to remedy literally years of systematic deficiencies,” Lynch said. “The City Council rejected the consent decree approved by their own negotiators; their decision leaves us no further choice.”

Ferguson Mayor James Knowles said that once the city had a clear understanding of the true cost of the consent decree, which it determined to be nearly \$10 million over the next three years, it had no choice but to request changes.

But the DOJ had little sympathy for Ferguson’s financial concerns. “There is no cost for constitutional policing,” Lynch said late Wednesday.

Knowles acknowledged that by requesting revisions to the deal, the city council was inviting litigation, but that the city was still willing to continue negotiations. “The ball is in their court,” Knowles said at a news conference in Ferguson. “We’re sitting and waiting to talk. If they want to threaten legal action, then that’s what they’re threatening.”

Despite the city’s dire financial straits, the DOJ has elected to file suit, which will likely cost Ferguson millions of dollars. “I think the city of Ferguson had a real opportunity to step forward here,” Lynch said. “Instead, they have chosen to step in the past.”

Knowles contends that it would cost the city less to be sued by the federal government than to accept the consent decree. “The agreement, as it currently stands, will cost more to implement than it would be to fight a lawsuit,” he said. “Substantially more.”

Photo of Ferguson City Hall: [Paul Sableman](#)

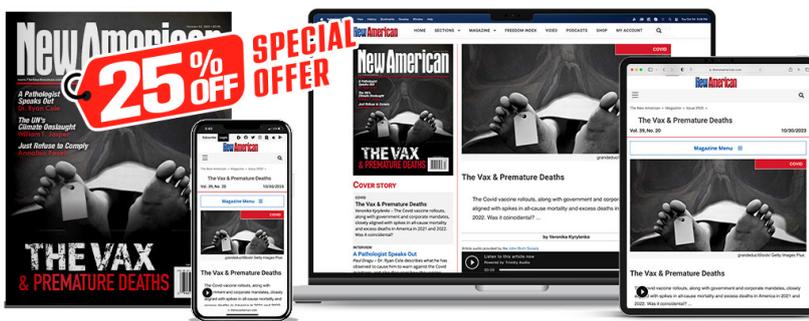


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