


County attorney says monitor has 'financial incentive' to continue MCSO oversight

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PHOENIX (AZFamily) — [Maricopa County Attorney Rachel Mitchell](#) is joining the list of elected officials who are voicing their opposition to continued federal oversight of the county's sheriff's office. The comments from Mitchell come after a fiery community meeting on Wednesday night in Phoenix, [where community members voiced concerns over the cost of monitoring](#) that has lasted 11 years and still shows no signs of ending.

The oversight stems from a lawsuit in which then-Sheriff Joe Arpaio was found to have racially profiled Latino drivers. Robert Warshaw has served as the monitor for the MCSO case.

According to county records, the lawsuit and subsequent federal monitoring have cost taxpayers \$311 million as of June 2025. Of that, \$31 million has gone toward monitor fees.

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The renewed scrutiny of the federal oversight comes as the Department of Justice recently closed investigations into police departments, [including an investigation into the Phoenix Police Department](#). What makes the Maricopa County oversight different is that the case is under the oversight of [federal judge G. Murray Snow](#) and has been for more than 10 years.

'We need to move on'

In her monthly press conference on Thursday, Mitchell said voters have already determined the changes needed in the county's sheriff's office by their choices in the sheriffs who have been elected to the office since.

"This was a situation that was put in place by somebody that was three sheriffs ago; he was voted out of office," Mitchell said. "The system worked in the sense that we voted out the person who was the focus of this monitor. So we need to move on."

Some community groups and the ACLU say federal oversight is still needed and more work needs to be done to improve the department. But Mitchel said it's all about the money.

"This monitor has a financial incentive to continue to find violations and non-compliance and that needs to be taken into account," she said, noting that Warshaw also serves as monitor for the Oakland, California, Police Department. "We have paid, the county has paid this monitor just shy of \$30 million at this point. If he finds compliance, then he's out of a job."

Mitchell said the oversight of the department is a hindrance to the elected sheriffs. In 2023, then-Sheriff Paul Penzone, a Democrat, announced his plan to resign from the position, citing the monitor's oversight.

"I'll be damned if I'll do three terms under federal court oversight for a debt I never incurred and not be given the chance to serve this community in the manner that I could, if you'd take that other hand from being tied behind my back," [Penzone said at the time](#).

Mitchell echoed other Republican elected officials who spoke at the community meeting on Wednesday night, saying the money spent on oversight could be spent on other things.

"As a taxpayer, \$350 million [the amount expected to be spent by the end of the fiscal year] can be spent a lot of ways to make our community safer," Mitchell said.

In Warshaw's latest report to the federal judge overseeing the case, he continued to note the [department's backlog of internal investigations](#), which has seen improvement in recent months. He also noted continued concerns over racial disparities in the department's traffic stops, which is something reflected in the most recently analysis of traffic stops from the department.

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