

[print](#)

NAACP challenges police inquiry

10.06.09 - 06:46 pm

Meeting with town sought over clearing of racial profiling charges

By Gregory Childress

gchildress@heraldsun.com; 918-1046

Chapel Hill -- The NAACP is calling for a meeting with town officials to challenge the claims on an internal Police Department investigation that cleared police of wrongdoing in the alleged racial profiling of a downtown businessman.

Local and state leaders of the civil rights organization met Monday on the Justice Plaza in front of the Franklin Street Post Office to ask officials for "the same opportunity to present the incident to you from Mr. Brown's point of view."

The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, state NAACP president, said the June 1 incident during which barbershop owner Charles Brown was stopped and handcuffed by police is a "stain" on a community that was recently honored as one of the best places in the country for start-up businesses.

"We're deeply concerned about the allegation of police misconduct," Barber said. "These are some serious allegations."

Barber said NAACP leaders are concerned that the investigator only talked to the five officers on the scene during the incident. They also are bothered by the fact that, even after they knew they had the wrong man, officers insisted that the NCIC operator search state criminal record files and extended AOC files for outstanding warrants against Brown.

"It's almost as though they were trying to find a reason to justify this wrongful act," Barber said.

Such conduct by law enforcement officials severely damages relationships with African-American communities, Barber said.

"When you create distrust. ... It's just not smart," Barber said. "It undermines the thing you're trying to create, public safety."

Barber said the Brown incident would be the focus of discussions later this week when the state NAACP opens its convention in Hickory. He also said the organization's work on the case will be forwarded to the NAACP national headquarters for its consideration.

"This case has the potential to be a national case," said Barber.

In addition to calling for a meeting with town leaders, Barber said the NAACP is requesting a report on the status of a long-sought civilian review board and five year review of officers' stops and arrests including location, cause, race and

gender demographics.

Also, the organization is asking for a report on the number of black business owners in town and details about how they have been included in the town's development plans.

"Perhaps this will stimulate some discussions and decisions about bringing about more diversity and equality to our community," Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP Chapter President Michelle Laws wrote in a letter to town leaders.

Police officials released the findings of the department's internal investigation last week. The lead investigator, Capt. Jeff Clark, recommended that all officers in the case be exonerated. He said there was no evidence to support Brown's claim that he was racially profiled and mistreated when he was stopped and handcuffed by police June 1 after they mistook him for another man.

Al McSurely, Brown's attorney and chairman of the NAACP's legal redress committee, said the incident could have been cleared up in a matter of minutes had police simply treated Brown fairly.

He said police could have escorted Brown back to his E. Rosemary Street shop and asked him to produce a key or called the Chamber of Commerce to find out whether a new business had opened downtown.

© heraldsun.com 2009