



Advocacy Groups File Amicus Brief in Support of NJ Attorney General’s Supersession of Paterson Police Department

The power of supersession is a necessary tool to promote accountability of police and is inherent to the authority of the NJ Attorney General as the state’s chief law enforcement officer

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NEWARK – The ACLU of New Jersey, the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, Reimagining Justice, Inc., and Salvation and Social Justice today [filed an amicus brief](#) in support of the New Jersey Attorney General’s supersession of the Paterson Police Department.

The organizations are represented by the ACLU-NJ, the Institute, and the Lowenstein Center for the Public Interest. The brief was filed in the New Jersey Supreme Court.

The brief argues that the power of supersession over municipal police departments is inherent in the New Jersey Attorney General’s authority as the chief law enforcement officer of the state. It is a [necessary tool](#) to promote accountability and to stop abuse by police of vulnerable communities.

"The loss of Najee Seabrooks – a dedicated member of our Reimagining Justice, Inc./Paterson Healing Collective family – resonates through our organization and community," said **Liza Chowdhury, Executive Director of Reimagining Justice, Inc.** "The harm inflicted by the Paterson Police Department's actions not only denied Najee the help he desperately sought, but the loss of his life has left his family and our team grappling with profound grief. We are still traumatized by the cries for assistance that went unheard, and the echoes of gunshots that still resonate in our hearts and minds. Our team members who were on scene repeatedly urged the police officers on site to use de-escalation tactics because we knew Najee needed help not violence. Our commitment to community advocacy and crisis intervention remains unwavering, yet we carry the scars of this unbearable loss – a constant reminder of the urgent need for change."

Paterson has long endured systemic failures in policing, marked by excessive force and misconduct disproportionately affecting Black and brown communities. Black people comprise 24% of Paterson’s population but account for [52% of use-of-force incidents](#). Between 2019 and 2023, Paterson recorded the [most police-involved killings](#) in New Jersey. From 2014 to 2018, internal affairs [substantiated just 1 out of 183 complaints of excessive force](#) within the Paterson Police Department (PPD), and a 2022 audit revealed that PPD supervisors consistently [failed to review use-of-force incidents](#) and lacked a comprehensive de-escalation policy.

“The Paterson Police Department has shown a pervasive pattern of abuse and lack of internal accountability that have disproportionately harmed Black and brown communities and repeatedly resulted in tragic killings by police,” said **Amol Sinha, Executive Director of the ACLU of New Jersey**. “Without intervention from the Attorney General, the people of Paterson – especially the communities that are most vulnerable – would be without meaningful protections, as their rights have been ignored by systems that have consistently failed to hold police accountable and address these dangerous injustices.”

While intervention doesn't guarantee swift or complete transformation, the absence of supersession will only encourage worse outcomes. Although the federal government can investigate police departments under certain circumstances, federal intervention is slow, unpredictable, and may not result in further action even if there is significant evidence of misconduct.

“Paterson, like some other cities around the state and country who disproportionately and violently target people of color, cannot be counted on to police themselves into compliance,” said **Ryan Haygood, President & CEO of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice**. “The killing of Najee Seabrooks further exposed a longstanding pattern of abuse from Paterson PD. The Attorney General's office has the authority to oversee the department and its supersession plays an essential role in reforming the department's practices and culture. We urge the Court to recognize this and do the right thing to keep the supersession in place.”

Paterson's history of disproportionate enforcement and systemic misconduct demonstrates the urgent need for effective and comprehensive oversight to uphold constitutional guarantees of equal protection under the law. Attorney General supersessions of municipal police departments constitute a tool essential to correct these injustices, rebuild public trust, and promote equitable policing for all.

"The Paterson Police Department has a long and troubling history of misconduct and brutality, with numerous allegations of abuse and racial bias spanning decades," said **Rev. Dr. Charles F. Boyer, Executive Director and Cofounder of Salvation and Social Justice**. “The Attorney General's oversight in Paterson is not just appropriate, but necessary to ensuring that civil rights of Paterson residents are upheld and that they feel safe and protected by those who have taken an oath to do just that. We urge the NJ Supreme Court to uphold the supersession prioritizing community health and safety of Paterson residents over political expediency.”

"Police are public servants and public trust in policing is absolutely integral to our democracy," said **Jesse Burns, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey**. "The Office of the Attorney General has a right and a responsibility to intervene when these public servants fail to protect the residents they are meant to serve."