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Statement Regarding Release of Text Messages

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Today 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 into a Department member's off-duty actions as well as an Internal Affairs investigation of four Department members' conduct.

On March 30, 2016, Chief Suhr received a letter from District Attorney Gascon confirming receipt of information provided by the Department to the District Attorney's Office in late 2015 related to the criminal investigation of former Officer Jason Lai. Mr. Lai was charged with six misdemeanor counts for unlawful access and/or use of criminal and motor vehicle data bases ([see Department issued a press release #16-028](#)). The information delivered to the District Attorney's Office was uncovered by SFPD Internal Affairs Investigators during the investigation into the sexual assault allegation made against Mr. Lai while off-duty.

As part of that criminal investigation, the Department searched cell phone records of the involved members and determined that four of those members had sent text messages containing reprehensible racial and homophobic remarks. The Department acted immediately in suspending the officers involved in these texts messages and referred the matter to the Police Commission for discipline up to and including termination, as their character clearly fell below the minimum standards of being a police officer.

Since that time, three of the members have separated from the Department. As stated above, Mr. Lai has been charged with six misdemeanor counts for unlawful access and/or use of criminal and motor vehicle data bases. The fourth officer has an open case pending before the Police Commission where he faces discipline up to and including termination.

The investigation also revealed that three other officers had each received single questionable text messages from Lai. These officers underwent an administrative investigation that determined that they had received a text message but did not send any questionable messages. The investigation concluded that there was insufficient evidence to bring charges against the officers.

"As has been clearly stated but cannot be overstated enough, there is no room in this Department for anyone who holds these types of hateful and discriminatory views. Any officer who engages in such reprehensible racist and homophobic remarks will be held accountable and swiftly dealt with. These views are clearly incompatible with the character required of being a police officer. We will not allow officers capable of such conduct to sully the good name of the San Francisco Police Department and what we stand for." – Police Chief Greg Suhr

“These texts were found and charges were brought before the Police Commission last fall. There is no tolerance in the Department or the Commission for officers who hold such reprehensible views. We will continue our work with the Police Department to eradicate implicit and explicit bias and support the many incredible officers who work hard every day for the people of San Francisco.” – Police Commission President Suzy Loftus

“The content of these text messages is repulsive and this behavior will not be tolerated without consequences. I urge the Chief and Police Commission to seek the fullest possible disciplinary action for all of the officers involved,” said Supervisor Malia Cohen. “This incident reminds us of why we need to implement reform of the Department as soon as possible. It is why I have continued to advocate for implicit bias training and more diverse recruitment in the Department. And it is why I am placing a ballot measure, Proposition D, on the June ballot to bring more transparency to the actions of our law enforcement officers.”

Under Chief Suhr’s leadership of the Department, all recruits undergo a variety of courses carefully developed to build public trust such as ethics, community immersion, implicit bias, and interpersonal communications. 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 all captains, commanders, deputy chiefs, and the Chief to attend an advanced implicit training provided by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission in conjunction with the Mayor’s Office.

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