



## **BLACK MINISTERS' COUNCIL OF NEW JERSEY**

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### Remarks

The Rev. Reginald T. Jackson  
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Black Ministers Council of New Jersey  
Advisory Committee on Police Standards  
Tuesday, November 21, 2006

Mr. James E. Johnson, Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to come today to speak on behalf of the Black Ministers Council of New Jersey as this committee deliberates and make recommendations regarding standards for the New Jersey State police and local police to ensure that they do their duties and perform well as they seek to serve and protect all citizens of this state and that all the citizens of this state are treated justly and fairly. You have an awesome responsibility and we pray for you and the charge committed to your care.

The Black Ministers Council was and remains very committed to seeing not only that the scourge and evil of racial profiling is ended, but also that law enforcement in New Jersey, both state and local are reformed and retrained so that the practice of racial profiling and oppressive law enforcement is ended and minorities in particular have no reason to fear or be intimidated by law enforcement in this state.

Immediately before this committee is the charge to recommend to the governor whether it should join with the U.S. Justice Department in recommending whether the federal Consent Decree should be lifted.

Before addressing this matter, let me first comment on the conduct of the New Jersey State Police over the last five years. During the last five years I have deliberately have had little publicly to say about the New Jersey State Police because I felt they deserved the opportunity to seek to comply and live up to the terms of the Consent Decree without some of us looking over their shoulder. But the Monitors Reports show that the New Jersey State Police satisfied the requirements of the Consent Decree. It seems to the BMC that anyone fairly reading the monitors reports must concede that the New Jersey State Police have made progress. We still have great concern about the southern portion of the New Jersey Turnpike and the high number of stops of minorities which must be addressed. Progress however has still occurred overall. For this the BMC is pleased.

#### **Consent Decree**

While we are delighted that the New Jersey State Police have met the requirements of the Consent Decree and received favorable reports that alone should not be the criteria by which this committee makes its recommendation to the governor. We believe there is a much larger question. That question is has the “culture” of the New Jersey State Police changed? It is possible to have complied with the Consent Decree and not have changed. It would be frustrating and disappointing indeed to have the Consent Decree lifted and discover the “culture” of the organization has not changed.

The New Jersey State Police have been under a Consent Decree before in 1975. When that Consent Decree was lifted rather than diversity and relationships among minorities within the New Jersey State Police increasing and improving, numbers decreased and relationships deteriorated tremendously. This in fact contributed much to the host of problems which required the present Consent Decree. The major problem confronting the New Jersey State Police was not racial profiling; it was and perhaps remains the "culture" of the New Jersey State Police. It was this "culture" which made racial profiling permissible, tolerable and okay. It was this "culture" which led the New Jersey State Police to adopt a posture of denial. In fact to my knowledge, to this date, November 21<sup>st</sup> the organization has not publicly admitted it practiced racial profiling. Further, in casual conversations with troopers who I talked to, and who did not know who I was, still denied that the New Jersey State Police practiced racial profiling in the 1990's. Almost to a man they denied it and seemed bitter about it. This attitude persisted despite the state's admission, records, proven untruths and statistics which proved other wise. If years later they are still in denial how can we believe that the "culture" has changed? More importantly how can we lift the Consent Decree knowing that troopers believe they did nothing wrong to be under the Consent Decree?

Since we have no certifiable means by which to prove that the "culture" of the organization has changed we believe it is unwise to lift the Consent Decree. If the New Jersey State Police genuinely believes that the requirements of the Consent Decree provide for good law enforcement, and want to dispel negative perceptions among minorities, they should advocate that the requirements of the Consent Decree become

law. In other words they should become permanent, not subject to change with new leadership or shifting attitudes. These requirements becoming law would help troopers and improve law enforcement. Additionally, it would go a long way toward ensuring that the New Jersey State Police do not return to the past and help local police to reform which is greatly needed. The requirements becoming law would also provide for continuous accountability and strengthen leadership of the organization.

### **Oversight**

The State of New Jersey must bear much of the responsibility for the problems of the New Jersey State Police. It has allowed the organization to function without clear and strong oversight and often closed its eyes to improper and illegal conduct. It allowed racial profiling, discrimination, sexism and other problems to persist and grow. Oversight of the New Jersey State Police is a major area of concern that must be addressed. In the past the Office of Attorney General did a horrible job, to put it mildly. If it had not been for the April 1998 shooting on the New Jersey Turnpike there is no reason to believe that racial profiling would not still exist and the New Jersey State Police would still be operating as it had in the past. As painful as it was the 1998 shooting was a blessing to the State of New Jersey and its citizens. It forced us out of denial and made many of us see reality.

The Black Ministers Council believes that there must be independent oversight of the New Jersey State Police. It would be our hope that the Office of Police Affairs would be able to provide oversight, but it has not given us any guarantee that it can or will. We cannot get out of our mind that it took a shooting to bring us to this hour and that the

Office of Attorney General threw up many impediments to keep us from this hour. It was only the persistence and determination of those outside of government that left the State with no other alternative but to act. It is our strong belief that independent oversight of the New Jersey State is required.

### **Conclusion**

We urge this Advisory Committee to urge the governor to have the State of New Jersey ask the federal courts to keep the Consent Decree in place, make permanent the requirements of the Consent Decree and provide independent oversight of the New State Police. This will benefit not only the New Jersey State Police but also local police and citizens of the State of New Jersey. We are pleased that the New Jersey State Police have made progress. They have made progress before. We make these recommendations today, so that this time progress will be permanent.