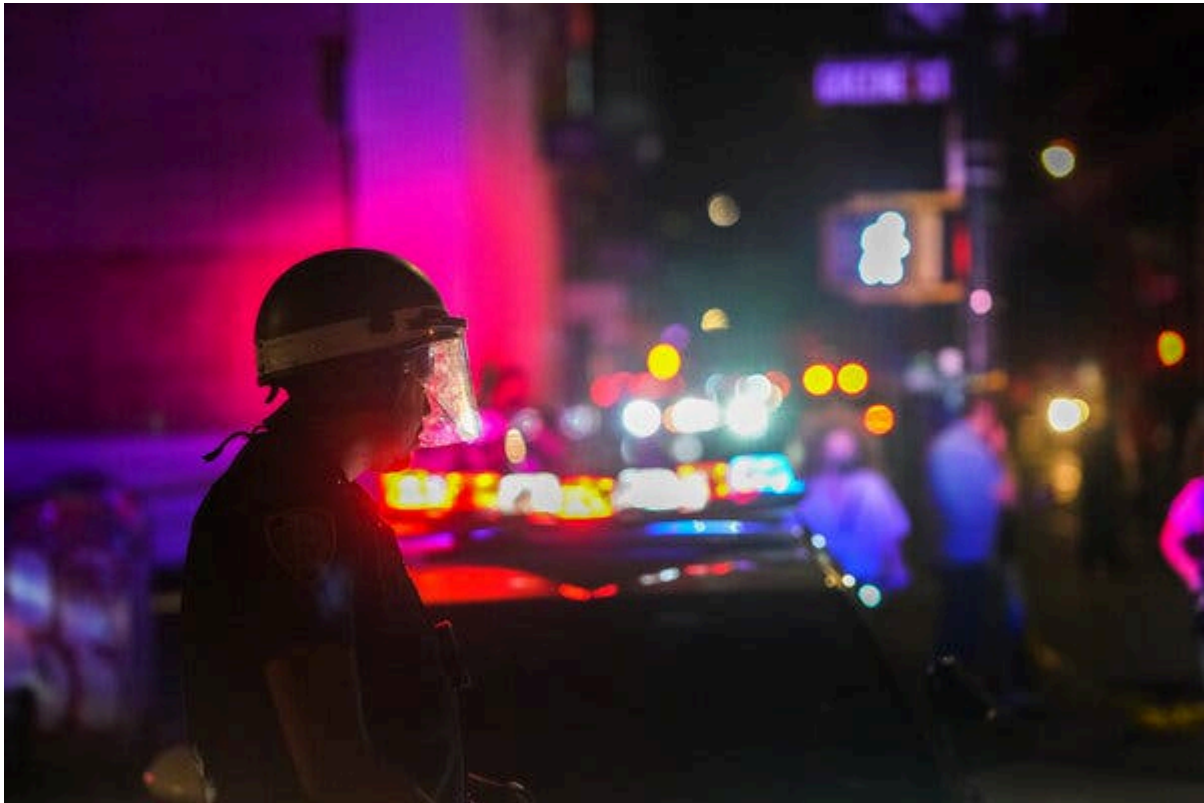


# The New York Times

## **323,911 Accusations of N.Y.P.D. Misconduct Are Released Online**

*The records were sealed for decades, but last month, New York repealed a law keeping them secret after national protests against police brutality.*



*Some 81,550 New York City police officers were named in complaints released on Thursday by the New York Civil Liberties Union. Credit...Chang W. Lee/The New York Times*

By Ashley Southall  
Aug. 20, 2020

Over 323,000 accusations of misconduct against current and former New York City police officers were published online on Thursday, a major milestone in a long and contentious political battle to open records of police discipline to public scrutiny.

The records comprise all the civilian complaints filed since 1985 with the city's independent police watchdog agency, the Civilian Complaint Review Board, and closed after an investigation.

Some 81,550 officers were named in the complaints, which together offer the public the broadest look to date at how officers are investigated and punished for a range of offenses, from using profanity and slurs to beating or choking people during arrests.

The complaints were published in an online database by the New York Civil Liberties Union, which obtained the records from the review board after state lawmakers repealed a law that had kept them secret.

The civil liberties union noted that less than three percent of the 323,911 complaints resulted in a penalty for officers, 12 of whom had been terminated. In a statement, Christopher Dunn, the organization's legal director, said the records showed that the Police Department, whose commissioner makes the final decision on disciplinary matters, "is unwilling to police itself."

"The release of this database is an important step towards greater transparency and accountability," Mr. Dunn said, "and is just the beginning of unraveling the monopoly the N.Y.P.D. holds on public information and officer discipline."

Fred Davie, the chairman of the review board, said in a statement that the agency released the records in response to demands from the public for greater police accountability, as evidenced most recently by the protests following the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis.

He said that "all New Yorkers have a right to transparency" under the state law granting access to public records, and that his agency "will hold paramount the people's right to know how their communities are policed."

The records include all allegations of excessive force, abuse of authority, discourtesy and offensive language investigated by the review board, as well as the board's findings and any discipline imposed by the police commissioner.

They were shrouded in secrecy until June, when, as protests against police brutality spread across the country, the state legislature in New York repealed a 44-year-old law that had been used to keep them secret.

After a legal challenge from labor unions representing police officers, firefighters and corrections officers whose records were shielded by the law, a federal appeals court on Thursday ruled the data could be released while the case continued in court.

The unions vowed to continue fighting against what Hank Scheinkopf, a spokesman for the labor groups, said was "the improper dumping of thousands of documents containing unproven, career damaging, unsubstantiated allegations that put our members and their families at risk."

The publication of the records, policing experts said, chips away at a legal wall of confidentiality built up by police unions, which for decades have used their political clout to block efforts to make complaints about officers and the punishment they receive public.

Samuel Walker, a professor at the University of Nebraska Omaha who is a leading expert on police accountability, said the data would allow academic researchers and policymakers to identify patterns and problems.

"That provides the fodder for policy changes, and that is terribly important," he said.

How and whether to disclose police disciplinary records have been contentious topics for decades, and practices vary across the country. States like Delaware have laws keeping the records secret, while others like Florida and Arizona permit the release of some or all records.

The issue has become a major target for reform after Mr. Floyd's killing. The officer who knelt on Mr. Floyd's neck for several minutes, Derek Chauvin, had 18 prior complaints and had been involved in three shootings while on duty.