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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Legal Aid, Handley Farah & Anderson, and Stroock & Stroock & Lavan Secure Settlement Overhauling NYPD's Long-Standing and Illegal Warrant Search Practices

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, Handley Farah & Anderson and Stroock & Stroock & Lavan secured a [settlement](#) in *Terron Belle et. al. v. the City of New York et al.*, a class action lawsuit brought in 2019 challenging the New York City Police Department's [unconstitutional practice](#) of prolonging stops to demand a person's identification to run unrelated warrant checks and investigation card ("i-card") searches without individualized reasonable suspicion to justify prolonging the detention.

The lawsuit alleged that this practice — made possible by advances in smartphones and mobile access to comprehensive NYPD databases — was just the latest tactic in a long history of unwarranted search and seizure practices by the NYPD. Where traditional stop, question, and frisk practices were focused on finding guns and drugs, this newer NYPD practice focused on running IDs to see whether the person might be wanted in connection to a crime, for failure to show up in court, or for being past due on paying a summons. If the person had an open warrant or i-card, the officers would then have reason to make an arrest, even if the record search was completely unrelated to the initial reason that the officers made the stop.

Take for example the illegal stop of Terron Belle, the lead plaintiff in this case. Mr. Belle was walking home from the subway one night when four plainclothes police officers surrounded him on the sidewalk, ordered him to turn around, and searched him. The officers told Mr. Belle that they were searching for guns, but when they found nothing, they demanded his ID. The officers proceeded to detain him to run a warrant check even after the reason for their stop — a belief that Mr. Belle was carrying an illegal gun — was confirmed to be incorrect.

Police may only detain a person for as long as it takes to confirm or dispel reasonable suspicion that the person has committed a crime. Once that suspicion is dispelled, the person must be free to leave, but across New York City, officers routinely prolong these detentions to search for open warrants or i-cards in the hopes of making an arrest.

While making an arrest for an open warrant is legal, prolonging the length of time someone is detained while the officers search for unrelated i-cards or warrants violates the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution. The NYPD admitted no liability in the settlement but agreed to reforms to bring their practices in line with the Fourth Amendment's prohibition of such prolonged detentions.

Under this settlement, the City of New York has:

- updated the NYPD's [Patrol Guide Procedure Number 208-22 \(Warrant Checks\)](#) and [Patrol Guide Procedure Number 208-23 \(I-Cards\)](#) to prohibit officers from prolonging stops for purposes of conducting warrant and i-card searches;

- issued a [FINEST message to all NYPD members of service](#) alerting officers of the new policies and required the message to be read at each shift's roll call meeting for ten consecutive days, which began on December 9, 2022;
- trained NYPD Training Sergeants on the new policy, which the Training Sergeants must [train all officers](#) within their command on the policy changes by January 31, 2023;
- agreed to advise all members of service that violations of the new policies may result in discipline according to the NYPD Disciplinary Matrix;
- committed to paying a total of \$453,733 in damages to plaintiffs and attorneys' fees.

"I brought this lawsuit to challenge the NYPD's violation of my rights and the rights of other Black and Latinx people all over the city," said **Terron Belle, named plaintiff in the case**. "I am hopeful that the settlement reached will keep what happened to me from happening to other people. I was treated like a criminal and held against my will so that they could run a warrant check on me when I had done nothing wrong."

"I was standing in front of my building in Harlem when officers demanded that I give them my ID. I had done nothing wrong, so I asked why they were stopping me. They told me it was to run a warrant check," said **Edison Quito, a plaintiff in the case**. "In a free country, you shouldn't have to give officers your ID for them to run a warrant check just because you're standing on the sidewalk. I joined the case to try to challenge the NYPD's illegal practice and I am proud of the result."

"The NYPD's racist Stop and Frisk program is supposed to be over, but they've been doing Stop and Warrant Search for years," said **Luis Rios, a plaintiff in the case**. "The settlement in this case makes it so what happened to me and my friends hopefully won't keep happening."

"We're grateful to our clients for being willing to step forward to address these systemic concerns – the policy reforms they've fought for and achieved are a reminder that the NYPD's expanding use of database technology must remain constitutional if we are to live in a fair, just and safe community," said **Rebecca Chang, attorney at Handley Farah & Anderson**

"For years, the NYPD maintained an unconstitutional practice of prolonging stops to run warrant and i-card searches, turning each of these stops into an unrelated fishing expedition and subjecting our clients to harassment by police," said **Molly Griffard, staff attorney with the Cop Accountability Project at The Legal Aid Society**. "This settlement marks a change in the NYPD's official policy and holds the NYPD accountable for infringing on the rights of New Yorkers."

"This lawsuit has always been about bringing justice to innocent New Yorkers who are baselessly detained in the street so aggressive NYPD officers can run their IDs," said **civil rights attorney and plaintiffs' counsel Cyrus Joubin**. "Thanks to the five courageous plaintiffs who told their stories and sought to hold the NYPD accountable, we are proud to have not only shed light on the NYPD's abusive practices using their Domain Awareness System, but also to have taken a significant step to restrain such abusive practices."

"We're pleased to have assisted Legal Aid, Handley Farah & Anderson, and Cyrus Joubin in reaching this important outcome that not only compensates our clients for violations of their rights, but also changes NYPD policy and re-trains their officers to prevent these violations moving forward," said **David Kahne, special counsel at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan**.

While the reforms agreed upon in this settlement aim to end this illegal practice, New Yorkers who experience prolonged stops for purposes of warrant checks or i-card searches may file a complaint with the [Civilian Complaint Review Board](#) and are encouraged to report this police misconduct to the [Legal Aid Society](#), who will continue to monitor the NYPD's adherence to their new policy.

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