

Justice Department Announces Civil Rights Investigation of Rankin County, Mississippi, and Rankin County Sheriff's Department

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The Justice Department announced today that it has opened a civil pattern or practice investigation into Rankin County, Mississippi, and the Rankin County Sheriff's Department (RCSD). Rankin is the state's fourth most populous county, with a population of approximately 160,000. It is located about 30 minutes east of the state capital, Jackson, Mississippi.

The investigation will seek to determine whether RCSD engages in patterns or practices that violate the Constitution and federal law. The investigation will evaluate all types of force used by RCSD officers, including deadly

force. It will also assess whether RCSD engages in unlawful stops, searches, and arrests in violation of the Fourth Amendment and whether RCSD conducts discriminatory policing in violation of the 14th Amendment, Title VI, and Safe Streets Act.

“The public is now well aware of the heinous attack inflicted on two Black men by Rankin County deputies who called themselves the ‘Goon Squad,’” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “Those officers have since been convicted and sentenced, but we are launching this civil pattern or practice investigation to examine serious allegations that the Rankin County Sheriff’s Department systematically violates people’s constitutional rights through excessive use of force; unlawful stops, searches, and arrests; and discriminatory policing. These include allegations that Rankin County deputies have overused tasers, entered homes unlawfully, used racial slurs, and deployed dangerous, cruel tactics to assault people in their custody. We are committed to working with local officials, deputies, and the community to conduct a comprehensive investigation.”

“The violent, unlawful and racially charged actions of the so-called Goon Squad left lasting and damaging effects on the community,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “Since the Goon Squad’s sickening acts came to light, we have received reports of other instances where Rankin deputies overused tasers, entered homes unlawfully, bandied about shocking racial slurs, and deployed dangerous, cruel tactics to assault people in their custody. Based on an extensive review of publicly available information as well as complaints provided to us, we have grounds to open a pattern or practice investigation into the Rankin County Sheriff’s Department now. The Justice Department

will conduct a comprehensive and fair investigation into allegations of racially discriminatory policing of Black communities, the use of excessive force, and violations of the Fourth Amendment.”

“The information we have learned to date about the conduct of some members of the Rankin County Sheriff’s office calls back to some of the worst periods of Mississippi’s history,” said U.S. Attorney Todd W. Gee for the Southern District of Mississippi. “We do not have to accept the old hatreds and abuse of the past. And we do not have to accept the false claim that safety comes at the price of illegal force and abuse of power. We will conduct an impartial and thorough review of the Rankin County Sheriff’s Office, and if we find violations, we will take necessary action to address them.”

This civil investigation is separate and independent from the federal criminal civil rights prosecutions of RCSD deputies related to the violent assaults of two Black men, Michael Jenkins and Eddie Parker, at the hands of five white deputies.

The investigation will include a comprehensive review of RCSD policies, training, and supervision. The investigation will also examine RCSD’s systems of accountability. The Justice Department will reach out to community groups and members of the public to learn about their experiences with RCSD. The Justice Department will also speak with RCSD deputies and leadership to hear their perspectives.

Before this announcement, the Justice Department notified Rankin County officials, who have pledged to cooperate with the investigation.

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 Civil Rights Division's Special Litigation Section and U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Mississippi will jointly conduct this investigation.

Individuals with relevant information are encouraged to contact the Justice Department via email at community.rankin@usdoj.gov or by toll free phone at (888) 392-8557. Individuals can also report civil rights violations regarding this or other matters using the Civil Rights Division's new reporting portal, available at civilrights.justice.gov/. Individuals can also report civil rights violations to the U.S. Attorney's Office at USAMSS.civilrights@usdoj.gov or (601) 973-2825.

Today's announcement marks the 12th pattern or practice investigation into law enforcement misconduct opened by the Justice Department during this administration. The Justice Department recently completed an [investigation of the Phoenix Police Department](#).

Information specific to the Civil Rights Division's police reform work can be found [here](#).

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