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From the Los Angeles Times

164 more claims filed over May 1 melee

Civil rights lawyers plan a class-action suit against the LAPD and the city over physical, emotional injuries at MacArthur Park.

By David Zahniser

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Civil rights lawyers filed 164 more claims against the city of Los Angeles on Thursday in connection with injuries or emotional harm allegedly suffered when the LAPD broke up a May 1 immigration protest at MacArthur Park.

Lawyer Carol Sobel, speaking for scores of people who were in or near the park on the day when police fired rubber bullets into the crowd, said she and other lawyers would pursue a class-action lawsuit against the city and the Los Angeles Police Department.

Sobel said the move was designed to buy lawyers more time to identify all of the potential plaintiffs and to encourage people to come forward, regardless of their immigration status.

"We think that there literally are hundreds, if not thousands, of people whose rights were violated that day," said Sobel, who submitted the claims along with lawyers from the National Lawyers Guild and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

The city has 45 days to respond to the claims before a lawsuit can be filed. So far, 10 lawsuits have been filed over the incident and 258 legal claims have been submitted -- nine of them by journalists who covered the event that day.

LAPD Lt. Ruben De La Torre said the department would not discuss the May 1 incident until a report is issued on the matter next month. City Atty. Rocky Delgadillo's office said it was "concerned" but had not yet read the latest complaints.

The May 1 incident prompted investigations by the LAPD and the FBI, and forced Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to return early from a trade mission to Mexico and Central America. Police Chief William J. Bratton responded by reassigning two high-level commanders.

The 33-page filing contains complaints from residents who said they were struck by batons, hit by rubber bullets or otherwise injured while fleeing from police -- including one woman who said she subsequently suffered a miscarriage.

The filing also includes a number of people who said they suffered emotionally, including children and senior citizens who said they were traumatized.

The plaintiffs collectively will seek monetary damages and changes at the LAPD, including the implementation of more frequent and consistent training on how to deal with crowds.

Sobel said the melee was sparked by LAPD officers who rode their motorcycles into a crowd of Aztec dancers on Alvarado Street. That version of events contradicts assertions by police that the incident was started by agitators who threw objects at officers, Sobel said.

"We've tried to tell [the story] with videos and with photos that demonstrate that the Police Department's preliminary report was false, that there was not the provocation that was claimed," she said.

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