

Color of Law Violations

Law enforcement officers and other officials like judges and prosecutors have been given tremendous power by local, state, and federal government agencies—authority they must have to enforce the law and ensure justice in our country. These powers include the authority to detain and arrest suspects, to search and seize property, to bring criminal charges, to make rulings in court, and to use deadly force in certain situations.

Preventing abuse of this authority, however, is equally necessary to the health of our nation's democracy. That's why it's a federal crime for anyone acting under "color of law" to willfully deprive or conspire to deprive a person of a right protected by the Constitution or U.S. law. "Color of law" simply means the person is using authority given to him or her by a local, state, or federal government agency.

The FBI is the lead federal agency for investigating color of law violations, which include acts carried out by government officials operating both within and beyond the limits of their lawful authority. Off-duty conduct may be covered if the perpetrator asserted his or her official status in some way. Those violations include, but are not limited to, the following acts: