

Baltimore Police to Reform Following Freddie Gray Death

Baltimore will implement police department reforms recommended by the U.S. Justice Department as quickly as possible after a report found that officers routinely violated the civil rights of the city's black residents, officials said on Wednesday.

The Justice Department on Tuesday released a scathing report on the 2,600-officer department that found that black residents in the majority-black city are commonly subjected to unconstitutional stops as pedestrians and motorists, arrests and excessive force.

The 163-page report was triggered by the April 2015 death of a black man named Freddie Gray in police custody.

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said at a city hall news conference that Baltimore would put a reform plan in place in the next few months and that changes would be carried out as quickly as possible.

"It's not going to be easy to reform the department, and it's not going to be quick," the mayor said.

Vanita Gupta, the head of the Justice Department's civil rights division, said Baltimore and federal officials had already agreed on a legal framework for changes that would be overseen by a court-appointed monitor.

Gupta said she expected quick progress toward reaching a final agreement with the city.

The mayor said the police department had already begun to lay the groundwork for reform through changes in policies, training, the start of a body-camera program and a new use-of-force policy.

The police department suffered from built-in shortfalls in training, supervision and accountability that left officers without tools they needed to be effective within federal law, the report said.

The department's "targeted policing of certain Baltimore neighborhoods with minimal oversight or accountability disproportionately harms African-American residents," the report stated.

Police Commissioner Kevin Davis called the report and future reforms "a turning point for better policing not just in Baltimore, but in our United States."

The mayor said other cities that have implemented such agreements have spent between \$5 million and \$10 million a year, adding that "we anticipate that will be the range" for Baltimore.

The Justice Department report was issued 16 months after police arrested Gray, 25, for fleeing unprovoked in a high-crime area. He suffered a neck injury in a police vehicle while shackled and handcuffed, and died a week later.

His death sparked protests and rioting in the city, and helped fueled the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Six officers were charged in Gray's death, but four trials ended without a conviction. Prosecutors dropped the remaining charges last month. {eoa}

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