

PRESS RELEASE

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STEPTOE RELEASES INVESTIGATIVE REPORT ON
THE GUN TRACE TASK FORCE SCANDAL

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Steptoe & Johnson LLP today released its investigative report on the Baltimore Police Department’s Gun Trace Task Force (GTTF) scandal. Entitled **Anatomy of the Gun Trace Task Force Scandal: Its Origins, Causes, and Consequences**, the 515-page report provides a rich and detailed history of events and decisions over the past 20 years within the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) and the city of Baltimore that contributed to the scandal.

The Report is the product of a two-year investigation that included more than 160 interviews and the review of hundreds of thousands of pages of documents. The report covers the period from 1999 to the present, beginning with the zero-tolerance/quality-of-life approach to policing brought to Baltimore by former Mayor Martin O’Malley and the two BPD commissioners he recruited from New York, and ending with some of the changes and reforms that have been implemented over the past four years. As part of the investigation, the Steptoe team interviewed every elected Baltimore mayor from O’Malley to Brandon Scott, and every BPD commissioner from Ed Norris to Michael Harrison.

The Report helps to explain how a scandal of such proportions could begin and continue for years without being detected. Until a federal investigation led to the arrests of seven members of the GTTF on March 1, 2017, GTTF members roamed the city stealing money, planting drugs and guns, and committing other egregious crimes against the residents of Baltimore. To date, the federal investigation has resulted in the successful prosecution of a dozen former BPD officers, including several who were never members of the GTTF.

According to Michael R. Bromwich, the leader of the Steptoe investigative team, “Our goal was to determine what factors caused these former BPD officers to violate their oaths and betray the people of Baltimore. We sought to make findings and draw conclusions about the aspects of BPD’s organization, structure, and culture that created weaknesses in BPD that allowed the corruption to take place and go undetected and

unpunished for so long.” According to Bromwich, “Our investigation demonstrated that the corruption within the GTTF began long before the officers joined forces on that squad, and was by no means limited to that squad. Our investigation also revealed that several of the officers involved were known to engage in misconduct on a continuing basis, but that the internal mechanisms within BPD were inadequate to the task of disciplining them appropriately and terminating them when the facts justified it.”

The investigation found that there were widespread failures to supervise the corrupt officers, in part because they had connections to high-ranking personnel in BPD and did not respect the chain of command. In addition, the investigation determined that BPD’s culture over time came to prize quantity over quality – with respect to arrests, drug seizures, and gun seizures – and to value numerical goals over police work that was based on adherence to BPD policy, state and federal law, and the US Constitution. Finally, the investigation found that BPD’s system for investigating and punishing misconduct has historically not been adequate to the reality of misconduct within BPD, despite some good faith efforts to reform that system. The internal affairs function has been understaffed, undertrained, reviled by the vast majority of BPD members, and unable to make serious charges stick even with substantial supporting evidence.

The Report addresses recent reforms that have been implemented within BPD. These include a comprehensive system for using and auditing footage from body-worn cameras – a promising means for deterring and detecting corruption. In addition, the Report comments favorably on the Ethical Policing is Courageous (EPIC) training program recently introduced within BPD that addresses the importance of peer intervention in reducing the incidence of misconduct.

In addition to its findings, the Report makes 25 recommendations that address issues related to hiring, training, supervision, and accountability. The Steptoe team limited the recommendations to those it believes are practical, capable of being implemented, and have the potential to significantly reduce the risks of corruption.

The Report includes numerous appendices, including a full recital of all the crimes discovered during the federal investigation and a detailed discussion of the most serious complaints of misconduct, including excessive use of force, lodged against the former officers over the course of their careers. The contents of these Internal Affairs records have not previously been disclosed.

BPD and the city were urged to undertake the investigation by the Honorable James K. Bredar, the federal judge presiding over the BPD consent decree, which reflects a 2017 settlement between the Department of Justice and the city and requires BPD to implement sweeping reforms in a wide number of areas. The consent decree does not explicitly address corruption issues, but BPD and the city are required to make

a large number of substantial reforms in many of the areas closely connected to the investigation, including hiring, training, supervision, and accountability. Judge Bredar entered a court order in October 2019 authorizing the Steptoe investigation.

The investigation was conducted with complete independence and without any interference from BPD or from city officials. Mr. Bromwich said, “Former Chief Solicitor Andre Davis and Commissioner Michael S. Harrison promised at the outset that we would have full and complete independence in conducting our investigation and producing our report. They were true to their word, as were BPD and the city officials whom we dealt with during the course of our work.” The Steptoe team appreciates the substantial cooperation and assistance it received from the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Maryland, the Baltimore Field Office of the FBI, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, and the consent decree monitoring team.

For additional materials relating to the investigation, please visit the GTTF Independent Investigation website at the following link: <https://www.gttfinvestigation.org/>

About Steptoe:

In more than 100 years of practice, Steptoe has earned an international reputation for vigorous representation of clients before governmental agencies, successful advocacy in litigation and arbitration, and creative and practical advice in structuring business transactions. Steptoe has more than 500 lawyers and other professional staff across offices in Beijing, Brussels, Chicago, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Washington. For more information, visit www.steptoe.com.

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