

# The Star-Ledger

## **More than 200 N.J. police officers received major discipline in recent months, new data shows**

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More than 200 New Jersey officers from dozens of agencies were recently found guilty of serious misconduct, according to new data that offers the first comprehensive look at how local police discipline their own.

The attorney general's office released records Tuesday showing everyone who was fired, demoted or suspended for more than five days during part of last year, a major change for a state that had long hidden which cops broke the rules.

Acting Attorney General Andrew Bruck said the disclosures would "build greater public trust while promoting professionalism."

"We are releasing this information not to shame or embarrass individual officers, but to provide the same type of transparency and accountability in policing that New Jersey mandates in other essential professions," Bruck said in a statement.

"The vast majority of New Jersey's law enforcement officers serve the public with honor and integrity, doing the right thing day-in and day-out for the communities they serve, so I take no joy in putting this information out."

The data can be downloaded at [www.njoag.gov/majordiscipline](http://www.njoag.gov/majordiscipline).

Police unions sued Bruck's office to keep the names secret, but New Jersey's Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of the plan.

The 203 officers who were punished, some repeatedly, represent a fraction of the state's more than 38,000 police.

Their actions ranged from the relatively minor — one cop was suspended 10 days for falling asleep on the job — to drunken driving, harassment and filing false reports.

A total of 87 law enforcement agencies reported at least one case of major discipline, out of approximately 500 departments total.

Agencies had until Monday to identify anyone who received major discipline from June 15 through Dec. 31 of last year. Before the downloadable database was made public, residents had to scour individual police websites to find reports that were sometimes buried far from the homepage.

Prisons and jails were among the departments with the most cases, including 16 in Camden County and a dozen at South Woods State Prison, according to the data.

Several incidents concerned social media use.

At least four corrections employees were terminated for their online activity, while another received a 90-day suspension for sending an email criticizing Black Lives Matter, records show. One former South Woods officer reposted a picture of Black men on the gallows with the caption, “we need to bring this back.”

Two officers at the troubled Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women were fired, although the data does not cover the period this year when ten officers were criminally charged for allegedly beating women.

Among police departments, the highest total came from the State Police, which is New Jersey’s largest agency. Fifteen troopers were punished for a range of conduct, including drinking on the job and endangering a child, data shows.

Officials did not always give clear descriptions of the misconduct.

One report from Camden County said only that Sgt. Angel Nieves “failed to manage a critical incident” and was demoted. County spokesman Dan Keashen said later that the officer had been found guilty of “neglect of duty” during an on-duty encounter with a supervisor.

Jersey City’s seven cases were the second-highest among police, yet the information provided was less detailed than previous reports that kept officer names secret.

For example, the city said Lt. Michael Timmins was suspended for 90 days after he “negligently discharged a firearm while off duty and on his personal property,” which broke a rule concerning guns and “intoxicants,” according to Tuesday’s data.

No other details were provided. But an earlier police department report that did not include officer names appeared to refer to the same incident when it said a “member of this agency ... retrieved a firearm after consuming 6-8 beers” and “negligently discharged a round ... during a dispute,” leading to a State Police investigation, an arrest and placement in a Pre-Trial Intervention program.

“These disclosures are proving that agencies will just provide less information to the public than they did before,” said open records attorney CJ Griffin, who first noted the Jersey City discrepancy on her blog.

Some law enforcement leaders have raised concerns that disclosing more minor conduct could subject good cops to “undue scrutiny.”

In an interview Monday, Fairfield Chief Anthony Manna said one mistake didn’t necessarily signal a deeper problem.

“One blemish on a spreadsheet may result in this officer’s name being out there,” he said.

Representatives for Jersey City and the prison system did not immediately respond to requests for comment.