

EDITORIAL: Fresno Police Department has our trust



With City Manager Bruce Rudd, right, at his side, Fresno police Chief Jerry Dyer met the media briefly outside Federal Court Friday.

JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

The arrest of Fresno Deputy Police Chief Keith Foster on federal drug trafficking charges Thursday was a shock to his colleagues, the longtime police chief who had promoted him into the department's highest ranks and Foster's friends in the community.

It is a stain that should end Foster's career in law enforcement regardless of how the criminal accusations against him play out.

The U.S. Attorney — relying on information provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives — would not file a criminal complaint against a police officer without being sure of the evidence.

The potential to further disrupt the community and the department by failing to get a conviction is simply too high for federal prosecutors to file charges on a mere roll of the dice.

And, in the least, Foster, by the conduct described by a federal agent in the criminal complaint, has not met the minimum standards required of someone to wear the uniform, badge and weapon of a sworn police officer.

Foster's arrest is also a stain on the Fresno Police Department, but not one that should stoke public cynicism or a

loss in confidence in Police Chief Jerry Dyer's leadership or the other officers under his command.

By most every yardstick of police performance, the department has performed well despite the loss of many officer positions since the real-estate bubble burst in 2008 and propelled Fresno to the brink of bankruptcy early in Mayor Ashley Swearingin's first term.

As Dyer noted in a news conference Friday, complaints against police officers declined 16% and officer-involved shootings were down 27% in 2014 from the previous year in a department that handles an average of 1,150 calls for service daily.

Moreover, Swearingin said that FBI agents involved in the case said Foster's criminal activity did not involve other Fresno police officers and was "an isolated incident."

That should reassure residents. However, Swearingin and Dyer must fully review Foster's work over the year that he was investigated by federal authorities to see if his alleged criminal activities influenced decisions he made as deputy chief.

They must share the results of that review with the public, as well as the results of an internal affairs investigation into Foster that Dyer ordered after Foster's arrest. Dyer said that he expected the investigation to be completed within two weeks.

While we understand the chief's motives for expediting the investigation, it should not conclude before all of the important questions are answered. No. 1 on the list: How could a deputy chief, whose office is located three feet from Dyer's, allegedly engage in a multistate drug trafficking conspiracy without anyone else in the department knowing about it?

City officials also said that Fresno's independent police auditor, Rick Rasmussen, would review the situation to see if there were warning signs that should have been noticed by Dyer and others about Foster's behavior.

While Fresno area residents debate Foster's arrest and speculate about what drove his fall from grace, the department must go about the challenging job of keeping our community safe.

We ask that you support these men and women at this difficult time with a kind word. Most of them never make headlines. They just quietly protect us and serve us. And just like the rest of us, they are searching for answers as to why Keith Foster betrayed the immense trust placed in him.