

DOJ supports call to end Maricopa County Sheriff's Office oversight case

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PHOENIX (AZFamily) — The U.S. Department of Justice said Friday it supports an effort by Maricopa County to ask a judge to end federal oversight of the county's sheriff's office. The oversight has been in place [following a 2007 class action lawsuit](#) that found the department racially profiled Hispanic drivers under then-Sheriff Joe Arpaio.

The case, subsequent federal oversight, and [costs to the sheriff's office have totaled more than \\$330 million](#), according to figures provided by the county to *Arizona's Family Investigates*.

In a mid-December court filing, attorneys for Maricopa County said they believe the litigation has been a "success," and the sheriff's office has changed since the days of the lawsuit.

"The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office ("MCSO") today looks nothing like the institution against which Plaintiffs brought suit in 2011. Some of that progress is due to this case," the filing stated.

It goes on to cite the federal monitor's most recent quarterly report, where "MCSO is in 100% Phase 1 compliance with all four of this Court's orders and between 75% and 94% Phase 2 compliance."

In the December filing, the county's lawyers said that when issues arise, the department is prepared to address them.

"No human organization is perfect, and there will always be bad actors who infiltrate institutions of public trust. In those cases, the measure of the institution is its ability to identify and remove the bad actors. MCSO has reformed its policies, improved its workforce, and implemented mechanisms to assure that racial profiling never occurs. This litigation has been a success, and the time has come to allow MCSO to stand on its own two feet, freed of oversight—but always accountable if it violates the law in the future."

After the December filing, the ACLU of Arizona released a statement opposing the county's filing.

"Maricopa County's move to prematurely halt reforms in Melendres ignores the enduring harm Latino residents have experienced at the hands of MCSO," [Victoria Lopez, executive director for the ACLU of Arizona](#), said. "This case is about ensuring meaningful, lasting reform, not settling for temporary fixes. Ending oversight now jeopardizes the progress made thus far and is a distraction from working towards total compliance."

The judge set deadlines for filings to be made supporting or opposing the county's effort to end oversight, but no hearing has been scheduled.

Judge continues to question county costs

In the hearing on Friday, [Judge G. Murray Snow](#) questioned figures provided by the county on costs associated with the initial trial, federal oversight, and the changes made at the sheriff's office.

The county says those costs total more than \$330 million. But [a court-ordered audit found the county 'overstated' costs](#) of the federal oversight. The court's audit, which focused only on those MCSO-related costs, found that the department may have included costs unrelated to the case.

Some of the examples of what the audit deemed "inappropriate items" included:

- \$2.8 million for surplus body-worn camera licenses that went "above and beyond" court orders.
- \$1.5 million in office renovations for the relocation of the Professional Standards Bureau
- 42 vehicles worth \$1.3 million

Current Maricopa County sheriff, Jerry Sheridan, [disputed the audit's findings before a community meeting in October](#).

"I don't think there is any mislabeling of funds. I don't give the monitor's report any credibility whatsoever," Sheridan said.

When asked about the judge's concerns over the lack of details about money spent, Sheridan said that was "absolutely ridiculous."

The judge said the county is spreading "inaccurate information" when it continues to use its figures without responding to questionable findings made by the court's audit.

According to the latest figures from the county provided to *Arizona's Family Investigates*, total Melendres-related costs (including court case, legal fees, and oversight) have totaled \$330 million.

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Oversight through multiple sheriffs

Oversight of the sheriff's office has lasted through multiple sheriffs' administrations, long after the controversial tenure of Arpaio.

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](#).

The federal oversight also continued under Russ Skinner, who was sheriff after Penzone's resignation, and is in place under Sheriff Sheridan.

DOJ's shifting stance

The shift comes after the DOJ's Civil Rights Division ended investigations into police departments in [Phoenix](#), Minneapolis, Louisville, and other cities in 2025.

While those investigations could be pulled, 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.

After the DOJ moved to end investigations in other cities, [county leaders were more visible](#) at community meetings and [vocal in their position to end](#) the oversight under a federal monitor. The [county has argued that the millions in costs dedicated to the case](#) and federal oversight can be redirected to the county's public safety needs.

"Maricopa County moves for relief from the judgment so that Defendants may devote their full energy to public safety and the countless other priorities that suffer from the diversion of resources needed to fund federal oversight."

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