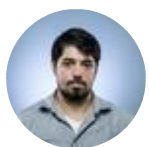


LOCAL / L.A. Now

Class-action suit filed against Long Beach over stings targeting gay men



Rory Moroney is now the lead plaintiff in a federal class-action lawsuit brought against the city of Long Beach over allegations that the Police Department unfairly targeted gay men during lewd conduct stings. (Luis Sinco / Los Angeles Times)



By **James Queally** · Contact Reporter

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The attorney who successfully argued that the Long Beach Police Department unfairly targeted gay men when conducting lewd conduct stings earlier this year has filed a federal class-action lawsuit against the city, claiming hundreds of other men were victims of discriminatory policing.

Bruce Nickerson filed the 18-page suit in federal court Thursday, naming the city, Long Beach Police Chief Robert Luna and several officers from the department's vice unit as defendants.

In April, a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge overturned the 2014 arrest of Rory Moroney on

suspicion of lewd conduct, saying the department was engaged in discriminatory policing because its vice unit only used undercover men to arrest male suspects who were seeking sex with other men. The same tactics were not used against women, according to Judge Halim Dhanidina.

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Moroney was accused of exposing himself to an undercover officer inside of a bathroom known to be a hot spot for “gay cruising.” The 50-year-old Long Beach resident contended he was only reacting to the officer’s flirtation, and the judge agreed.

Moroney is now named as the lead plaintiff in the class-action suit. At least two dozen other men were arrested by Long Beach police under similar circumstances in 2013 and 2014, court records show. In the suit, Nickerson said the plaintiff class could grow to include “hundreds of men who have been illegally arrested for violations of California law by the LBPD.”

Calls to the Long Beach city attorney’s office seeking comment were not immediately returned.

The suit asks the court to declare the conduct of Long Beach’s vice unit to be a violation of the 4th Amendment, which protects people against unreasonable searches and seizures, and the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection. The suit also seeks monetary damages.

The ruling in Moroney’s case was met with celebration and surprise by LGBT activists around Southern California, many of whom were stunned to hear Long Beach was using a policing tactic that has been shunned by many other departments throughout the state. The city is home to a vibrant LGBT community, and Mayor Robert Garcia is openly gay.

Garcia previously told the Los Angeles Times that he was unaware the Police Department was conducting lewd conduct stings, and has said the practice stopped after Moroney’s arrest was overturned. Garcia said he and Luna have met with LGBT leaders in recent weeks to discuss new approaches to enforcing lewd conduct laws and the city plans to roll out a new policy later this year.

“I view Long Beach as a progressive place that believes in justice and dignity for everybody,” Garcia told The Times in April. “So when I hear that something occurs that could be contrary to that, I’m alarmed.”

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