

To the judges

Long Island law enforcement agencies have breached the trust of the citizens they are paid to protect by using New York State's officer privacy law to hide egregious cases of police misconduct, ranging from falsifying reports and lying to shooting innocent people. And the inaction of political leaders and law enforcement officials prevents reform of a law that keeps abuses secret and perpetuates a lack of accountability.

Without Newsday's project, the public might never have learned the scope and breadth of offenses committed by police officers and the striking lack of oversight at all levels of New York government.

Using accountability visualization software built by our staff for this project, Newsday surveyed more than 80 state and local officials with responsibility for police oversight, pressed them for answers to the important issues raised by our series and presented their responses to readers. We released a version of the software under the MIT License as our first open-source project, making it possible for other news outlets to copy what we've done.

Newsday investigated police misconduct for nine months, reviewing and analyzing previously secret internal affairs investigations; confidential deadly force investigative reports; public employee suspension payroll data; records of police departmental charges and punishment for misconduct cases; and more than 900 lawsuits filed against Long Island's two largest law enforcement agencies, the Nassau County Police Department and the Suffolk County Police Department.

To examine officials' responses to police misconduct, the team reviewed more than 7,000 pages of county legislative transcripts, union agreements and proposed changes to state law. Reporters interviewed dozens of current and former police officers and supervisors, political leaders, victims and lawyers handling misconduct cases, as well as national experts in police procedure and oversight.

We revealed that elected officials repeatedly ignored high-profile misconduct cases, that efforts to increase oversight in the state legislature all failed quietly and that lawmakers responsible for police accountability had not discussed police misconduct issues in years. We analyzed campaign contributions by law enforcement unions to politicians and reported around police agencies' numerous denials of requests for public records.

Findings:

- More than 100 Long Island cops involved in serious misconduct cases either remain on the job or continued to work for years before retiring.
- More than 45 officers were charged with lying or falsifying paperwork but stayed on the job, including one who pleaded guilty to job-related perjury. One expert called such cases a sign of "a systemic institutional problem."
- Nassau County internal affairs investigators found two years ago that an off-duty cop unlawfully shot an unarmed cab driver. But the cop kept his job, and the case's details were secret until Newsday discovered that the confidential investigative report had been accidentally left unsealed in a public court file. Police investigators initially justified the shooting of the cab driver.
- The Nassau County Police Department has not found use of deadly force by an officer to be unjustified since at least 2006. During that period officers fired on suspects that they wrongly thought were armed,

shot people later convicted of no crime at all and used force that a jury would later call excessive, costing the county millions.

- In Suffolk County, after a teenager ran from police, an officer with a history of excessive force complaints and his partner beat the man so badly that he fell into a coma and later died.
- In the Town of Southampton, officials approved a secret deal to let a politically connected police lieutenant sidestep charges of lying to investigators about his handling of an officer's drug addiction.

Our online accountability tool encouraged readers to weigh in by comment board and to communicate with officials through "tweet-at-them" buttons. In our survey, 18 state and local lawmakers called for increased oversight of law enforcement, 13 incumbent or incoming county legislators supported public hearings and two state lawmakers called for a repeal of the law that keeps misconduct investigations hidden from the public.

Newsday's editorial page and the paper's local columnist Joye Brown added their voices to the debate, as well, pressing for greater oversight and accountability in the wake of our findings.

Response:

- Three weeks after Newsday published the first story about the off-duty police shooting of the unarmed cabdriver, Suffolk County's district attorney convened a grand jury, which is ongoing, and served subpoenas to key figures in the investigation.
- In January, The Nassau County Police Department filed departmental charges against one of the officers involved in the incident.
- Nassau County revealed plans to purchase Tasers to give officers a "less-than-lethal" way to control suspects after being interviewed for our report on police use of deadly force. And less than one week after Newsday published its final story in the series, the Nassau County Police Department issued a request for proposals seeking an ethics and oversight consultant.
- The Nassau County Police Department has indicated that it will revise its deadly force policy, including for shootings at automobiles according to a February newsletter from the Superior Officer's Association.
- The Commission on Open Government, a state body charged with advising agencies on transparency, cited the paper's reporting extensively in calling for state leaders to review the police privacy law in a December 2013 report.
- And this January, a State Supreme Court justice ruled that the Nassau County Police Department must grant Newsday's requests for documents under the state Freedom of Information Law. Newsday sued when the department declined numerous requests for information for this series and for general news reporting. The judge awarded Newsday attorneys' fees and costs.

Thank you for considering Newsday's officer misconduct coverage for a Pulitzer Prize.

The Editors