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OPD Applauds DOJ Report, Urges Greater Transparency by the Baltimore City Police Department

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The Maryland Office of the Public Defender applauds the U.S. Department of Justice for its report documenting the racial bias and systemic deficiencies that have permeated the Baltimore City Police Department.

The Justice Department’s report documents the findings of their civil rights investigation, which was initiated in May 2015, in the aftermath of Freddie Gray’s death in police custody. The Department found that the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) has a pattern or practice of engaging in unconstitutional stops, searches, arrests, excessive force and retaliation and disproportionately targeting African Americans in their enforcement strategies.

The report notes that these serious and systemic civil rights violations are the result of insufficient policy guidance and training, the failure to collect and analyze data regarding officer activities and the failure to hold officers’ accountable for misconduct. “Public defenders in Baltimore have been raising these concerns for years,” noted Public Defender Paul DeWolfe. “An overwhelming lack of transparency, particularly with respect to allegations of misconduct and abuse, have allowed for these violations to fester.”

BPD is expected to enter a consent decree with the Justice Department to address the deficient policies, training, oversight, accountability and policing strategies that underlie the findings. DeWolfe stated: “OPD is pleased with the initial reaction of BPD in acknowledging its past deficiencies in these areas and its willingness to collaborate with DOJ and others to bring about much needed reform. As part of the effort to rebuild trust with the community, BPD must provide greater transparency, both with respect to the systemic reforms implemented as well as the accountability for individual officers who engage in illegal behavior.”