

What You Can Do About Police Misconduct

General Remarks:

If you are charged with a crime, consult your lawyer before making any formal complaints.

If you are injured, see a doctor as soon as possible to preserve medical evidence.

If there are visible injuries or other damages, take color photographs as soon as possible.

If there are witnesses, get their names, addresses and phone numbers as soon as possible.

Complaints to the ACLU:

Police abuse is a serious violation of civil liberties, and one that the ACLU is extremely concerned about. We encourage individuals who have been the victim of police misconduct to contact us and register a complaint. The ACLU will then send you a "Police Complaint Form" (enclosed) for you to fill out. If you complete this form, have it notarized, and return it to us, we will formally request police authorities to investigate your complaint. Receipt of your form will also enable the ACLU to look for patterns of police abuse that we might be able to use in a lawsuit. While the ACLU is able to take only a very small number of police misconduct complaints to court, we remain very interested in being informed about such incidents for the reasons just noted.

Other Actions to Take:

Complaints to the Police Department

If the Providence Police are involved, you can get a formal hearing by making a written complaint, which will be reviewed by the Providence Police Internal Review Board. The official Civilian Complaint forms can be picked up at:

Providence Police Station
325 Washington Street
Providence, RI 02903

or

The Providence Human Relations Commission
City Hall
Providence, RI 02903
401-421-7740

In addition to providing the complaint forms, the Human Relations Commission may also investigate your complaint and provide representation for the hearing before the Internal Review Board.

If another Police Department is involved, you can complain to the Police Chief who may investigate and initiate disciplinary action.

Complaints to the FBI

You can file a complaint (in person) with the FBI. (If you are in prison, you should call or write the FBI for an interview.) The FBI is located at 10 Dorrance Street, Providence (272-8310), and in the U.S. Federal Building and Post Office in Newport (849-2226).

Complaints to Elected Officials

You may make a complaint to your Town Councilor or Mayor who may investigate and initiate disciplinary action.

Legal Suits Against the Police

A person who has been the victim of police misconduct can file a civil suit against the police. This option should especially be considered when there are witnesses and clear evidence of damages. (Such a lawsuit is separate from having to defend any charges the police may have brought against you.) A private attorney is suggested for such a suit. If you do not know any attorneys, you can contact the Lawyer Referral Service at 421-7799.

Only in **EXCEPTIONAL** circumstances will the ACLU bring a lawsuit, but we will actively monitor the notarized police complaints that are returned to our office.

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