

Veteran Black troopers claim racial discrimination still rampant at State Police

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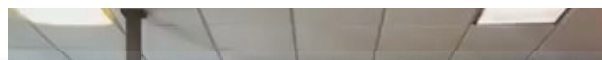
New Jersey State Police Major Brian Polite speaks to reporters at the scene of a plane crash in this file photo.

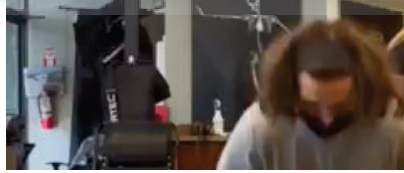
By [S.P. Sullivan](#) | [NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Two Black veteran New Jersey state troopers, including a major who has served as a top spokesman for the State Police, claim in a new lawsuit they were passed over for promotions and subjected to racist taunts from their white colleagues.

Maj. Brian Polite and Lt. Damon Crawford allege State Police brass were aware of and lobbed some of the insults themselves in the suit, which accuses them of violating New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination.

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They also accuse the division of failing to live up to its pledges to diversify its ranks.

The details of the suit, first [reported](#) by Newsweek, resurface longstanding claims of discrimination and favoritism among State Police brass. A spokeswoman for Attorney General Matthew Platkin’s office, which defends the division in lawsuits, declined to comment.

Polite served as a State Police spokesman for more than a decade, appearing at the scenes of major accidents to brief reporters and in promotional videos for the division. As a relatively young, Black trooper, he often served as a face of a force that has struggled to overcome a reputation marred by a federal monitorship for racial profiling.

“When I got on the job, I thought it would be cool to lock up the bad guys, so to speak,” Polite said in a 2016 video on the state government’s YouTube page.

“But it quickly turned to trying to give back to the community. That’s what got me here and that’s what’s keeping me here now.”

But Polite, now serving as head of Employee Relations and Community Outreach, said he was wrongly passed over for a promotion to lieutenant colonel for “a less qualified” candidate, Sean Kilcommons.

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At a retirement party, the suit claims, Kilcommons told a woman who worked for Polite there would soon be changes at the State Police and that her boss “is gonna s—t his underwear.”

Kilcommons is now deputy superintendent, effectively second in command to Col. Patrick Callahan, the head of the State Police.

Kilcommons could not be reached for comment. Polite referred questions to his attorneys.

After gaining command over Polite, the complaint says, Kilcommons stripped him of his duties overseeing recruiting for the division. The complaint accused Kilcommons of “trying to undo the progress Polite’s section has made with minority communities throughout the State in terms of recruiting and community outreach.”

Crawford worked under Polite as an assistant bureau chief at the division’s Employee Health and Wellness Bureau. He alleges that in March, a white captain in the division referred to Polite in a meeting as the “HNIC,” an acronym standing for “head N-word in charge.”

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Crawford, the only Black person in the room at the time, said he reported the remark to superiors and the captain was transferred out of the unit. But the lawsuit alleges the transfer effectively served as a promotion to a unit where the captain oversaw more troopers, including minority officers.

The complaint is one of more than a dozen filed over the years making similar claims of discrimination by minority, female and LGBTQ troopers, according to the law firm Burnham Douglass, which is representing many of the plaintiffs.

They come after a [taxpayer-funded probe into hiring practices](#) at the State Police quietly faded from public view. The Attorney General’s Office hired an outside law firm, Kaufman Dolowich & Voluck, to review “allegations of discrimination in the employment practices of the New Jersey State Police,” NJ Advance Media reported in January 2021.

Several minority troopers told the news organization they spoke for hours with attorneys from the firm but never found out what came of the inquiry. The office has declined records requests from NJ Advance Media seeking documents from the investigation, citing employment privacy rules and other exemptions.

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Platkin's office did not respond to questions about whether that investigation was ongoing.

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