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N.J. will not immediately release names of disciplined cops, official says, giving unions time to appeal

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New Jersey's Attorney General agreed Monday to delay the release of names of officers found guilty of misconduct to allow time for the state's highest court to weigh in.

Gurbir Grewal told the Supreme Court that no names would be released before Nov. 30. That would provide enough time to notify officers, so they can challenge the release of their names on a case-by-case basis, Grewal wrote.

He asked the seven justices to make a decision about the case before the end of November, but he said he would wait to publish names until the court made a decision.

His letter came the same day police unions asked the court to continue blocking a plan to name cops who were fired, demoted or suspended for more than five days, according to the state's Policemen's Benevolent Association, Fraternal Order of Police and the State Troopers Fraternal Association.

The law enforcement groups are still drafting a formal appeal.

In a document filed Monday, union lawyers told the court "active and retired officers" were in danger of "reputation damage, invasion of privacy" and "disclosure of disability." The plan could possibly put cops "and their families in danger of retribution," lawyers wrote.

In response, the court's chief justice gave both sides until Nov. 12 to submit arguments for the judges to consider.

Grewal's plan was first put on hold over the summer after unions sued, but a state appeals court unanimously upheld his order Friday and said officials could begin releasing names within days.

New Jersey's Supreme Court does not have to take up the case since all three lower court judges were in agreement. Had one disagreed with the decision, the top court would have had to hear an appeal.

Unlike other states, New Jersey doesn't reveal the names of officers punished for giving false testimony, abusing spouses or drinking on the job. Cops can also receive "major discipline" for being chronically late and other less serious behavior.

Unions have argued the plan risks exposing officers who may have only made minor mistakes years ago. Troopers have also pleaded guilty to accusations on the condition of anonymity, lawyers argued, and outing them now would violate those agreements.

Advocates for the proposal argue the move would increase public trust at a time when most Americans say they don't have high confidence in law enforcement.

“If people don't trust the cops, they're not going to report crimes, if people don't trust the prosecutors, they're not going to testify in court,” Grewal said last week. “If that doesn't happen, that's bad for public safety.”