

Justice Department Announces Investigation Of New York City Police Department's Special Victims Division

Published at 6/30/2022

5 min read



The Justice Department announced today that it has opened a civil pattern or practice investigation into the Special Victims Division (SVD) of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). The investigation will assess whether the SVD engages in a pattern or practice of gender-biased policing. The investigation will include a comprehensive review of the policies, procedures and training for SVD investigations of sexual assault crimes, including how SVD interacts with survivors and witnesses, collects evidence and completes investigations; any steps NYPD has taken to address deficiencies in its handling of sexual assault crimes; how SVD allocates staffing and other resources; and the services and support offered to survivors of sexual assault. As part of this investigation, the Justice Department officials will reach out to community groups and members of the public to learn about their experiences with SVD.

Prior to the announcement, Justice Department officials notified Mayor Eric Adams, NYPD Commissioner Keechant L. Sewell, and NYC Corporation Counsel Sylvia O. Hinds-Radix, who have pledged to cooperate with the

investigation.

“Survivors of sexual assault should expect effective, trauma-informed and victim-centered investigations by police departments,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “Based on information provided to the Justice Department, we find significant justification to investigate whether the NYPD’s Special Victims Division engages in a pattern or practice of gender-biased policing. Investigations into sexual assault that comply with the Constitution promote accountability, enhance public safety and foster community trust.”

“Respectful, thorough and complete investigations of sexual assaults are fundamental to a well-functioning justice system,” said U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York. “Over the last several months, we have learned concerning information from a variety of sources of historical issues about the way the Special Victims Division has conducted its investigations for many years. Our review is intended to ensure that, going forward, survivors of sexual assault in New York City receive fair and just treatment in the criminal justice system, and as a result, those who engage in sexual violence are held accountable. We appreciate that the NYPD has already taken steps to address these concerns.”

“Victims of sex crimes deserve the same rigorous and unbiased investigations of their cases that the NYPD affords to other categories of crime,” said U.S. Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York. “Likewise, relentless and effective pursuit of perpetrators of sexual violence, unburdened by gender stereotypes or differential treatment, is essential to public safety. We look forward to working with our partners in EDNY and the Civil Rights Division to assess the NYPD’s practices in this

area.”

The department received information alleging deficiencies at SVD that have persisted for more than a decade, depriving survivors and the public of the prompt, thorough and effective investigations needed to protect public safety. These deficiencies allegedly include failing to conduct basic investigative steps and instead shaming and abusing survivors and re-traumatizing them during investigations.

The investigation is being conducted pursuant to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which prohibits state and local governments from engaging in a pattern or practice of conduct by law enforcement officers that deprives individuals of rights protected by the Constitution or federal law. The act allows the Justice Department to remedy such misconduct through civil litigation. The department will be assessing law enforcement practices under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as well as the Safe Streets Act of 1968.

The Special Litigation Section of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the Civil Rights Unit in the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, and the Civil Rights Team in the Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York will jointly conduct this investigation. Individuals with relevant information are encouraged to contact the department via email at USANYS.CommunitySVD@usdoj.gov or by calling 212-637-2746. Individuals can also report civil rights violations regarding this or other matters using the Civil Rights Division's new reporting portal, available at www.civilrights.justice.gov, to the Eastern District of New York at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/civil-rights> or to the Southern District

of New York at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/civil-rights>.

Information specific to the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division's police reform work can be found

here: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/922421/download>. The department's updated guidance on improving law enforcement response to sexual assault and domestic violence can be found here: [Improving Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence by Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias \(justice.gov\)](#).

Additional information about the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York is available on its website at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny>. Additional information about the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York is available on its website at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny>. Additional information about the Civil Rights Division is available on its website at www.justice.gov/crt.