



**U.S. Department of Justice**

Office of Justice Programs

*Bureau of Justice Assistance*

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*Washington, D.C. 20531*

August 6, 2021

Sheriff Chris Nocco  
Pasco County Sheriff's Office  
8700 Citizens Drive  
New Port Richey, FL 34654

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Sheriff Nocco:

I am writing to you in reference to the Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) grant award to the Pasco County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) under our Smart Policing Initiative (Grant Number 2018-WY-BX-0004 or "this grant award").

BJA's Smart Policing Initiative (SPI) is designed to support unbiased policing while promoting public safety, with an overarching goal of building trust between law enforcement and the community. SPI provides resources, training, and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies that enable them to address their most pressing crime problems and institute lasting cultural and organizational changes that foster reliance on and effective use of evidence-based practices, data, and technology.

Agencies that receive SPI funding are expected to engage members of their communities as allies in reducing violence, ensure transparency in their crime reduction approaches whenever feasible, and establish innovative and effective working relationships with citizens and community leaders to gain support for their proposed policing initiatives. Trust, and building trust, is at the core of SPI funding.

PCSO recently circulated the attached letter to individuals regarding a PCSO-run program (the "PCSO program"), which claimed to be "in cooperation with the Department of Justice's Strategies for Policing Innovation Initiative." However, the letter does not adequately depict the dedicated training and technical resources under SPI provided by the Department, nor does it adequately describe the requirements for greater community engagement required for SPI's success.

We also have concerns regarding the methodology used to identify individuals for inclusion in the PCSO program; the name of the program; communications about the program; the lack of involvement and communication with the greater community about the program; and the

insufficient coordination with relevant law enforcement stakeholder groups. These shortcomings have the unfortunate consequence of eroding trust in the community, rather than building trust. Given this, and given the goals of SPI, BJA will undertake an immediate assessment of the activities funded under this grant award<sup>1</sup>. As the assessment begins, PCSO should immediately pause its activities under this award so that BJA can work with PCSO to provide an intensive review of several aspects of the PCSO program.

Specifically, BJA will work with PCSO to:

- Convene a working group of all relevant community leaders, federal law enforcement partners and social service organizations to ensure roles, responsibilities, and communication with the community are clear, transparent, and reflective of best practices in focused deterrence programming. The law enforcement partners should include all entities who might play a role in holding individuals accountable for violent activity, to include the State Attorney's Office, the United States Attorney's Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.
- Provide a specialized training and technical assistance review team to review data used for any SPI program to ensure the program is unbiased and reflects current standards of transparency and data integrity.
- Ensure that the community is an active partner in the PCSO program, and provide mechanisms to share and receive feedback and participation from the community in the initiative. Such assistance will include the incorporation of previously provided guidance on effectively communicating with the public on this issue.
- Develop a new strategy for engaging with individuals about participating in the PCSO Program. This should include a written notification to any recipient of the attached letter that the attached letter is effectively withdrawn. The written notification should also include a revised engagement strategy with individuals who received the letter.
- Develop evaluation measures to ensure the PCSO program does not undermine trust between the community and law enforcement and ensure that the program does not result in discrimination of any kind.

PCSO's continued access to this grant award funding is contingent on PCSO fully adopting and implementing these proposed actions. Kate McNamee, the BJA Senior Policy Advisor with oversight over SPI, will manage this supplemental assistance to your SPI team and ensure that

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<sup>1</sup>As you are aware, special condition #28 on this award, to which PCSO agreed as a condition of accepting BJA funds, reads, "The recipient agrees to cooperate with any assessments, including, but not limited to, the provision of any information required for the assessment or evaluation of any activities within this project."

the project is successfully implemented in accordance with Department of Justice expectations and requirements.

The Department of Justice is committed to advancing work that promotes civil rights, increases access to justice, supports crime victims, protects the public from crime and evolving threats, and builds trust between law enforcement and the community. This program can support that work and save lives. It is my sincere hope that BJA can continue to support PCSO to reduce violence and strengthen partnerships in your community. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristen Mahoney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristen Mahoney  
Acting BJA Director