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Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, December 3, 2021

Justice Department Launches Investigation of the Mount Vernon Police Department

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York (SDNY) announced today that the Justice Department has opened a pattern or practice investigation into the Mount Vernon Police Department (MVPD). The investigation will assess whether MVPD engages in a pattern or practice of discriminatory policing. The investigation will also assess MVPD's use of force, strip and body cavity searches, and how it handles evidence.

The department will conduct a comprehensive review of MVPD's systems of accountability, including complaint intake, investigation, review, disposition and discipline. SDNY and the Civil Rights Division will also reach out to community groups and members of the public to learn about their experiences with the MVPD.

Prior to the announcement, department officials informed Mount Vernon Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard, MVPD Chief Marcel Olifiers, City Council President Marcus A. Griffith, Commissioner of Public Safety Glenn Scott, and Corporation Counsel Brian Johnson of the investigation.

"An effective and accountable police department is a hallmark of a healthy and well-functioning democracy," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke. "The Civil Rights Division is committed to ensuring that law enforcement agencies across our country use their authority in a manner that is constitutional, transparent and free from discrimination."

"Police officers have tough jobs, and so many do their work honorably, lawfully, and with distinction, respecting the rights of the citizens they have sworn to protect," said U.S. Attorney Damian Williams. "But when officers break the law, they violate their oath and undermine a community's trust. We ask that anyone who has information relevant to the investigation into the Mount Vernon Police Department to contact the Department of Justice via email at community.mvpd@usdoj.gov or to call (866) 985-1378."

The investigation is being conducted pursuant to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which prohibits state and local governments from engaging in a pattern or practice of conduct by law enforcement officers that deprives individuals of rights protected by the Constitution or federal law. The Act allows the department to remedy such misconduct through civil litigation. This is the seventy-fourth investigation of a law enforcement agency conducted pursuant to this statute since it was enacted in 1994. The department will be assessing law enforcement practices under the Fourth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, as well as the Safe Streets Act of 1968; and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York and the Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division, in Washington, D.C., will conduct this investigation. Individuals with relevant information are encouraged to contact the department via email at community.mvpd@usdoj.gov or by calling the toll free phone at (866)-985-1378. Individuals can also report civil rights violations regarding this or other matters using the Civil Rights Division's new reporting portal, available at www.civilrights.justice.gov.

Information specific to the Civil Rights Division's Police Reform Work can be found here:

<https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/922421/download>. Additional information about the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York is available on its website at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny>. Additional information about the Civil Rights Division is available on its website at www.justice.gov/crt.

Topic(s):

Civil Rights

Component(s):

Civil Division

Civil Rights - Special Litigation Section

Press Release Number:

21-1200

Updated December 3, 2021