



[www.blackparentsworkshop.org](http://www.blackparentsworkshop.org)  
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August 2, 2017

Hon, Christopher S. Porrino  
New Jersey Attorney General  
Department of Law and Public Safety  
P.O. Box 080  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0080

Dear Attorney General Porrino:

I am writing again to seek your assistance on a matter of public urgency in the Township of Maplewood.

On July 5, 2016, Black youth attending the Independence Day fireworks celebration in the township of Maplewood, were herded and accosted by our local police department under the direct orders of Chief Robert Cimino. Upon the conclusion of the fireworks, the police pushed the youth, the overwhelming majority who were Maplewood and South Orange residents, in the direction of neighboring Irvington. Along the way, the youth were assaulted, pepper sprayed, body-slammed, punched and kicked. Four young people were arrested.

Last night, the Maplewood Township Committee unanimously voted to demand the resignation of Chief Cimino and put him on administrative leave. This is a step in the right direction but we have more questions than answers at this point regarding this episode, and are seeking your intervention to raise the confidence level among residents that our police department will be held accountable.

Among our concerns:

- In light of the videotaped (street cameras and dash-cameras) evidence of the use of excessive force by the Maplewood police against Black youth on July 5, 2016, the decision by the Essex

County Prosecutor's Office in April to not bring charges against Chief Cimino and the officers directly involved in attacking the youth is incomprehensible.

- The release of videotape evidence by Chief Cimino to select members of the community who had not filed Open Public Records Access (OPRA) requests when two parties (Mr. Thomas Whitaker and the Village Green newspaper) had their OPRA requests denied. Maplewood Mayor Vic De Luca is on record stating that the chief's actions were "unilateral."
- The refusal of the Township of Maplewood to honor the OPRA requests of Mr. Thomas Whitaker and the Village Green newspaper *after* the conclusion of the Essex County Prosecutor's investigation in April. Despite repeated demands by community groups for the release of police audio and video recordings, the township only relented after the New Jersey Supreme Court ruling in *NJMG v Lyndhurst*. The audio recordings were not made available to the OPRA petitioners until July 26, 2017.
- The Maplewood Police Department only issued a statement on the disciplining of officers involved in the July 5, 2016 incident late in the afternoon of July 28, 2017, the same day the township made the videotapes available.
- The Maplewood Police Department's directing unaccompanied minors the night of July 5, 2016 into a neighboring community, Irvington, that has a curfew prohibiting unaccompanied minors under age-16 from being on the streets after 10:00 pm.
- The manner in which six (6) Maplewood police officers were disciplined, the basis of their disciplinary penalties and the refusal of the Maplewood Police Department and the Township of Maplewood to reveal the identity of the officers and the specific charges brought against them.
- The use of pepper spray on a youth on July 5, 2016 when he was in a defenseless position, having been body-slammed by an officer.
- The punching and kicking of a youth on July 5, 2016 by at least 6 officers after he had been subdued and was in a defenseless position.
- The department's historical practice of harassing Black youth, its use of intimidation tactics, the provocation of Black youth to entice confrontations, and the violation of Black youth's civil rights. We have a number of residents, adults and youth, who are prepared to attest to these practices.

We are working with a collective of community groups to demand the implementation of reform measures in the Maplewood Police Department. Though the township has retained a firm, Hillard Heintze, to investigate the conduct of our police department, there is a significant erosion of public trust in law enforcement in our community. And, Black youth are particularly injured and rightly suspicious of any reform effort that is internally driven.

Therefore, we are appealing to you to conduct an independent inquiry of the Maplewood Police Department, monitor the work of the firm Hillard Heintze, and for your office to assume oversight of the department until you have completed your assessment of its operations. We must have an independent inquiry to restore public trust in our police and assure our youth that their constitutional rights will be respected and protected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. Fields".

Walter Fields  
Chairman  
(973) 738-7876 (Direct Dial)