

**TRENTON POLICE DEPARTMENT FINDINGS
REMARKS**

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Thank you, Assistant Attorney General Clarke. I'm Philip Sellinger, U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey.

After a year-long investigation by my Office and our DOJ colleagues, our announcement today—that the Trenton Police Department has engaged in unconstitutional policing—represents the first step toward change for the residents of our State Capital ----change that is both necessary and long overdue.

During this investigation, we spoke with over a hundred community members, as well as faith leaders, state and local

employees, advocacy organizations, and members of the criminal defense bar. Several community members shared with us painful personal stories of their encounters with Trenton officers. I thank them for their bravery and willingness to speak with our Team. Their experiences, which helped spawn this investigation, are validated by the data, which I will address in a moment.

I thank Mayor Reed Gusciora, Police Director Steve Wilson, and the officers of the Trenton Police Department who cooperated with our investigation. We spoke to many members of the force at every level as well as union representatives and other law enforcement agencies. To be sure, police officers have the incredibly important, and difficult, job of keeping us safe, And we know there are many officers within the Trenton Police Department who perform their jobs with honor and distinction. But if police officers abuse the trust the community places in them and fail to respect the constitutional rights of those in the community, and if the community

feels threatened by those who wear the badge, those who are supposed to protect them, it undermines public safety and endangers the very citizens they swore to protect and serve. And that has been happening in Trenton for too long.

Our Team reviewed thousands of documents, including reports, policies, training records, and internal affairs files, as well as body-worn camera footage. Collectively, they demonstrate a highly disturbing pattern or practice of excessive force and unlawful stops, searches, and arrests. This unconstitutional conduct needs to stop, and it must stop now.

We have found that after unconstitutional stops, searches and arrests, all too often police rapidly escalate their interactions with Trenton residents—without providing people a chance to comply

with orders. This unreasonable escalation, plus dangerous forms of physical force and the unreasonable use of pepper spray, have had deadly consequences. For example, a 64-year old Trenton resident died of respiratory failure after officers threw him across his front porch, slammed him face down on the steps, and pepper sprayed him in the face while handcuffing him. Body-worn camera footage of the encounter later discredited the officer's claim that the man had presented a threat.

Another man experiencing a behavioral health crisis, who was unarmed, running around a hospital parking lot shirtless, died after officers tackled him to the ground, pepper-sprayed him, and held him down, pushing his head into mulch.

Our investigation also identified supervision deficiencies department-wide that contributed to excessive use of force. In one case, officers initially used reasonable force to arrest a man. Once he was already on the ground, an officer stomped on his hand three times, kneeled on his head, and kicked him in the shoulder. Each of these uses of force was excessive. Yet, three levels of supervisors found the officer's conduct justified. In fact, we found that supervisors found officers' use of force justified in virtually every incident we reviewed.

A mother told us that her teenage son was experiencing suicidal thoughts after officers tackled him while he was riding his bike—because he was riding on the sidewalk without a reflector.

Unlawful stops, searches, and arrests erode public trust. Community members have told us they are afraid of the police; they feel disrespected and degraded by officers; and they do not view the officers as protectors.

Beyond the deprivation of constitutional rights, this is a serious problem for another reason: Effective law enforcement requires trust, community engagement, problem solving, and training in de-escalation techniques.

The failings identified in this Report make us less safe. That's because poorly documented stops and searches, and faulty report writing, undermines prosecutions and leads to the dismissal of criminal charges in both state and federal court. Indeed, in one case, a federal judge found an officer's

documentation was purposely false. These failings also come at a cost to the City's taxpayers. Officer misconduct has cost the City more than \$7 million in civil settlements since 2021.

Today's Report is the first step toward achieving reforms that will result in greater trust between the community and the Police Department. Lasting reform, however, takes time. We are optimistic that this process will put the Trenton Police Department on the path toward professional policing that respects the constitutional rights and dignity of each person and promotes crime reduction. We know from our conversations with officers that many recognize the need for improvement—more training, greater accountability, and a better relationship with the community.

We now begin the task of negotiating a remedy to the violations we have identified. We are hopeful that Mayor Gusciora and Director Wilson remain committed to resolving the constitutional violations.

Most importantly, we want to continue to hear from members of the Trenton community. Community input is a key component of this process, and we urge community members to participate in meetings our Team will hold in the near future.

As the U.S. Attorney, I fully understand the critical role that local policing has in violent crime reduction. Federal and state law enforcement need effective, dedicated, and professional local partners to combat murders, shootings, gangs, gun trafficking, and the distribution of illegal and deadly drugs, like fentanyl. Our efforts to reform the Trenton Police

Department will promote our ultimate goal -- to ensure that the people of Trenton are served by a police force that effectively fights crime while respecting the constitutional rights of every person.

My Office remains committed to creating long-lasting and meaningful reform for the residents of Trenton and to protecting the safety of all New Jerseyans.

Thank you.

[Media Q&A period]