

CJ Griffin Quoted in Article Discussing "Remarkable Turnaround" by New Jersey in Beginning to Publicly Identify Police Officers Who Commit Serious Violations

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News

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CJ Griffin, Director of the Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden, was quoted in an article in nj.com, "N.J. will name cops who commit serious violations, in major new directive by state Attorney General." The article discusses a new order issued by the New Jersey Attorney General which requires disclosure of the names of officers who are sanctioned by termination, reduction in rank or grade, and/or a suspension of greater than five days.

The Article also explains that the State has released the name of a state trooper who had been "required to separate from employment" for "engaging in racially offensive behavior." Disclosure of that trooper's name was the subject of an OPRA lawsuit filed by Griffin in 2017 against the New Jersey State Police on behalf of Libertarians for Transparent Government. The trial court dismissed the lawsuit and the Appellate Division affirmed that dismissal, but the New Jersey Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. The appeal is pending.

CJ Griffin, a noted public records attorney who has fought with the state of the release of police records, called the move "a great first step toward police transparency in New Jersey," and applauded the Attorney General for taking action.

"But I really do hope it is only a first step because the public wants and needs so much more," said Griffin. "We need open access to the actual internal affairs files, not just a neatly worded sentence or two about why major discipline was imposed upon certain officers. We really need to be able to identify when the system hasn't worked."

Yet the attorney added that many holes remain in new policy.

“Where complaints are sustained and officers resign, often in good standing, no disclosure is required,” Griffin pointed out.

In Elizabeth, for example, an internal affairs investigation found the city’s longtime police director had abused black and female staff with racist and sexist slurs. But the Union County Prosecutor’s Office refused to release its report.

The director was never disciplined, Griffin said, but rather resigned due to public pressure.

“Nothing about the AG’s directive today would make any of it public because no discipline was imposed,” the attorney said.

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