

We urge you to support **Senate Bill 371/Assembly Bill 996**, sponsored by Senator Loretta Weinberg (D-Teaneck), Senator Nia H. Gill (D-Essex) and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson (D-Trenton), which would make police disciplinary records subject to the Open Public Records Act (OPRA). Currently, New Jersey is among a minority of jurisdictions that treat such records as strictly confidential. That must change.

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

[Choose bullet points from the next page or create your own.]

- **Ensuring accountability.** Complaints against officers are investigated by each police department's internal affairs unit, which consists of the officer's own co-workers. Data shows that complaints are rarely sustained, but there is no public oversight to ensure the internal investigations are conducted properly and there are too many high-profile incidents that proves they are not. The public must play an oversight role.
- **Promoting racial justice.** Police killings of Black people, including George Floyd in Minneapolis, and just days earlier Maurice Gordon in New Jersey, have sparked a global movement for change. Shining a light on complaints filed against officers will help to identify and address racial bias in law enforcement.
- **Enabling open and transparent government.** Complaints against other public employees are accessible. Residents being able to see complaints filed against officers are critical to open and transparent government.
- **Building community trust.** Our Attorney General has repeatedly stated that transparency builds trust in law enforcement, but New Jersey remains one of the least transparent states in the nation when it comes to police disciplinary records. The public deserves to see the complaints against police officers and review how those complaints are investigated.
- **Helping law enforcement officers.** Communities that trust law enforcement are more likely to cooperate in investigations and report

crimes. Opening misconduct records would allow officers to see if disciplinary action is fairly administered throughout their department. This is particularly important for Black, Latino and other officers of color who often face harsher penalties than their white male counterparts.

- **Preventing wrongful convictions.** Judges and juries would know if an officer who built a case has a history of lying, coercing witnesses, or tampering with evidence which will allow them to reach accurate conclusions about a defendant's innocence or guilt.
- **Saving taxpayer money** spent on police misconduct and wrongful conviction lawsuits and state compensation, which totals millions of dollars per year.
- **Adding teeth to police licensing:** New Jersey is developing a system to require new officers to obtain licenses that can be suspended and revoked for misconduct. Under the current system of complete secrecy, very few complaints against officers are ever sustained and thus very few officers would forfeit their licenses under the new system. Transparency will ensure that complaints are investigated properly and that more officers are held accountable for misconduct.

We must be able to learn about complaints against police officers and review how the investigations are conducted to ensure that there is accountability. Please ensure that S371/A996 passes to bring New Jersey in line with other states on this issue, such as New York, Florida, Colorado, Georgia, and Alabama.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name and/or organization's name]