

CJ Griffin Quoted in New Jersey Monitor on How NJ's Recent Police Misconduct Directive Falls Short

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CJ Griffin, Partner and Director of the Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden, was quoted in a New Jersey Monitor article, "Effort to expand transparency around police misconduct falls short, critics say." The article discusses the recent directive issued by the New Jersey Attorney General requiring police departments to create a summary report for public release upon request, which report details certain police misconduct.

By requiring agencies to publicly report a "brief synopsis" of misconduct instead of the disciplinary records themselves, Platkin both creates more work for police departments while ensuring the agencies will release a "sanitized" version of officers' wrongdoing, attorney CJ Griffin said.

"In many ways, it's the opposite of real transparency. It's still a document that's prepared solely for public consumption. Give us the actual documents," said Griffin, whose court battle for police disciplinary records in Union County led to Tuesday's directive.

In that case, the state Supreme Court ruled in March that officials must release police disciplinary records when the public's interest in them outweighs an officer's confidentiality concerns. Griffin represented police reformer Richard Rivera, who sued Union County officials after they denied his request for records in the investigation of former Elizabeth Police director James Cosgrove, who resigned in 2019 amid accusations of racist and sexist conduct.

The article further notes that legislation that would make police internal affairs record fully public in New Jersey has not advanced.

While legislators stall, Platkin could deliver true transparency by ordering internal affairs records to be public, Griffin said.

Instead, his office offers “a nugget” of progress while rolling back transparency in hidden ways, Griffin said.

She pointed to a footnote in Tuesday’s directive that rescinded an earlier directive requiring 20 years of retroactive disclosures for state police. The new order also expressly protects internal affairs records — which the Supreme Court’s Cosgrove ruling made more public under the state’s common law right of access — from the Open Public Records Act, she added.

“The AG will keep doing these little policy revisions that have a nugget of progress and will get cheers from the media. But it’s not the kind of transparency we need, and we’re still behind other states,” Griffin said.

Click here to read the full article.