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US Department of Justice Confirms 'Pattern and Practices' Probe of Portland Police

Lisa Loving Of The Skanner News July 23, 2010

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Months after the shooting of an unarmed African American man in mental health crisis, the U.S. Department of Justice has finally responded to a community request to investigate the Portland Police Bureau.

While the department says it cannot review one individual case of alleged bad practices in the Portland Police, the plea for a "pattern and practice" investigation by the Civil Rights Division has been referred to the DOJ Special Litigation Section for review.

The request was sent to federal officials in February of this year after the fatal shooting Jan. 29 of Aaron Campbell, who was despondent after the death earlier that day of his younger brother from a heart problem.

A coalition of community groups including the Urban League of Portland, the African American Alliance, the Albina Ministerial Alliance, as well as then-Police Commissioner Dan Saltzman, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Earl Blumenauer together called for a federal investigation into the shooting by Officer Ronald Frashour.

Frashour shot Campbell in the back with an AR-15 rifle as Campbell was trying to surrender to officers in the dark, rainy parking lot of a Northeast Portland apartment complex.

The Campbell shooting was the first of a string of fatal police encounters by men in mental health crisis this year, and touched off a renewed movement to reform police accountability

Three men have been fatally shot so far this year while in mental health crisis: Campbell, who was 26; Jack Collins on March 22; and 25-year-old Keaton Dupree Otis on May 12. Also part of the police reform mix are the bean-bag shooting of a 12-year-old on a MAX train platform last December and the settlement by the City of Portland of the James Chasse case Two police officers in particular, Officer Chris Humphreys and Frashour, have each been involved in multiple violent incidents over the past five years that resulted in city payouts and lawsuits.

Other officers this year landed in the media headlines for off-duty road rage attacks against citizens, including Sgt. Scott Westerman, who was forced to step down from his position as president of the Portland Police association after allegedly threatening the same female motorist twice on separate days.

"I think it's encouraging that the Aaron Campbell shooting and the circumstances around it have not been forgotten and that the Justice Department will do a sort of broader look at the whole issue," Commissioner Dan Saltzman told The Skanner News Friday afternoon.

"I'm pleased to get this response, albeit a little later and a lot of things have happened since, but still saying that special litigation section of the department is going to continue to take a look at this, as to whether there is any symptomatic indications throughout the police bureau of a problem in this regard," he said.

Saltzman was removed from management of the Portland Police Bureau in May by Mayor Sam Adams, who also at the time fired former Portland Police Chief Rosie Sizer.

The moves, which caught some Portlanders by surprise, came after months of blistering attacks on what critics said was the mayor's lack of leadership.

Saltzman said he is not sad to have been taken off the job of government the police bureau now that one of the major initiatives he initiated appears to be bearing fruit.

 $\hbox{``I'm just encouraged that we stood together, Joyce Harris and Lolenzo\,Poe and\,myself, stood}$ together and asked that the US Department of Justice to investigate the tragic shooting of Aaron Campbell," he said.

"I think it's encouraging that it hasn't been lost, even though there's been a lot of time that's passed since we first made the request."

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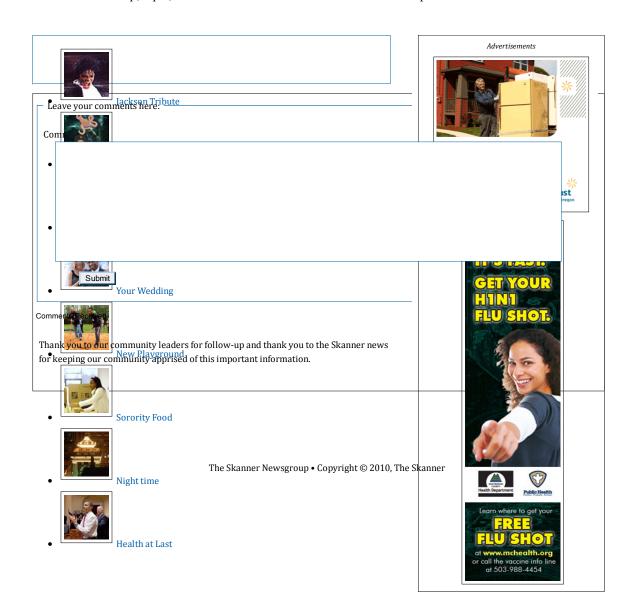
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