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Here and Now

New NYCLU website aims to bring transparency to police department policies

By [RANDY GORBMAN \(/PEOPLE/RANDY-GORBMAN\)](#) & [MARIAN HETHERLY \(/PEOPLE/MARIAN-HETHERLY-0\)](#) • JUL 26, 2018

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The New York Civil Liberties Union is out with a new online resource called Behind the Badge (<https://www.behindthebadgeny.org/>), which provides information on the internal policies and data from police departments around the state, including Buffalo (https://www.behindthebadgeny.org/police_departments/buffalo/).



The NYCLU said nearly two dozen public records requests and analysis of over 15,600 pages of documents, received with the help of court orders in some cases, revealed that there are very few rules that police the police in New York State.

(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wbfo/files/styles/x_large/public/201807/behind_the_badge.jpg).
CREDIT NYCLU

“Our community needs to know what rules police the police,” said John Curr, director of NYCLU’s Western Regional office. “Transparency is essential for the community to be able to hold police accountable when they abuse their power, use excessive force or make discriminatory stops or arrests.”

Among the points the NYCLU made in its review of practices was the fact that departments use portable tracking systems commonly known as "Stingrays," which the civil liberties group says allow police to spy on cell phones.

Director for the group's Genesee Valley Chapter, Iman Abid, said the organization has concerns about not knowing how the use of that equipment was authorized in some cases.

"I think it's incredibly important to start talking about that, just because there's just so much information being collected on communities of color, or if it's the immigrant community that lives in the area; communities that are incredibly skeptical already of the department itself," he said.

Abid said another concern they have with information gleaned from departments is the high percentage of people of color who are arrested for low-level marijuana possession.

"As we're talking about trying to pass legislation on decriminalizing marijuana and the fact that we're still not having this conversation at large, as a community, I think is very baffling to me," Abid said. "Especially with the amount of people it impacts; such a low-level offense, it could actually hold people back from careers, it can hold them back from buying homes, purchasing cars."



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wbfo/files/stingray.jpeg>).

In a case with wide-ranging impact, a New York City judge in April ruled information collected by portable cellphone tracking systems commonly known as Stingrays may remain confidential.

CREDIT FILE PHOTO / NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

The Buffalo Police Department is criticized on the website for resisting efforts to provide basic information on police practices. The website says reviews for Cheektowaga Police and Lockport Police are pending.

Rochester Police officials say much of the website information is three to four years old and no longer accurate. Abid praised Rochester Police for timely responses to Freedom of Information Law requests.

"There's a few other departments across the state that took a ton of time to respond to the FOIL requests in the first place, and luckily in our case, RPD responded in a timely manner and they also presented us with all the data we're requesting," he said, "so I think that's great and it goes to show that they must have a good, comprehensive system in place to be able to acquire all this data."

The NYCLU expects to add more police departments to its Behind the Badge website in the future.

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