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Following judge naming 17 Antioch Police officers for alleged racist texts, Mayor Thorpe calls for independent audit



Screenshot of Antioch Mayor Lamar Thorpe's Facebook Live video offering his remarks about the alleged racist texts sent by Antioch Police Officers.

Union president included; Thorpe wants review of all complaints over last 6 to 8 years

By Allen D. Payton

According to an [East Bay Times article](#) published Friday evening, April 7, 2023, Contra Costa Superior Court Judge Clare Maier, while adjudicating a felony case of suspects arrested by Antioch Police, released the names of 17 officers who are “accused of using racist slurs, jokes and memes in text messages over a period of more than two years.” In addition, [Contra Costa District Attorney Diana Becton announced on Friday](#) that the judge ruled to have the texts released to the defense in that case.

In response, Antioch Mayor Lamar Thorpe posted a [Facebook Live video](#) on his official page, Saturday afternoon, April 8, 2023, expressing his “profound disappointment” with the officers and called for an independent audit. He specifically called out the Antioch Police Officers Association (APOA) union president, Lt. Rick Hoffman for being included.

According to the Times’ report, the other officers named include Devon Wenger, Eric Rombough, Andrea Rodriguez, Calvin Prieto, Morteza Amiri who already have been placed on leave amid the FBI investigation. The list also includes Joshua Evans, Jonathan Adams, Scott Duggar, Robert Gerber, Thomas Smith, Brock Marcotte, Aaron Hughes, Brayton Milner, John Ramirez and Kyle Smith, as well as Tim Manly who resigned from the department.

Hoffman, Police Chief Steve Ford and department PIO Ashley Crandell were asked for the timeframe the texts were sent and for any other response. In addition, the APOA’s attorney, Mike Rains was also asked for a response to the situation.

Thorpe’s Remarks

After thanking those who offered their condolences for the recent passing of his father, reading from prepared remarks Thorpe said, “On Friday afternoon, Contra Costa Superior Court Judge Clare Maier released the names of 17 Antioch police officers who allegedly were unafraid to use racist language.

There are no words to express my profound disappointment especially given that one of the named officers serves as president of the Antioch Police Union.

While Antioch has worked hard to become one of the Bay Area’s most racially diverse cities, this will undoubtedly leave an embarrassing stain on our community.

The culture at the Antioch Police Department is a problem and has long been a huge legal and financial liability for the city, which is on full display today.

The culture at the department requires further exploration including how the hell all of this alleged misconduct could go on for so long without anyone on the command staff noticing— lieutenant and above.

Therefore, I’m calling for an independent investigation of the internal affairs process specifically looking at all complaints within the last six to eight years from the nature of complaints to their dispositions.

I am also seriously concerned about complaints that have not been investigated and are now outside of the statute of limitations. I want a complete review of that as well.

Moreover, we need a complete independent audit of our hiring and promotions practices so that the Council can implement measures to better root out individuals with certain biases. This idea was part of my original police reform package that I presented to the City Council in 2020 but has yet to be examined.

Lastly, our police-reform efforts to this point are missing the forest for the trees because this is about culture. I agree with Vice Mayor Tamisha Torres-Walker on conducting some kind of police equity audit of the Antioch Police Department to measure bias in our enforcement efforts and ultimately pursue measures that help eliminate racist policies, practices, and behaviors.

We will hold anyone accountable that has allowed this culture to continue whether you’ve been here for a year or 20 years, and regardless of your rank.

In my first 30 days in office, I had to deal with two in-custody deaths; in less than a year, a failed recall effort fueled by the idea of protecting the police department; then in year two I was hauled into the DA’s office to be briefed about a very serious FBI investigation of the Antioch Police Department; and now, on year three we’re dealing with alleged racism.

Our culture of acceptance is wrong. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

The fact of the matter is that our goal of a strong police department will not materialize until every resident in our city regardless of race and socio-economic background can feel that they have a trusting relationship with our police officers.

If you’re a supporter of law enforcement, you should support these reforms as they help separate officers who are committed to the badge and have played by the rules and those who have no business being police officers.”

One thing the mayor said was incorrect. One of the two in-custody deaths he mentioned referred to Angelo Quinto’s. However, he died in the hospital three days after the incident with police and was not in police custody at the time. (See [related article](#))

Mayor Pro Tem Torres-Walker Responds

In a post on her official Facebook page Saturday afternoon, Mayor Pro Tem Tamisha Torres-Walker shared a link to the Times’ article and wrote, “We can no longer be bystanders and action must be taken to correct this culture of racism and anti-blackness in policing starting with Antioch.

I haven’t seen any of the text messages referenced in this article and to be honest I’m not sure I want to. What I will say is that my peers on the City Council and the community at large should take these miscarriages of justice seriously.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge those in the Antioch police department who work hard every day to provide none bias policing service to our community as public safety continues to be our primary concern moving forward.”

In a previous message posted on Thursday, Torres-Walker wrote, “Antioch Police Union Attorney Rains criticized Mayor Lamar Thorpe’s press conference for allegedly violating the right to confidentially and due process for a few officers suspected of crimes against the public while entrenched in a culture of racism.

Chief Ford has taken actions addressing recruitment, assessment, hiring, retention, promotion, and agency culture since April of last year which included a hefty incentive package to bring new talent with a community policing mindset that is culturally responsive.

Willful ignorance can no longer be the order of the day. We can address the public safety needs of Antioch residents, and lift those in law enforcement who are doing their best while holding their counterparts accountable for their roles in how we got here.

I trust my peers on the council to do what is best for the public at this time and the Leadership of Chief Ford.

I ask the public for grace, your prayers, and your support.

We will get through this together.”

No Responses Yet from Chief Ford, APOA Leadership, Two Other Councilmembers

Police Chief Steve Ford, the department’s PIO Ashley Crandell, Lt. Hoffman and the other APOA leadership were asked for the timeframe in which the alleged texts were sent and for any other responses. In addition, the APOA’s attorney, Mike Rains and Councilmembers Monica Wilson, Lori Ogorchock and Mike Barbanica were also asked for responses to both the Times’ article and the mayor’s remarks.

APOA Attorney Responds

In response, APOA attorney Rains wrote, “I have been asked by several local television stations for comment, and I am telling everyone that I am not in a position to comment at the moment, because I have not seen any texts, and have not participated in discussions which the DA’s office has apparently had with the court and with counsel for the defendants in the underlying case. In retrospect, I would have liked to have been involved in such discussions, and believe the individual Officers have legal rights which I do not think were adequately considered, because they did not have a voice, either individually, or through counsel in the discussion. The Chief has ordered the commencement of an investigation of the most recent allegations by an ‘outside’ investigator, and the officers and our office plan to fully cooperate with the investigator and answer all questions.”

UPDATE: Barbanica Says There Must Be Accountability But Premature to Assume Anything Before Investigation is Complete

“Racist statements, racist comments at any level are wrong,” Barbanica stated. “However, I don’t know the content of these text messages. What we should be looking at here is, everyone is entitled to due process. It is premature to assume anything at this point until the investigation is complete. Let’s don’t lose sight that there are many hard-working men and women in the Antioch Police Department who are serving every day to protect this community and I don’t want to assume those under investigation are guilty of anything. If racist statements were made there must be accountability. Let’s wait and see what these texts actually say.”

None of the others responded prior to publication time.

Please check back later for any updates to this report.

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Thorpe remarks on racist texts APD logo

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