Ex-Police Agent Tells of Spying on Citizens

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A former police agent has told Senate investigators that he operated undercover to spy on private citizens while working with the Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit, a nationwide police information unit founded to combat organized crime.

The agent's description of his operations under LEIU sponsorship conflicts with the organization's stated purpose of exchanging information on organized crime.

Houston police officials said Monday they had dropped out of the association after repeated requests for personal information on individuals with no known criminal ties.

Lt. Ray Henry of the Long Beach, Calif., police department, LEIU national chairman, denied the Houston allegations.

The former undercover agent, who worked out of a police department in the Midwest, described his experience in a recent interview with staff of the Senate committee on intelligence, it was learned.

He reportedly said much of his uqndercover activity was unrelated to any investigation of organized crime and that among individuals under surveillance were attorneys for the American Civil Liberties Union.

The agent, whose name and base of operations were withheld, reportedly told the committee staff that some of his undercover work was done for a different police department in an adjacent state.

Committee sources were unavailable for comment about their interview with the former agent.

An association of police intelligence officers with members in about 230 communities throughout the United States and Canada, LEIU was virtually unknown outside police circles until the disclosure of the clash between Houston police officials and LEIU this week.

Henry said the organization exists "strictly for the purpose of putting two law enforcement agencies with a like interest together. The organization, as such, does not conduct any investigation or ask anyone else to do an investigation."

LEIU was created in 1956 to provide an exchange of information on organized crime figures operating in more than one state.

In recent years, with the help of $1.3 million in federal funds, LEIU has established the Interstate Organized Crime Index, a computerized file containing more than 18,000 names. Some are aliases and nicknames of organized crime principals. Others are businesses and individuals police believe are linked to organized crime.

But Houston police officials said they got requests for personal informaiton about individuals who had no known ties to any sort of criminal activity.