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SFPD Releases Remaining Text Messages Associated with 2015 Criminal Investigation

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On Tuesday, April 26, 2016, the San Francisco Police Department responded to released excerpts of racist and homophobic text messages that were previously reported on earlier this year. These messages were discovered in the fall of 2015 during a criminal investigation initiated in early August of 2015 into a Department member's off-duty actions as well as an Internal Affairs investigation of four Department members' conduct.

As part of that criminal investigation, the Department searched the personal cell phones of the involved members and determined that four had sent text messages containing reprehensible racial and homophobic remarks. The Department acted immediately by suspending the officers involved in these text messages and referring the matter to the San Francisco Police Commission for termination, as their character clearly fell below the minimum standards of being a police officer.

Since that time, three of the four members have separated from the Department. One of the four- former officer Jason Lai- has been charged with six misdemeanor counts for unlawful access and/or use of criminal and motor vehicle databases. His text messages were released earlier this week. The fourth officer has an open case pending before the Police Commission where he faces discipline up to and including termination.

On Wednesday, April 27, 2016, San Francisco Police Department Internal Affairs investigators arrested former police lieutenant Curtis Liu on charges stemming from the Lai sexual assault investigation. Mr. Liu was booked at San Francisco County Jail on one count of Filing a False Police Report (felony) and two counts of Obstructing an Investigation (misdemeanors).

“Because this was an ongoing criminal investigation, the Department was unable to discuss the text messages. With the culmination of the criminal investigation this week with the charging of Mr. Liu, we think it is important for the public to know that we conducted the investigation, discovered the texts and took immediate action, and that those responsible for such hateful texts are no longer police officers,” said San Francisco Police Chief Greg Suhr. “Those former members betrayed the public's trust and the trust of the right-minded, hard-working men and women of the San Francisco Police Department.”

SFPD will not tolerate any form of biased behavior or speech. The despicable text messages make clear that these former officers were not fit to serve City of San Francisco and would not have met the Department's current standards for hiring as police officers.

“There is no place in this Department for officers who hold these views. The San Francisco Police Commission will continue to look for implicit and explicit bias among Department members, and when we find it, we will take the steps necessary to eradicate it,” said San Francisco Police Commission President Suzy Loftus.

The Department currently provides implicit bias training in the Basic Academy and as part of ongoing, professional officer training. In addition, the Department recently mandated that all captains, commanders, deputy chiefs and the Chief of Police attend an advanced implicit bias training program provided by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission in conjunction with the Mayor’s Office. Every member will receive implicit bias training and procedural justice training by the end of 2016.

Clearly, these disgusting texts and images are examples where explicit bias existed in the Police Department. Out of an abundance of caution and with the assistance of the City’s Human Relations Department, effective immediately, every member of the San Francisco Police Department will take Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace training. This training describes clearly what is unacceptable behavior and the responsibilities of officers to report such conduct. All officers will undergo the two-hour training before the middle of May.

“We must be responsible to keep doing what we’re doing to support good cops,” said San Francisco NAACP President Reverend Amos Brown. “And those good cops should go on and do their jobs with the knowledge that they have support from the NAACP.”

As San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee stated Thursday in an open letter to officers, we must act immediately and report any action by any Department member- regardless of rank- that brings dishonor to the Police Department and the communities we are sworn to protect.

Officers have been stepping forward to do that. SFPD has completed two other investigations that we have forwarded to the District Attorney’s office for a criminal charging decision, where Department members reported alleged unacceptable conduct by two other members, involving possible overtime fraud and misrepresentation on a DMV form.

“On the behalf of the right-minded, upstanding members of the San Francisco Police Department, we will cut out this cancer of intolerance, and continue working hard every day to restore the trust of the City and the people we are privileged to serve,” said Chief Suhr.

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