



N.J. State Police Accused of Promoting White Male Troopers Over Minorities

BY **FATMA KHALED** AND **NAVEED JAMALI** ON 4/21/23 AT 5:40 PM EDT

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New Jersey's state police (NJSP) have been accused of workplace violations by 17 current and former troopers who allege in lawsuits that they experienced discrimination, retaliation and harassment because they belong to minority groups.



Allegations in a law firm's documents cite the lawsuits. Shared with *Newsweek*, the documents portray a work environment within the NJSP that promotes white men over qualified minorities, despite the former's histories of DUIs and harassment. The documents and the troopers described a workplace condoned by Superintendent Patrick Callahan, who was appointed acting superintendent in 2017 by former GOP Governor Chris Christie and was nominated for the position by Governor Phil Murphy, a Democrat, in 2018.



Although Callahan has faced criticism in the past over his leadership, Murphy still supports him and appeared by his side during every briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic, Politico reported in 2021.



In the documents, Burnham Douglass, the law firm representing the troopers, cites allegations from those who experienced discrimination because of their race, gender or sexual orientation. The documents also show that around 84 percent of the 3,181 troopers employed by the NJSP are white males, even though the law enforcement agency serves one of the most diverse states in the nation. Blacks or African Americans made up 15.3 percent of



New Jersey's population as of July 2022, according to U.S. census data, while Asians made up 10.3 percent and Hispanics and Latinos were 21.5 percent.

Newsweek reached out by email to the NJSP for comment on the lawsuits and the allegations in the documents.

Michelle Douglass, an attorney with Burnham Douglass, said in the documents that the hiring and promotion of minorities within the NJSP was "abysmal." Brian Polite, one of the plaintiffs named in the lawsuits and the only Black male major in the NJSP, was bypassed for promotion and was the subject of racist remarks, according to the documents. Polite is the commanding officer of sections that oversee the recruiting unit and the diversity and inclusion unit.



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The New Jersey State Police, led by Superintendent Patrick Callahan, has been accused of workplace violations by 17 current and former troopers, who allege in lawsuits that they experienced discrimination, retaliation and harassment because they belong to minority groups.

NEW JERSEY STATE POLICE

Polite was one of the most senior majors in the NJSP who seemed "more qualified" to be promoted to lieutenant colonel, but Callahan chose Sean Kilcommons as deputy superintendent, according to the documents.



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Douglass told *Newsweek*: "Imagine you follow the rules, you attain academic accomplishments such as a law degree, master's degree and Ph.D. You train, you score top tier in all testing processes. But because of your skin color, nationality or gender, you are not promoted in the face of mostly white guys who get promoted above you, not because they earned it. Rather, they belong to the same informal frat club."

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"That's what it's been like for our clients over the years," Douglass continued.

"Frustration is an understatement. We brought these claims to remedy a deep-seated systemic breakdown in the hiring and promotional processes within the NJSP."

Kilcommons, who was second in command under Callahan, was accused of making racist comments about Polite upon his promotion around November 2022. At the time, he allegedly told a group of civilian employees during a retirement dinner for an outgoing deputy superintendent that "s*** is about to change and your boss [Polite] is gonna s*** his underwear. His underwear is gonna be darker than his skin."



In another allegation, Polite was racially targeted last month at an Employee Assistance Program Unit meeting, when Captain Phil Stolfa referred to Polite as the "H.N.I.C," which was short for "head n-word in charge" of the unit. Stolfa, whose full name is not given in the documents, was promoted to major after being recommended for the position by the deputy superintendent. He was transferred outside of Polite's command to a unit with more employees, including African Americans and other minorities, under his command.



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The lawsuits' allegations describe how the promotion and treatment of minorities enabled similar behavior and misconduct in the state police's workplaces. For example, Sergeant Sean McKinney, Sergeant Kevin Byrne, Lieutenant Blair Asbury and Lieutenant Michael Smith, who are white and non-Hispanic, were all promoted despite their "far worse past disciplinary records."

Byrne was promoted twice even though he served a lengthy suspension for a hit-and-run incident that happened in 2012, which led to DUI charges against him. He was driving a state police vehicle, which hit several other cars and was left on the side of the road, with multiple firearms inside.



Promotions were allegedly not granted to two openly homosexual troopers, John Hayes, a white male, and Jamie Lascik, a Black woman, who both sued the NJSP under the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination. They filed their lawsuit after being bypassed for a promotion that was granted to a "heterosexual lesser qualified male" because their supervisor told others that "I'm not creating no Lady Blue and Gold Unit and I'm not creating no LGBT Unit."





According to the documents, "The Lady Blue and Gold was a resource group of enlisted female Troopers started in 2002. The group had meetings, played golf, and played in the yearly East Coast State Police softball tournament. The stigma and banter through the years regarding the Lady Blue and Gold is that it was 'a bunch of lesbians.'"

Burnham Douglass also shared with *Newsweek* several videos and [Instagram](#) posts that involved alleged misconduct by troopers, with some removed from their assignments because of the investigations into the racial content posted on the social media platform. They included trooper Julian Agoras and Sergeant George Gallagher, who were detached from their units after responding to two pictures posted by an [Instagram account](#) that is

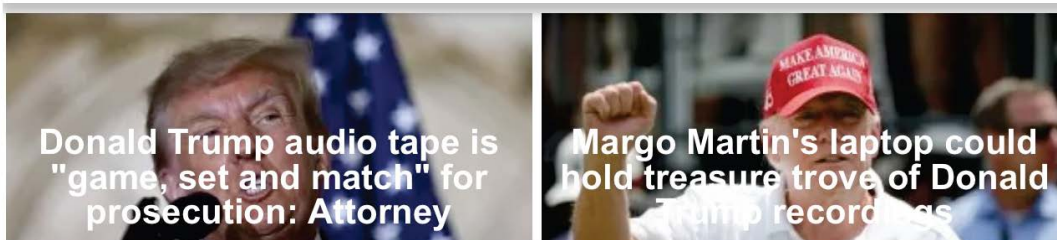


believed to be owned by a trooper whose handle name is "Garden State Goons." The pictures displayed sexism and racism, according to the documents.

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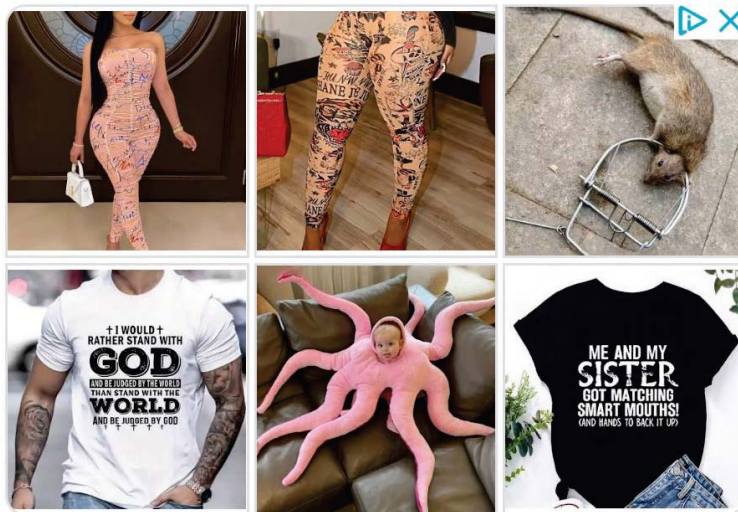
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In another instance, Christian Dreyer, who currently holds the rank of major, commanding officer, special operations, was promoted several times, despite his allegedly violent record. Dreyer was suspended for two years and faced aggravated assault charges after allegedly beating up a girl, partially collapsing her lung. According to the documents, Dreyer also beat up a young man after allegedly asking for oral sex.

In one of the documents, Philip Burnham, the managing partner at Burnham Douglass, says: "The 17 clients we represent and their respective matters show that Governor Murphy through Colonel Callahan has promoted and fostered racism, sexism, favoritism, muted



minority advancement, and punishes any trooper who brings forth any such allegation."



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He continued: "The overall picture painted here is one of institutional racism and a frat house mentality, not the picture one should imagine of the New Jersey State Police, the top law enforcement agency in New Jersey."

A spokesperson for Murphy's office told *Newsweek* that the "governor's office does



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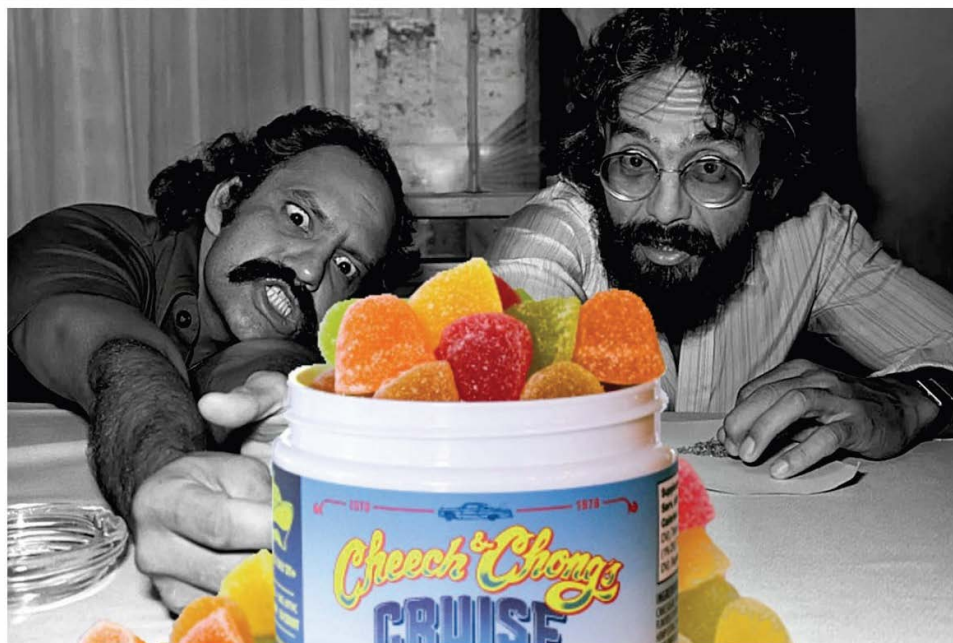
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not comment on pending litigation" when asked about the allegations against the NJSP and the governor's support of Callahan.

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