

Felix DeJesus, is a Paterson resident who has not been seen for over 2 years following an interaction with police in February of 2022. Although the police recorded the interaction, they have refused to cooperate and answer his family’s questions, including why he was left alone in a poor state during freezing weather.

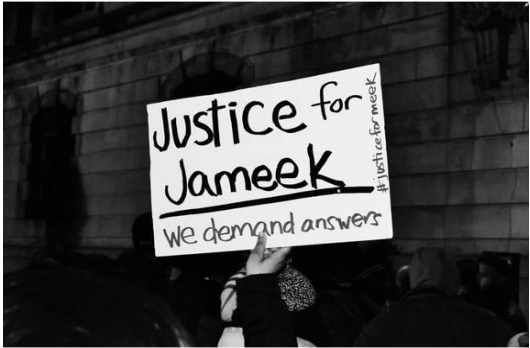
Paterson is the deadliest police department in the State of New Jersey, by both absolute and relative measures.

Two of the most alarming cases in recent years include those of Jameek Lowery and Felix DeJesus. In January of 2019, Jameek Lowery sought help while going through a mental health crisis.

Although only living a few minutes from the hospital, the police took 2 hours to get Lowery to the hospital, by which point he had already lost consciousness. Suspecting police abuse, his family sued the department in a case similar to that of Freddie Gray in Baltimore.

**Recent Police Terror in Paterson**  
There is a crisis of policing in Paterson. There have been no less than eleven federal indictments and convictions of Paterson Officers, five of which were part of the ‘Robbery Squad’, a group that went around assaulting residents and robbing them. Their sergeant, Cheff, was the ringleader and was ultimately sentenced to 3 years in prison. Lowery sought help while going through a mental health crisis.

**Resisting Police Terror  
in Paterson and  
Reimagining Community  
Safety**



Paterson Mapping Project

As of this writing (Nov 2024), over a year has passed since the New Jersey’s Attorney General Office took over the Paterson Police Department in March of 2023. What does it have to show for it? Well, not much other than some facelifts.

The takeover can be read as strategic decision by the State to save face and de-escalate the tense situation in Paterson as calls to defund the department were growing louder.

Instead, the takeover is now justifying MORE funding as it implements its “Next Gen” policing program. The State takeover of the PPD is nothing more than a rebranding of an institution that is not broken but rather working as it was intended--criminalize poverty and Black and Brown people.

The Passaic County Jail in downtown Paterson was demolished. The site of deplorable living conditions and documented police abuse for years, the county jail was demolished around the same time two deputies were indicted for beating an inmate at the jail. The deputies worked under Sheriff Richard Berdnik who killed himself in the Toros restaurant just off Getty ave in January of 2024. There is reasonable suspicion that Berdnik decided to take his life out after a federal investigation closed in on him.

The takeover comes after decades of police misconduct and abuse in Paterson, with the city ranking as New Jersey’s deadliest for killings by the police. Just a couple of weeks prior to the takeover, a member of Paterson’s nonviolent intervention program, the Paterson Healing Collective, was gunned down by a militarized unit of the Paterson police department while having a mental health crisis.

**Oppose:**

- More funding for the police;
- targeted police recruitment in impoverished communities;
- the implementation of surveillance technologies that are used to criminalize our youth and clear our neighborhoods for developers qualified immunity that protects killer cops

**Propose/demand:**

- More funding for recreation and non-violent intervention teams;
- Civilian Complaint Review boards with disciplinary and subpoena powers
- More funding for our schools and less officers

**Organize:**

- a copwatch with your neighbors to protect yourselves against abuse;
  - mutual aid drives to support neighbors and older folks in your communities care networks the we can use to protect one another, instead of relying on the police.
- Connect with networks in the city or organize folks on your block! We have only ourselves to rely on, not leaders, politicians or much less the police. Only the people of Paterson can make Paterson strong.

**What else can we do?**

On the other side of this struggle are community members looking to reimagine community safety beyond policing, striving to secure community-neighborhoods. Instead of relying on 'listening sessions' set on the terms of the police themselves, it is time that we, the people of Paterson, get to define what community safety means.

On one side of the blue line that the police themselves have drawn in the city, are the police themselves, their union, and sympathetic politicians who are looking to at best reform policing, all the while maintaining the modes of policing. These modes can be found in the ways in which police have historically targeted Black, Latino and poor residents, clearing the way for developers to displace poor residents.

More so, based on arrests, a Black person in Paterson is 459% more likely to have force used on them than a white person. This does not simply reflect a case of a few bad apples but an endemic level of corruption.

Police operate with impunity because they have the prosecutors on their side, and are protected by a culture of silence, what is known as the blue line.

**Resources**

**Books:**

A World Without Police by Geo Maher

Our Enemies in Blue by Kristian Williams

No More Police: A Case for Abolition by Mariame Kaba, Andrea J. Ritchie

**Websites:**

<https://crimethinc.com/>

<https://criticalresistance.org/>