

Open Letter to End Police Misconduct Secrecy (Senate Bill 2656/Assembly Bill A5301)

Dear [insert names of Legislators]

In 2020, police killings of Black people including Breonna Taylor in Louisville, George Floyd in Minneapolis, and Maurice Gordon in New Jersey, sparked national protests. As your constituents in [insert names of municipalities in your legislative district], we are committed to improving transparency and accountability in policing here in New Jersey. We urge you to support and co-sponsor Senate Bill 2656/Assembly Bill 5301 (S2656/A5301) which would make police disciplinary records subject to the Open Public Records Act (OPRA).

This bill would create a path to greater accountability and benefit both the public and police officers in our state. Currently, New Jersey lags far behind other states when it comes to transparency in the police internal affairs process and police disciplinary records. Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, and 25 other states all provide greater access to police disciplinary records than New Jersey.

Access to government records promotes general transparency in government, and in the context of police disciplinary records can expose issues and provide insight into what can be done to effectuate meaningful change. Shielding police disciplinary records from the public significantly reduces trust in law enforcement and causes the community to believe that misconduct is being swept under the rug.

Opening misconduct records would not only benefit the public, but it would also benefit police officers directly. It would allow them to see if disciplinary action is fairly administered throughout their department. The bill expressly provides protection for law enforcement in that certain information pertaining to the law enforcement officer, or the officer's family, the complainant, or the complainant's family, and a witness, or the witness' family, be redacted to sufficiently protect those individuals while providing transparency.

Shining a light on officer misconduct and how it is investigated by departments is a necessary first step towards accountable policing in New Jersey. S2656/A5301 has been endorsed by over 100 organizations and individuals impacted by police misconduct in our state.

Please co-sponsor S2656/A5301 and do everything you can to ensure that it passes to bring New Jersey in line with other states on this issue, such as New York, Florida, Colorado, Georgia, and Alabama.

Sincerely,