

State group says Harrison County lax in reporting racial profiling statistics

Senate bill would add penalty for violations

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Under a bill introduced earlier this month in the Senate, at least one area law enforcement agency would be penalized for not reporting recent racial profiling statistics to their governing body, according to a group in Austin.

Harrison County was the only agency in East Texas that did not submit its 2005 racial profiling reports, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition said in a report that covered every law enforcement agency with at least 3,000 annual traffic stops for 2005. A law enacted in 2001 requires the reports to be turned in by March 1 of the year following.

Harrison County Sheriff Tom McCool said his department has complied with the law every year until now.

"I plead guilty to being late with that report this year, but it will certainly be done at the next commissioners court meeting," McCool said. "But my first thought is that information about our previous reporting is incorrect."

Senate Bill 1448, authored by Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas, would result in a \$1,000 civil penalty for such violations.

The bill also calls for a statewide repository to be established at the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education, the state agency responsible for developing and implementing training curriculum for peace officers.

West also authored the 2001 bill that made racial profiling by law enforcement illegal. It required agencies to submit annual racial profiling reports, but had no penalties for agencies that do not comply.

"We obtain those figures annually, and I do present them to the commissioners," McCool said. "It's not a big deal. All we have to do is push a button to generate the report, which has also been sent to that (TCJC) organization several times."

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition is the only statewide clearinghouse for such information, said Molly Totman, the group's spokeswoman. She described the organization as a privately funded nonprofit group "committed to identifying problems in and finding solutions for" the state's criminal justice system.

"But we don't have the authority to make agencies comply with the reporting law," Totman said. "Consistent reliable data on a statewide basis would enable law enforcement to implement better policies and improve community relationships."

State Sen. Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler, said Thursday that he had not studied the bill in detail, but had "real concerns" about legislation that would increase the workload for law enforcement agencies.

"I think what we have in place is working fine since most of the (departments) are reporting," Eltife said.

"All we seem to do in Austin is put more and more paperwork on entities and not let them do their work, so I'm not really in favor of legislation like this."

http://www.news-journal.com/news/content/news/stories/03302007_Racial_profiling.html