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New Report Reveals Maricopa County Sheriff's Office Misled Public by Massively Inflating Costs of Court-Ordered Reforms

The records show that 72 percent of the costs MCSO billed to the County were unrelated to Ortega Melendres

Case: [Ortega Melendres, et al. v. Arpaio, et al.](#)

Affiliate: [ACLU of Arizona](#)

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ACLU Affiliate

[ACLU of Arizona](#)

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PHOENIX, AZ – A new court-ordered independent audit reveals that the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) has deceived the public by grossly inflating the costs of complying with [Ortega Melendres v. Sheridan](#), a class action

that found MCSO engaged in racially discriminatory policing practices and immigration enforcement in Arizona.

The report details widespread misuse of county funds and deceptive practices within MCSO's self-reported figures. While records show the Sheriff's Office has billed the County for \$226 million for costs supposedly related to *Ortega Melendres*, the report reveals that over \$160 million of that cost (72 percent) is improperly attributed to *Ortega Melendres* and that much of it was entirely unrelated to the case. Among the expenditures wrongly charged to *Ortega Melendres* are purchases for golf carts, horses, tasers, and jet fuel.

"Sheriff Sheridan has spent the last year assuring constituents that his leadership differs from his former boss, Joe Arpaio. But misleading the public about MCSO's behavior is more of the same," said **Victoria Lopez, executive director for the ACLU of Arizona**. "MCSO has been quietly diverting taxpayer dollars to unrelated expenses and then using their inflated price tag to claim that it's 'too expensive' to stop violating the Constitution. The agency's misrepresentation of the costs in this case is not an accident. It's a product of conscious decisions made and sustained within MCSO. This report shows the truth: it's not reform that's expensive, it's MCSO's misconduct."

The report also found that MCSO routinely billed the full salaries of employees who did only minimal work on *Ortega Melendres* compliance, and it suggests MCSO violated state budgeting laws. "This mischaracterization," the report reads, "misleads the public on the cost of reform efforts, and calls into question MCSO's credibility, transparency, and truthfulness of its reporting to the public, the Parties, and the Court." MCSO has frequently exploited its falsely inflated cost figures in an effort to turn the public against federal court orders holding the agency to account for constitutional violations.

"The Sheriff's Office and complicit County politicians cooked the books in *Ortega Melendres* to create a fake cost boogeyman that might get them off the hook for completing critical reforms in this case," said **Jenn Rolnick Borchetta, deputy director of the ACLU's Criminal Law Reform Project**. "Reforms in *Ortega Melendres* started with MCSO dragging its heels on compliance instead of just fixing the constitutional problems. All the while, the community has been paying the price for their misconduct, both financially and through real human harm. We will not accept this blatant

attempt to escape accountability. We expect that now, with this alarming report, MCSO and the County will recommit to focusing on the work that remains instead of continuing with misconduct that takes time away from getting reforms done.”

For years, MSCO and local officials have repeatedly cited false and inflated costs while failing to substantiate their claims. In September 2024, the court ordered the agency to produce documentation. The first receipts MCSO provided showed that most spending was categorized as “MCSO operational costs.” When pressed for more detail on the vague category, MCSO was unable to produce itemized receipts, prompting the Judge to order an independent audit.

The full report is here:

<https://www.aclu.org/documents/ortega-melendres-et-al-v-arpaio-et-al-order-and-cost-audit>

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