November 20, 2017

Dear Police Chief:

Earlier this month, Channel 10 ran two news stories suggesting that some police departments in the state were requiring, or strongly recommending, that their officers issue a certain number of traffic tickets at certain times while on patrol.[1] These stories were particularly troubling because, since 2010, Rhode Island state law has specifically prohibited ticket quota practices by police departments. R.I.G.L. §31-27-25.

If your department is one of the agencies alluded to in the news station's reporting, we urge you to immediately halt any such practice and advise your officers that any order to the contrary is countermanded.

Ticket quota policies, whether "suggested" or mandated, send a message that police enforcement is more about making money than enforcing the law in a fair, equitable and necessary manner. An encounter between a motorist and a police officer over a traffic violation is never a pleasant one, but it is even less so when the basis for the stop is to meet a quota, not to address a truly legitimate safety need. A quota policy can only generate disrespect for, and cynicism about, law enforcement.

In short, the implementation of traffic ticket quotas is problematic as a matter of policy, but even more so when it involves a police department itself violating the law. For any departments that may have been unaware of the state law, we trust that this reminder will resolve the matter. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this.

Sincerely,

Steven Brown
Executive Director

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[1] "NBC 10 I-Team: Officers instructed to ticket or face unfavorable action," 11/1/17, available at: http://turnto10.com/i-team/nbc-10-i-team-officers-instructed-to-ticket-or-face-unfavorable-action; "Attorneys tell NBC 10 I-Team: many departments have ticket quotas," 11/2/17, available at: http://turnto10.com/i-team/attorneys-tell-nbc-10-i-team-many-departments-have-ticket-quotas