**Justice Department Report: Baltimore Police Routinely Violated Civil Rights**

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Baltimore police routinely violated the constitutional rights of residents by conducting unlawful stops and using excessive force, according to the findings of a long-anticipated Justice Department probe to be released Wednesday.

The practices overwhelmingly affected the city's black residents in low-income neighborhoods, according to the 163-page report. In often scathing language, the report identified systemic problems and cited detailed examples.

The investigators found that "supervisors have issued explicitly discriminatory orders, such as directing a shift to arrest 'all the black hoodies' in a neighborhood."

They also found that black residents were more likely to be stopped and searched as pedestrians and drivers even though police were more likely to find illegal guns, illicit drugs and other contraband on white residents.

Police practices in Baltimore "perpetuate and fuel a multitude of issues rooted in poverty and race, focusing law enforcement actions on low-income, minority communities" and encourage officers to have "unnecessary, adversarial interactions with community members," the report said.

Launched after the death in April 2015 of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man, from spinal injuries suffered in police custody, the wide-ranging probe uncovered extensive problems with the way Baltimore officers do their job and police themselves, the report said.

Gray's death, which triggered rioting captured on live television, was one of several recent killings of unarmed black men by police across the country. The deaths have provoked a nationwide conversation about race, discrimination and police practices, and have exposed deep rifts between police and the communities they serve.

The results of the Justice Department's investigation are expected to be announced Wednesday in Baltimore at a news conference attended by high-ranking federal law enforcement officials and city leaders.

Baltimore Police Commissioner Kevin Davis said Tuesday that he is looking forward to reviewing the federal findings and that the report will help him improve the force.

"We have begun this journey to reform long-standing issues in many real, tangible ways," Davis said. "DOJ's findings will serve to solidify our road map."

Among the Justice Department findings: Baltimore police too often stopped, frisked and arrested residents without legal justification, and such activities fell disproportionately on black residents.

Federal investigators concluded that 1990s-era policies that encouraged more aggressive policing contributed to the discriminatory practices and that such measures are partly responsible for fraying the faith of city residents in their police force.

Although city and police leaders have disavowed "zero-tolerance" policing, it has continued on Baltimore's streets as supervisors who came up through the ranks under the former policy have perpetuated it, according to the report, which focused on policing since 2010.

The report noted that officers recorded more than 300,000 pedestrian stops from January 2010 to May 2015. Roughly 44 percent were made in two small, predominantly African-American districts that contain 11 percent of the city's population, and seven black men were stopped more than 30 times each.

Black pedestrians were 37 percent more likely to be searched by Baltimore police citywide and 23 percent more likely to be searched during vehicle stops. But officers found contraband twice as often when searching white residents during vehicle stops and 50 percent more often during pedestrian stops, the report notes.

The report also found that Baltimore police routinely misclassified citizen complaints about racial slurs used by officers.

In six years of data on citizen complaints, only one complaint was classified as a racial slur. "This is implausible," the federal investigators found, and so they went back to the complaints and searched for keywords, including racial slurs against blacks.

They found 60 additional complaints that alleged Baltimore officers "used just one racial slur — 'n----r' — but all of these complaints were misclassified as a lesser offense," the report found.

The report, which looked for practices that violate the Constitution or federal law, also found that gender bias might be affecting the Police Department's handling of sexual assault cases.

"We found indications that officers fail to meaningfully investigate reports of sexual assault, particularly for assaults involving women with additional vulnerabilities, such as those who are engaged in sex work," the report said.

Officers frequently used excessive force in situations that did not call for aggressive measures, the report said, and routinely retaliated against residents who were criticizing or being disrespectful of police for exercising their right to free speech and free assembly.

The report found that officers used excessive force against individuals with mental health disabilities or in crisis. Because of "a lack of training and improper tactics," police ended up in "unnecessarily violent confrontations with these vulnerable individuals," the report said.

It noted that officers used unreasonable force against juveniles as well, often relying on the "same aggressive tactics they use with adults."

The investigation concluded that deeply entrenched problems were allowed to fester because the department did not properly oversee, train or hold officers accountable. For example, the report said, the department lacks systems to deter and detect improper conduct, and it fails to collect and analyze data that might root out abuses or abusers.

The report said the Police Department also lacks effective strategies for recruitment and retention. A lack of adequate staffing meant "forcing officers to work overtime after long shifts, lowering morale, and leading to officers working with deteriorated decision-making skills."

The Justice Department's so-called pattern or practice review is expected to be the first step before reaching a court-enforced agreement that would hold the city accountable for making reforms and subject it to federal monitoring for years to come.

In recent years the Justice Department has completed about two dozen similar probes into local police departments across the country, including one after the 2014 shooting of an unarmed black man by police in Ferguson, Mo.

Baltimore officials invited the federal investigation of the Police Department. The Justice Department announced a "collaborative review" with Baltimore police days after a Baltimore Sun investigation in 2014 revealed that the city had paid millions of dollars to settle more than 100 civil suits alleging police brutality and other misconduct.

The Justice Department cites The Baltimore Sun reporting 10 times in its report, including that investigation.

After Gray's death, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake asked the Justice Department to conduct a full-scale civil rights investigation. In welcoming the federal probe, Rawlings-Blake said she was "willing to do what it takes to reform my department."

Gray died April 19, 2015, after suffering severe spinal injuries while being transported in a police van. Hours after Gray's funeral, protests and rioting erupted in Baltimore. City officials imposed a curfew, and Gov. Larry Hogan deployed the National Guard. More than 200 people were arrested during days of unrest, and nearly 100 police officers were injured.

The Justice Department has since worked closely with the Baltimore Police Department, which set up a team of officers and officials to deal directly with federal investigators. The report is expected to praise police and city leaders for their cooperation.

Anticipating what the Justice Department would discover, city officials have pushed forward on several fronts, revising the Police Department's policy on use of force and instituting new training.

The Police Department also redesigned and placed cameras in its transport vans and introduced a new software platform to better disseminate new training materials and policies for officers. Both issues arose in the Gray case.

In the criminal prosecutions of the six police officers involved in Gray's arrest and transport, three were acquitted at bench trials, and Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn J. Mosby recently dropped the charges against the three remaining officers.

The Justice Department is separately reviewing whether federal civil rights violations occurred. But the legal hurdles for bringing a federal case are higher than those faced by state prosecutors.

"We will continue our independent review of this matter, assess all available materials and determine what actions are appropriate, given the strict burdens and requirements imposed by applicable federal civil rights laws, " Justice Department spokesman David Jacobs said in a statement.

Mosby said Tuesday that her office is looking forward to reviewing the Justice Department report, but that it "will likely confirm what many in our city already know or have experienced firsthand."

The six city officers pleaded not guilty in the criminal case, and union officials have defended their actions.

"While the vast majority of Baltimore City police officers are good officers, we also know that there are bad officers and that the department has routinely failed to oversee, train, or hold bad actors accountable," Mosby said in a statement.