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Newark Public Safety Director Ambrose Reminds Police of Use of Force Guidelines Including Prohibiting Neck Holds

Underscoring Officers Are Duty Bound to Prevent or Intervene in Unreasonable or Illegal Use of Force Incidents Regardless of Rank

Newark Public Safety Director Anthony F. Ambrose issued a clear reminder of use of force guidelines to members of the Newark Police Division in a departmental memorandum issued on June 9, also reiterating that neck holds are not only prohibited but considered deadly force, and that officers are duty-bound to prevent or intervene when use of force appears unreasonable or illegal in a memorandum issued on June 4.

“This is a pivotal time in the history of policing to ensure that every Newark police officer is crystal clear about our use of force policy,” Director Ambrose said. “The guiding principles we issued serve as reminders to make sure that every police officer is on the same page. And every police employee is required to acknowledge that they have read and signed off on the memorandums reminding them of our use of force policies.”

The guiding principles outlined in the memorandums are founded upon the Newark Police Division’s Use of Force policy that went into effect on January 1, 2018 after receiving input and feedback from the community. The finalized policies were approved by the Department of Justice and the federal monitoring team overseeing the Newark Police Division’s 2016 Consent Decree.

“Our use of force policies were adopted after receiving feedback from the community at public meetings,” Director Ambrose said. “Every Newark Police Officer receives eight hours of scenario-based use of force training that key community stakeholders helped us to develop. We have worked hard to build community trust. Taking their thoughts into account has proven effective and we wholeheartedly want to maintain and increase that trust.”

Key points of the June 9th memorandum remind officers that we place the highest value on human life and that they are empowered by the community to serve as guardians with a moral, ethical and legal duty to protect the community from harm. It also reminds them that they are duty bound to prevent or intervene when use of force by any other law enforcement officer, regardless of rank, appears to be unreasonable or illegal in type or amount; that every use of force by a Newark Police Officer is evaluated by an inter-

disciplinary Review Board; and that we staff an All Force Investigations Unit whose sole purpose is to investigate use of force incidents by police.

Further, Newark Police officers are reminded to de-escalate situations at their earliest opportunity and without using force whenever possible. It also calls for using the minimum amount of force necessary to ensure the public's safety and to bring about lawful objectives. Police officers are reminded to decrease any force as a suspect's resistance or the threat to officers or to the public decreases.

Past records show that in 2010, there were 89 excessive force citizen complaints filed. In 2019, only 21 were filed. This reflects a 76 percent decrease in citizen complaints regarding excessive force by Newark Police. Further, the number of departmental complaints, those generated internally by members of the Police Division, rose 85 percent from 2018 to 2019; proving that our accountability mechanisms—including the review of body worn camera footage—are working.

“When we instituted body worn cameras in 2018, it not only helped us in substantiating citizen complaints, but also gave us a tool for filing our own internal complaints against officers who used excessive force,” Director Ambrose said. “The increase of 85 percent of departmental complaints proves that we are being vigilant about reducing abuses.”

In a June 4 memorandum, Newark Police were further reminded that neck holds are not only prohibited but considered deadly force.

“Only, and I underscore the word only, in a case where deadly force is authorized can a member of the Newark Police Division use a neck hold,” Director Ambrose said. “Even in a situation where a suspect swallows drugs or other evidence, no officer is permitted to use a neck hold to prevent that life-threatening act. At that point, they are required to render medical aid as part of their duty to preserve life.”