

State police win points on profiling

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Not long ago New Jersey State Police were the subject of protests, legislative hearings and high-profile lawsuits over the way some troopers disproportionately targeted minority motorists.

Now it is impressing even some of its most ardent critics with its reform efforts.

The department, which remains under the watch of a court-appointed monitor put in place nearly five years ago, invited some of its most vocal critics to hear in a seminar yesterday how its procedures had changed.

Even those who contend that statistics show racial profiling is still happening in some areas agreed that the department has taken big strides.

"I think that there's a real indication that something at least significant has changed in the division," said William Buckman, a Moorestown lawyer who has represented people who said they were unfairly targeted by troopers. "And that's commendable."

Civil liberties groups and organizations for minority police officers had members at the event at the state police technology center.

Col. Rick Fuentes, the state police superintendent, said the meeting was a chance to demonstrate in great detail how much the department had changed.

Fuentes and state Attorney General Peter C. Harvey sought to reassure the assembled activists that the reforms were designed to continue even after federal monitoring ends, which could happen as early as next year, over the objections of some of the activists.

Shai Goldstein, the former executive director of the state branch of the Anti-Defamation League and a vocal opponent of racial profiling, said that in 1998 New Jersey's was one of the most racist state police operations in the nation.

Goldstein was referring to the year two state troopers fired at four men in a van on the New Jersey Turnpike, an event that helped cement racial profiling as one of the biggest political and legal issues in the state.

But now, **Goldstein** said, the department is among the best.

Indeed, Fuentes said he expects to start educating other states' departments on how to implement reforms.

Department officials yesterday laid out how nearly everything about the state police had changed. The internal affairs unit has expanded, training methods have become more sophisticated, and recruiting efforts have been updated. A new computer system helps analyze the activities of individual troopers and even identifies patterns when a trooper is pulling over disproportionate numbers of people of one race, sex or age group.

Maj. Gordon Coleman, commander of the Office of Professional Standards, the internal affairs unit of the state police, said that before the reforms began, his unit's main equipment was three ledgers and files of index cards.

Now, the staff has grown from 19 to 65 and uses computers.

Richard E. Arline, vice president of the North Jersey chapter of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, said he was especially impressed with the emphasis on recruiting a diverse group of troopers.

Police officials said that most of the applicants for state police jobs were now women and minorities.

But Ed Barocas, the legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, said that part of the proof of effective reforms is in other statistics as well.

And he said that according to state police data, more than 30 percent of the drivers pulled over on the southern stretches of the turnpike are black. That rate, he said, is a bit higher than it was when the reform efforts started.