

Connecticut police in harassment scandal face trial in 2013

By Mary Ellen Godin

Four East Haven, Connecticut police officers facing federal charges that they harassed and used excessive force against Latinos will go on trial next year, one of their attorneys said on Thursday.

The officers, described by the FBI as "bullies with badges," were arrested and charged last week with conspiracy to commit racial profiling and using threats and intimidation.

They are accused of routinely injuring, threatening and intimidating Latinos with false arrests, false reports and harassment, according to the federal indictment.

Norman Pattis, who represents Officer Jason Zullo, said the trial was scheduled to begin in January 2013.

"A year wait is going to be difficult for my client," Pattis said, adding: "These guys were just doing their

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Also accused in the case are Sgt. John Miller and officers David Cari and Dennis Spaulding.

According to the indictment,

Spaulding and Zullo conducted unreasonable and illegal searches at Latino-owned businesses and regularly conducted traffic stops of Latino customers entering or exiting these businesses, towed their vehicles, and arrested and detained them.

It also said Cari and Spaulding prepared false reports to support their false arrests to conceal their misconduct and blocked citizens from video-taping police conduct.

Their boss, Police Chief Leonard Gallo, resigned on Monday amid the harassment scandal, which was made worse when the mayor of the working class town further enraged the Latino community with a quip about tacos.

Asked by a reporter what he would do for Latinos, Mayor Joseph Maturo Jr. replied: "I might have tacos."

He later apologized.

Prosecutors have said they expect more arrests and possibly more charges against the officers.

Gallo retires his post as of Friday, February 3. ■