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Politics

State Police trainers had disciplinary issues and skipped lessons on racial profiling, report says

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A recruit stands with others during a New Jersey State Police graduation ceremony last year. Aristide Economopoulos | NJ Advance Media

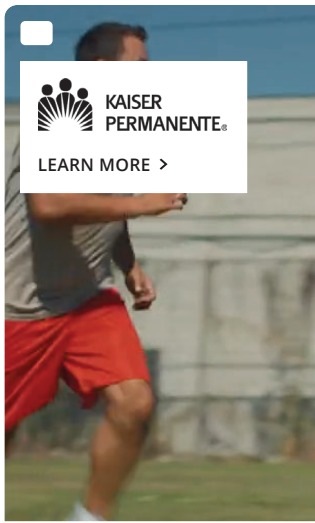
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By **Ted Sherman | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

The New Jersey State Police assigned troopers cited for disciplinary issues — some who had been suspended for driving while intoxicated, assault, and falsifying reports — as coaches to its new recruits, according to [a new report](#) by the Office of the State Comptroller.

At the same time, the report also found that some instructors at the training academy skipped entire segments from courses mandated by the U.S. Justice Department under a consent decree that came after [a racial profiling scandal](#) that called into question the long-standing culture of the State Police.

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According to the comptroller, one instructor described content from the recruit course on culture and diversity “in seemingly pejorative terms,” and instructed recruits by reading from a PowerPoint without elaboration. Another who presented a course on prejudice and discrimination reduced class time by 25 minutes and omitted a video segment on hate crimes from the instruction.

“The consent decree is intended to guard against the unconstitutional and offensive practice of racial profiling,” said Acting State Comptroller Kevin D. Walsh. “This report and others I’ve issued show the New Jersey State Police can do more to comply with the both the letter and the spirit of the consent decree and to ensure constitutional policing.”

State Police officials said they had no immediate response to the report, referring questions to the Attorney General’s office, which said it “welcomes the insights and recommendations from the State Comptroller’s report and plan to work on implementing those suggestions.”

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The State Police spent 10 years under the oversight of a federal watchdog, beginning in 1999, after its routine profiling of Black motorists sparked outrage following a shooting on the New Jersey Turnpike. In that incident, troopers on patrol stopped a vehicle and fired into a van carrying four unarmed New York City residents — three black men and one Hispanic man — injuring three.

The events led to a long reckoning for the law enforcement agency. Department of Justice subsequently took the state to court for intentional discrimination and the matter was ultimately settled with a consent decree that compelled dozens of reforms.

Walsh said his office serves as an independent watchdog to make sure the State Police does what it promised the Justice Department to eliminate racial profiling. In previous reports, the comptroller has looked at issues that included motor vehicle stops by the State Police and last year examined discipline and internal affairs investigations.

For its latest report, Walsh said the focus was on training and whether the agency was doing what should to prevent racial profiling as a practice, and noted that the months-long review found deviations in what was supposed to be taught, who was teaching it, and for how long.

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In his report, the comptroller found what he called “weaknesses” in the oversight and implementation of training programs and policies, along with a lack of any formal policy for observing and evaluating classroom instructors, as well as “significant deviations” from the approved curriculum on topics put into place as a result of the consent decree and the Attorney General’s Use of Force policy.

It also said the State Police failed to ensure promoted troopers attended required leadership training.



The comptroller said temporary instructors at the State Police academy faced far less scrutiny than those in permanent positions and some had histories of disciplinary problems.

According to the report, permanent instructors at the State Police academy are selected through a process that requires interviews, resumes, essays and some level of scrutiny. But the comptroller said temporary “detached” instructors faced far less attention regarding their qualifications to serve as coaches for recruits, than what had been contemplated under the reforms sparked by the consent decree.

A review by the comptroller of the backgrounds of 59 detached instructors who served at the academy from 2017 through July 2022 revealed that 12 had pending or substantiated disciplinary investigations and four had pending or substantiated Equal Employment Opportunity investigations on the records at the time of their appointment to the Training Bureau.

Among those charges included a 15-day suspension for inappropriate actions on duty and a 20-day suspension for the improper use of a State Police computer and unauthorized use of information. One instructor was allegedly under investigation for violation of criminal law, including sexual harassment, intimidation, and questionable conduct on duty. Another was under investigation for racial profiling and harassment, the report revealed.

Separately, the comptroller said instructors at the academy failed to follow the approved curriculum on topics directly stemming from the consent decree and the Attorney General’s Use of Force policy.

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“Some of the detached instructors appeared to show a lack of interest in teaching,” the report noted. Others were selected for their roles “in a manner that was inconsistent with the consent decree’s requirements.”

The comptroller said the report’s findings demonstrated that the Attorney General’s Office of Law Enforcement Professional Standards, which oversees a vast array of State Police policies and procedures, including training, needed to make improvements. He called it critical that training of troopers be

conducted by instructors who set the right tone, discourage racial profiling, and ensure policies involving use of force are followed.

In a statement, the Attorney General's office said the New Jersey State Police and the Office of Law Enforcement Professional Standards "have made excellence in policing a high priority" and welcomed opportunities to improve training for its police officers, detectives, and troopers.

"We understand the enormous and multifaceted challenges that confront those officers on the streets each day and are constantly looking for ways to make them better prepared to address difficult and dangerous situations with professionalism, respect, and empathy, while preserving public safety, the community's trust, and the rule of law," said a spokesman for the attorney general. "A number of steps have been taken in recent years to improve training and promote accountability and transparency, including launching a police licensing program, an online dashboard where the public can find extensive information on internal affairs investigations, and ensuring fair, independent investigations of police-involved fatal incidents."

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