

Sheriff makes change after violent abuse

Victims say it's to escape accountability

Michael Goldberg

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JACKSON, Miss. – Attorneys for the victims of a racist episode of police torture say new policies unveiled by a Mississippi sheriff's department this week were introduced so the sheriff can escape liability in a civil lawsuit and forestall a new federal probe.

With criminal sentencing for six former law officers scheduled for January and a \$400 million lawsuit against them and the sheriff pending, the Rankin County Sheriff's Department unveiled a new policy manual Tuesday. The policies took effect on Nov. 20, the same day attorneys for Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker amended their June lawsuit.

The new complaint incorporates findings federal prosecutors unsealed from their criminal probe. In a news release, Sheriff Bryan Bailey outlined some of the changes his department has adopted, including hiring an internal affairs investigator, requiring officers to wear body cameras and adding an online submission page for civilian complaints.

The policies were adopted due to the "inappropriate conduct" of deputies, Bailey said. Any body camera footage would only be released with the sheriff's permission.

Five former Rankin County deputies and another officer from a nearby department admitted in August to abusing Jenkins and Parker in what Bailey called the worst case of police brutality he had ever seen. Hours after the officers pleaded guilty to a long list of charges in federal court, Bailey promised to reform the department.

In an interview and in written comments provided to The Associated Press on Thursday, Malik Shabazz, the attorney representing Jenkins and Parker, said Bailey is trying to avoid a broader federal probe.

"Why now, Sheriff Bailey? Is it because the Sheriff's Department has been exposed as a bastion of depravity?" Shabazz said.

Jason Dare, an attorney representing the Rankin County Sheriff's Department, did not respond to a request for comment Friday.

Shabazz said the department's hiring an outside investigator to oversee compliance with procedures shows that before Jenkins' torture, the agency "did not have even a quasi-independent overseer to investigate excessive force



Five former Rankin County deputies and another officer from a nearby department admitted in August to abusing Eddie Terrell Parker, right, and Michael Corey Jenkins, center.

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claims," Shabazz said.

In March, an AP investigation linked some of the deputies to at least four violent encounters with Black men since 2019 that left two dead and another with lasting injuries. For months, Bailey said little about the episode. That changed after the Justice Department unsealed its charges against the former officers.

The federal probe revealed that six former law officers, some of whom called themselves the "Goon Squad," burst into a house without a warrant after someone phoned one of the deputies and complained that two Black men were staying with a white woman.

Once inside, the officers handcuffed and assaulted Jenkins and Parker with stun guns, a sex toy and other objects. The officers also used racial slurs over a 90-minute period that ended with one of them shooting Jenkins in the mouth during a "mock execution." Then, the officers devised a cover-up that included planting drugs and a gun, leading to false charges that stood against the victims for months.

The former officers agreed to sentences recommended by prosecutors ranging from five to 30 years, although the judge isn't bound by that. They are scheduled to be sentenced in January.

Dare has argued Bailey should be dismissed from the lawsuit because the sheriff is entitled to "qualified immunity," a legal concept that often shields police officers from civil penalties for alleged abuses.

Jenkins and Parker's legal team have requested a jury trial in the civil lawsuit and a broader federal inquiry into the department's conduct.

"What happened in January with Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Parker was not an isolated incident, it was merely the crescendo of the violent culture that the man at the helm, at minimum, allowed to exist," Shabazz said.

Michael Goldberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative.