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Rutherford sheriff hires mosque foe to train deputies

Shariah critic to lead deputy training class

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A former FBI agent who claims Nashville's mosques have no legal right to exist is training the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office about Islam and the threats of terrorism.

John Guandolo, vice president of the Arlington, Va.-based Strategic Engagement Group, is leading training being held at World Outreach Church in Murfreesboro. He spoke at an [anti-Shariah law event](#) at Cornerstone Church in Madison on Nov. 11, calling local mosques front organizations for the Muslim Brotherhood with no right to exist.

"They do not have a First Amendment right to do anything," Guandolo said then.

Rutherford Sheriff Robert Arnold said his department simply wants to learn about Muslim culture.

"There are not many classes out there for anything when it comes to Muslims ... but this training isn't just about that, it has many other components to it," he said. "My stance is and my office's stance is,

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... this county, and I am never going to waver from that."

Arnold has said the department has no plans to initiate an investigation of any local Muslims.

Guandolo's role in training law enforcement officials left Murfreesboro Muslims dumbfounded.

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Saleh Sbenaty, a member of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, said the sheriff's office never asked local Muslims to participate in the training. He said the department is supposed to protect the rights of citizens no matter what their faith.

Using a trainer who thinks Muslims have no civil rights doesn't make sense, he said.

"This training is hate training," Sbenaty said. "It is not training to keep our whole community safe."

A national Muslim civil rights group raised questions Tuesday about the training for deputies. In a letter, the Council on American-Islamic Relations asked Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Director Brian Grisham to investigate the appropriateness of training being led by

Strategic Engagement Group.

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Gannett Tennessee reporter Mark Bell contributed to this report. Contact Bob Smietana at 615-259-8228 or bsmietana@tennessean.com. Follow him on Twitter @bobsmietana.

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