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Newark Public Safety Director Announces New Policy Regarding the Release of Mugshots

***Photos of Persons Arrested for Minor Offenses Will No Longer be Released
Unless the Release Serves a Law Enforcement Purpose***

Newark Public Safety Director Brian A. O'Hara announces today that the Newark Police will no longer post mugshots or other photos of individuals arrested for minor offenses as part of an effort to safeguard individuals from marginalized communities from abuse.

“Over the past few days, we’ve seen a spike in negative social media comments to a post from 2017 that announced the arrest of six individuals for prostitution,” Director O’Hara said. “The incendiary comments fundamentally indicate that members of marginalized communities—including the transgender community—can become targets of cyber-bullying, which can lead to hate crimes and violence, simply because their photos were published online.”

The social media post that precipitated this policy change had been dormant since it was first posted four years ago, but suddenly went viral and generated over 9,400 comments and 28,000 shares. Some of the derogatory comments targeted the suspects’ appearances and questioned the mental health of the pictured individuals. Upon learning of the offensive comments, Director O’Hara immediately ordered the posting to be removed, and changed the Newark Department of Public Safety’s policy regarding release of mugshots.

“Effective immediately, the policy of the Newark Public Safety Department will be that we will no longer release photos of persons arrested for minor offenses unless doing so serves a specific law enforcement purpose, such as locating a wanted or missing person,” O’Hara said.

Citing the potential for the photos to be used to ridicule or to create disparaging memes of the women, Director O’Hara believes that the release of such photos is tantamount to a public shaming, perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces implicit biases.

“Public dissemination of mugshots has the potential to affect a person who is subsequently cleared of wrongdoing, as the outdated information remains in the public domain indefinitely. Regulating

the release of mugshots can help reduce public bias, stereotyping, and the stigma associated with the modern day “perp walk,” O’Hara explained.

The Newark Department of Public Safety will continue to release photos of persons arrested for violence and crimes that cause significant harm in the community, and when there is a specific public safety purpose, including: to apprehend a fugitive from justice; to identify other potential victims; to identify a crime suspect; and to locate a missing or endangered person.

“Members of the LGBTQ+ community are particularly vulnerable to hate speech and other judgmental behaviors that may limit their ability to secure gainful employment, housing and other services,” Director O’Hara added. “We must be sensitive to the consequences of public shaming of any person arrested for a minor offense. And the developmentally disabled, undocumented, homeless, mentally ill, and other marginalized communities may be at an increased risk of being targets of cyber-bullying.”