Dear Senate President Stephen Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin: 

Our coalition of more than 100 organizations and individuals urge you to prioritize passage of Senate Bill 2656, which would make police disciplinary records publicly accessible. Sponsored by Senator Loretta Weinberg (D-Teaneck) and Senator Nia H. Gill (D-Essex), this transparency measure is foundational to meaningfully address police accountability and racial injustice in the criminal legal system.

We represent a broad group of New Jerseyans, including members of law enforcement, civil rights organizations, labor unions, Libertarians, faith-based leaders, legal groups and individuals impacted by police misconduct. What unites us is the belief that transparency is critical to answering the calls for change that have echoed across our state and nation in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and just days earlier, Maurice Gordon in New Jersey.

The Problem. New Jersey is one of 20 states where police disciplinary records are completely off limits to the public and accessible only to police department internal affairs (IA) units. The consequences of this secrecy, which disproportionately affects Black and Latinx communities, includes:

- **A lack of external oversight/accountability.** The current law allows police to police themselves without external oversight. As a result, IA units regularly dismiss very serious complaints and fail to hold abusive officers accountable. For example, the Bergen County Prosecutor’s Office reported that in 2018 only one-third of complaints against officers were sustained by IA and 2.5% resulted in significant discipline.
- **Potential for wrongful convictions.** Even when New Jerseyans are facing life-altering criminal charges, officer disciplinary history is largely unavailable to prosecutors, judges and juries. If an officer who built a case has a record of lying, coercing witnesses and withholding evidence, that would affect judgements about innocence and guilt.
- **Taxpayers are left footing the bill** for police misconduct and wrongful conviction lawsuits and state compensation.

**Senate Bill 2656.** S.2656, seeks to make police disciplinary records open to the public under the Open Public Records Act, bringing New Jersey in line with New York, Connecticut and other states. This would include specific complaints filed against officers, the departments’ factual findings into complaints, and any resulting discipline. The bill protects sensitive personal information such as an officer’s medical records, biographical data, and home address.

Transparency is Foundational for Real Policing Reform. S.2656 is critical for other policing reforms to be effective.
• **Licensing.** The NJ Police Training Commission (PTC) recently voted to require new officers to obtain licenses that could be suspended or revoked if professional standards are violated. However, if police agencies are not properly investigating and disciplining officers, PTC will not have a basis to pull licenses.

• **Civilian Complaint Review Boards.** A CCRB cannot adequately investigate complaints against officers without full access to IA records. For example, if a CCRB is investigating an officer for using excessive force, it cannot see if the officer has a history of similar allegations filed with the police department.

• **Excessive use of force.** Use of force policies are only effective if there are consequences for officers who violate the rules.

• **Community policing.** Transparency is key to establishing trust between police and the people they serve, which is the bedrock of effective community policing.

• **Diversity in policing.** Women and officers of color frequently report being singled out and punished more harshly by IA units. Transparency will expose unfair disciplinary practices and foster a more equitable workplace.

• **Attorney General Policy.** Attorney General Gurbir Grewal issued a policy requiring police agencies to disclose the names of officers who received “serious discipline.” The order has been stayed as police unions fight it in court. The policy is insufficient because disclosure is limited to the names of officers who were fired, demoted or suspended for more than five days. The underlying complaints would remain confidential. The policy incentivizes agencies to exonerate officers rather than publish their names for disciplinary violations.

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The New Jersey Legislature has an opportunity to meet the moment and respond to demands for greater police transparency and accountability. **We urge you to prioritize and enact Senate Bill 2656.**

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey
Antiracism in Action
Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers of New Jersey
Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice
Bergen Grassroots Inc.
Black Community Watchline
Black in Bayonne
Black Lives Matter Morristown
Black Lives Matter Paterson
Camden County East NAACP
Central Jersey Progressive Democrats
Cherry Hill Women’s Center
Collingswood Democratic Committee
Dare Academy Camden
Essex Watch
Ethnos New Brunswick
Faith in New Jersey
Fifth and Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association (New Brunswick)
Gideon's Promise
Hotel Trades Council
Husky House
Indivisible NJ 5th District
Innocence Project
International Justice Project
Jersey City Together
Jersey Shore Wildlife Rescue
JOLT USA
Last Resort Wildlife Rescue
Latino Action Network
Latino Leadership Alliance of NJ
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Law Enforcement Action Program (LEAP)
Lazos America Unida
Libertarian Party of New Jersey
Libertarians for Transparent Government
Metuchen Equity Commission
NAACP of Metuchen & Edison
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Association of Public Defense
National Coalition of Latino Officers
National Organization for Women of New Jersey
National Police Accountability Project
NeighborCorps Re-Entry Services
New Brunswick Today
New Jersey Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement;
New Jersey Clergy Coalition for Justice;
New Jersey Coalition for Sexual Assault (NJCAS)
New Jersey Foundation for Open Government
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
New Jersey Office of the Public Defender
New Labor
Newark Communities for Accountable Policing
Next Chance Rescue
NJ Animal Observer
NJ Prison Justice Watch
No More Pain Rescue
Our Revolution Middlesex County
Our Town Princeton
Pax Christi NJ
Piscataway Progressive Democratic Organization
Pitbulls and Addicts
Prison Policy Initiative
RCHP-Affordable Housing Corp
Reformers: Advocates for Animal Shelter Change in NJ
Salvation and Social Justice;
South Jersey Progressive Democrats
Speak Up NJ
The Reformed Church of Highland Park
Transformative Justice Initiative
Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ
Ville Black Lives Matter
Volunteer Lawyers for Justice
Wind of the Spirit
Women for Progress
Women Who Never Give Up
Albert Pelham, President of the Montclair Branch of the NAACP
Barry Scheck, Co-founder of the Innocence Project
Byron Halsey, NJ Exoneree
Charlie Kratovil
Christopher Hedges, Pulitzer Prize Winning Journalist
CJ Griffin, Esq. Director of the Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden
D. Michael Risinger, John J. Gibbons Professor of Law Emeritus, Seton Hall University School of Law
Deborah Smith Gregory, President Newark, NJ NAACP
Dr. Yusef Salaam, Member of the Exonerated 5
Edward Barocas, former Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey
Gavin Rozzi, OPRAmachine
James Louis, NJ Exoneree
Jeffery Robinson, ACLU Deputy Legal Director and Director of the Trone Center for Justice and Equality
Joe Hayden, Esq.
John Paff
Justice Gary S. Stein (Ret.)
Kevin Baker, NJ Exoneree
Lawrence S. Lustberg, Director, John J. Gibbons Fellowship in Public Interest & Constitutional Law
Lesley C. Risinger, Esq.
Maurice Gordon Sr., Father of Maurice Gordon Jr.
Paul Casteleiro, Esq., Legal Director, Centurion Ministries
Professor Jessica S. Henry, Montclair State University
Rabbi Elliott Tepperman, Bnai Keshet, Montclair, NJ
Racquel Barrett, Mother of Maurice Gordon Jr.
Raymond M. Brown, Esq.
Reverend Derinzer Johnson, St. Stephen A.M.E. Zion Church
Reverend Doctor Willard W.C. Ashley
Reverend Dr. Charles Boyer, Bethel AME Church, Woodbury, NJ
Reverend Karen G Johnston, Unitarian Universalist Minister
Richard Coughlin, Federal Public Defender District of New Jersey
Rick Robinson, Chairman NJSC NAACP/Newark, NJ NAACP Criminal Justice Committee
Rodney Roberts, NJ Exoneree
Sean Washington, NJ Exoneree
William O. Wagstaff III, Esq., Attorney for The Gordon Family
Zayid Muhammad, Activist Poet Newark, NJ