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August 22, 2012

The Honorable Susie Morgan
U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana
500 Poydras St., C508
New Orleans, LA 70130

Re: United States of America v. City of New Orleans
Case no. 12-1924

Dear Judge Morgan:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide community input regarding the Consent Decree between the City of New Orleans and the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Southern Poverty Law Center ("SPLC") is a civil rights law firm based in Montgomery, Alabama, but with an office in New Orleans. SPLC is an organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. Our Louisiana work has focused in part on the criminal justice system.

We write to support the entry of the Consent Decree. The provisions prohibiting the NOPD from using race or sexual orientation as a basis for stops and arrests, and requiring training on bias-free policing, are important steps toward reforming a long-troubled police department. Orleans Parish Prison is populated by people who are overwhelmingly Black and poor—reducing disparate treatment by police is an important first step toward creating a more equitable justice system for our City.

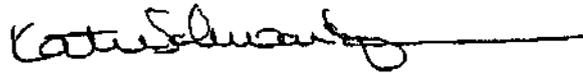
We are also particularly supportive of the provisions requiring supervisory review of probable cause on certain arrests, as well as the collection of stop and search data. Recent data from Orleans Parish Prison demonstrate that the length of stay in jail for African American arrestees is over double that of white arrestees.¹ The provisions in the Decree requiring supervisory review of minor arrests, and requiring tracking of racial stop data, will help our community continue to work toward incarcerating only those necessary to keep our streets safe.

¹ Overview of jail populations projections study, conducted by Dr. James Austin for Mayor Landrieu. Available at: <http://www.nola.gov/HOME/Mayors-Office/Criminal-Justice-Working-Group/>

For this Decree to be sustainable, we need the broadest possible community support and involvement in its implementation. To that end, it is important that the Office of Independent Police Monitor ("OIPM") be involved in this Decree. OIPM, created by the voters of Orleans Parish, must be included in the Decree, because the Public Integrity Bureau does not represent the community, the OIPM does. OIPM should be included in the Decree both to inform the work of the Federal Monitor and to ensure that once the Federal Monitor leaves New Orleans, we have strengthened local police oversight that our community can rely upon for years to come.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into this important case.

Very truly yours,



Katie Schwartzmann
Director, Louisiana Office