

New Jersey State Commission of Investigation



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SCI FINDS CONSTABLES EXPLOIT LOCAL APPOINTMENTS

TRENTON – Municipal constables have exploited their public appointments in various ways, including misrepresenting themselves as sworn law enforcement personnel, engaging in policing activities far beyond their narrow authority and using the position for personal profit, the State Commission of Investigation found in a report released today.

The SCI found that constables – untrained and frequently unsupervised civilians – are appointed by local governing bodies in numerous New Jersey municipalities where they are equipped with badges and authorized to purchase their own uniforms often designed to look nearly identical to those worn by police officers. State laws dating back

to the Colonial era enable municipalities to appoint constables, a position that was once the primary form of law enforcement before the advent of modern policing but has little purpose today. Their responsibilities vary from town-to-town, with some designating it as nothing more than a ceremonial title and others assigning constables to perform low-level policing duties, such as issuing littering summons and enforcing noise ordinances.

Not only do some constables give the appearance of sworn police personnel, but the Commission also found numerous examples of constables who engaged in questionable, and in some cases, unlawful conduct. Some constables have faced criminal charges for impersonating police officers, including one who allegedly pulled over a taxi driver and demanded production of his motor vehicle credentials after the two were involved in a July 2020 traffic dispute in Newark. In another incident, a group of Essex County constables took it upon themselves to provide backup to police during the December 10, 2019, mass shooting in Jersey City that left six people – including a police officer – dead. Another constable reportedly flashed his badge and told the law enforcement officers who stopped his vehicle that he was a police officer like them.

“These findings underscore the point that constables are outdated relics that have no place in the highly organized and sophisticated system of modern law enforcement,” the report states. “Rather than serving as a beneficial adjunct to police, the role instead far too frequently represents a potential hazard to the constables themselves, the police they claim to want to help and the public at large.”

The Commission also uncovered numerous instances where constables monetized their local appointment and used it to promote their private business

interests. To land jobs at private security firms, some constables tout their alleged law enforcement credentials, which they claimed helped them earn a higher hourly wage. The owner of a New Jersey subpoena service company, a former constable himself, told the Commission he pays constables more than his other process servers because their badges and uniforms give them an air of authority.

The Commission recommended the immediate repeal of statutes authorizing municipal governing bodies to appoint and empower constables in New Jersey. The recommendation received written endorsement from the County Prosecutors Association of New Jersey, the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police and the New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent Association.

"Constables represent an outmoded form of law enforcement that is unnecessary, incompatible and has not kept pace with the advancements and principles of modern policing," the report states. "Given the highly trained, well-ordered and coordinated law enforcement apparatus now in place, and the trend toward greater accountability, oversight and transparency of such activities, it is an anomaly that New Jersey municipalities still empower untrained and unsupervised private citizens to serve as constables."



The State Commission of Investigation is an independent New Jersey watchdog agency established in 1968 to investigate organized crime and corruption, waste of tax money and other abuses of the public trust. Copies of public reports are available at the Commission's offices or via its Web site at www.state.nj.us/sci.