
Lawsuit accuses Allentown police, federal agents of excessive force during unlawful search

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ALLENTOWN, Pa. — An Allentown man claims in a lawsuit that city police officers and federal agents injured him and terrified his family during a 2020 search.

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Julio Cesar Abreu Lora alleges Allentown police and agents from the U.S. Marshals Service and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement executed a search at his home — but never showed him a warrant — early on the morning of Jan. 8, 2020.

The suit, filed by Philadelphia attorney Alan Denenberg, says police were looking for Abreu Lora's brother, who did not live at the home.

"They may have had a warrant for Mr. Abreu Lora's brother, (but) that doesn't justify their mistreatment of him and his family."

Attorney Alan Denenberg

According to the suit:

Abreu Lora and his family were awakened that morning by officers and agents banging on the door.

They claimed they had a warrant for his brother and entered the home after holding Abreu Lora at gunpoint at the door.

Officers then brought Abreu Lora and his wife, children and mother-in-law into the living room at gunpoint.

Abreu Lora alleges he was injured when three federal agents tackled him to the ground and handcuffed him after he asked to see a warrant for the search.

“Agents have a difficult job, but that doesn't mean that they're entitled to trample over other people's rights trying to do their jobs.”

Attorney Alan Denenberg

Agents ran background checks on several family members and “left without making any arrests or ever showing a valid warrant,” according to the lawsuit.

“They may have had a warrant for Mr. Abreu Lora’s brother, [but] that doesn't justify their mistreatment of him and his family,” Denenberg said.

“When people's constitutional rights are violated, they deserve justice,” he said. “Agents have a difficult job, but that doesn't mean that they're entitled to trample over other people's rights trying to do their jobs.”

A spokesperson for the U.S. Marshals Service said the agency does not comment on pending litigation or legal proceedings.

Representatives from the Allentown Police Department and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement did not respond to LehighValleyNews.com.

Series of suits

Allentown Police Department is no stranger to lawsuits. The city has paid out more than \$2 million in the past decade to settle claims of excessive force by police officers.

That total includes a \$400,000 payout in 2021 to a man who said he was beaten by four Allentown cops who were searching for a gunman behind his home.

Allentown paid \$270,000 in 2019 after a federal jury ruled a woman was the victim of excessive force when city police threw her against a wall in May 2016.

And a \$160,000 settlement was agreed upon in July 2017, two years after dashcam footage showed an officer kicking a man in the head during a traffic stop.

That lawsuit claimed the officer — now-Sgt. Joseph Iannetta — used “what can only be described as a ‘WWE’ style kick” against the man. Footage of the arrest made national headlines.

Iannetta also was accused of using excessive force during a 2013 arrest that led to a \$350,000 settlement in 2016.

Ianetta now leads the city's Emergency Response Team, "a progressive, dedicated, and well-trained specialized unit charged with resolving high crisis/threat situations," according to the city's website.

Allentown police were accused of using excessive force last month when officers repeatedly hit a handcuffed man with a baton and struck him with a Taser from close range.

But officers' use of force was [ruled to be justified](#) by an internal investigation conducted by police officials and an independent review by the Lehigh County District Attorney's Office.

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Jason Addy

I cover Allentown and have worked for news outlets in Pennsylvania, Chicago and Minneapolis since graduating from Penn State. It's great to be much closer to home — I was born and raised in Lehighton — and I'm excited to help share Allentown's stories. If you've got an idea, I want to hear it. You can reach me any time at jasona@lehighvalleynews.com.

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