



Department of Justice: Baltimore cops “coerced sex in exchange for immunity from arrest”

The report found that officers specifically targeted “members of a vulnerable population.”

Victoria M. Massie

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Among the many damning findings within the Department of Justice report on the Baltimore Police Department is the revelation that some police officers allegedly coerced "members of a vulnerable population" into having sex, particularly those involved in sex work, in exchange for avoiding arrest, for cash, and even for narcotics.

"This conduct is not only criminal," the report said, "it is an abuse of power."

The report found that even though one officer had internal records with documented evidence of such conduct, no one — from BPD to the State’s Attorney’s Office — pursued criminal charges. Instead, he was allowed to resign (emphasis added):

For example, BPD investigators became aware of one officer’s alleged misconduct in March of 2012 when they conducted a "prostitution initiative" "for the purposes of gathering intelligence and obtaining confidential informants relating to police corruption." One of the women interviewed informed BPD investigators that she met with a certain officer and engaged in sexual activities in the officer’s patrol car once every other week "in exchange for U.S. Currency or immunity from arrest." The Department administratively closed the case nine months later, without, it appears, referring the matter for criminal prosecution or interviewing the accused officer, or any other potential witnesses.

Ten months after closing the first investigation, the Chief of BPD’s Office of Professional Responsibility received an anonymous "Crime Stoppers" tip that the same officer was "having sex in his patrol vehicle" with a different person involved in the sex trade. The Department initiated a new investigation, and assigned the case to a different detective. One day after

opening the investigation, an assistant state's attorney directed the detective to subpoena the woman's phone records for a six month-period. The detective waited more than a month to do so, and then did not review those records for another six months, until May of 2014. The records confirmed that the officer and the woman exchanged 237 text messages and five phone calls in the six-month period for which records were subpoenaed. Approximately four months later, the State's Attorney's Office declined to prosecute the officer, though BPD's administrative investigation remained open.

Four months after the State's Attorney's Office declined to prosecute, in February of 2015, BPD received a third, new tip that the same officer was engaging in sexual activities with the same woman involved in the sex trade who was mentioned in the "Crime Stoppers" tip. The new tip came from a neighboring Police Department, which interviewed the woman and subpoenaed her phone records in the course of an investigation. Though BPD's administrative investigation into the "Crime Stoppers" tip remained open, BPD opened a third, separate investigation into the new tip, assigning a new, third detective to investigate the same officer's conduct. The case was assigned "low" priority. The third BPD detective attempted to interview the woman but postponed the interview because she was in ill health. Two days later, the woman passed away. The investigators finally reviewed the officer's phone records, which indicated that the officer had exchanged text messages—some sexually explicit—with several other women whose numbers were linked to online profiles for sex trade services. Finally, months later, Department investigators interviewed the officer two times in connection with the two open investigations. The allegations resulting from the "Crime Stoppers" tip and the third investigation were eventually sustained in the fall of 2015, based largely on the evidence provided by the neighboring Police Department. The officer was allowed to resign from BPD. It is unclear from BPD's files whether any state authorities were notified of the officer's sexual misconduct.

Sexual misconduct is the second most common form of police misconduct

While the Justice Department's report points a finger at the BPD, sexual misconduct is common among police officers around the country.

According to the Cato Institute's National Police Misconduct Reporting Project, sexual misconduct is the second most common form of police misconduct after excessive force.

An investigation by the Associated Press last year showed that from 2008 to 2014, around 1,000 officers lost their badges for sexual misconduct: 550 officers were decertified for sexual assault, including extorting civilians for sex to avoid arrest; 440 other officers lost their certification for other sex offenses, including child pornography, sexting juveniles, or having sex while on duty.

The Oakland Police Department, and other neighboring departments, is currently under investigation regarding a sordid sex scandal in which officers had sex with a former sex trafficking victim when she was underage and then solicited sex from her when she turned 18.

The scandal has been so pervasive that the department went through three police chiefs in nine days earlier this year.

In December 2015, Daniel Holtzclaw, a former Oklahoma City police officer, was convicted of 18 out of 36 charges of burglary, indecent exposure, stalking, sexual battery, forcible oral sodomy, and rape, after targeting at least 13 black women — most of whom were also poor, and some who wrestled with drug addiction.

And while Holtzclaw is currently serving a 263-year sentence, his conviction is exceptional in part because there are few means of holding officers accountable.

Seven of the victims of Holtzclaw's abuses filed a lawsuit in March. Among the defendants named include not only Holtzclaw but the Oklahoma City Police Department, which was investigating him for sexual abuses while a few of the alleged assaults took place but had let him remain on duty.

As Bernadette DiPino, the police chief of Sarasota, Florida, told the Associated Press, sexual assault reports by officers are underreported: "It's so underreported, and people are scared that if they call and complain about a police officer, they think every other police officer is going to be then out to get them."

And the unfortunate reality is their fears are not at all far-fetched. The DOJ report is only the latest example of police departments with a culture where addressing abuses of any form — including sexual misconduct — can take a back seat to potentially endangering the communities they are charged with serving and protecting.