

## **A Citizen's Guide to Internal Affairs.** **By Prosecutor Robert A. Bianchi, Esq.**

The establishment of a meaningful internal affairs policy and procedure(s) are of extreme importance to everyone in law enforcement, as well as the citizens that law enforcement personnel are sworn to protect.

As I am sure all will agree, citizen confidence in the integrity of a police department is enhanced by the establishment of meaningful and effective complaint resolution procedures. Toward that end, the information below will help citizens and police officers conscientiously implement the Attorney General Guidelines with respect to the handling of citizen complaints.

Recognizing the key role played by officers assigned to the Internal Affairs function, it is important that the law enforcement community is properly prepared for the task. We in the Morris County law enforcement community are committed to ensuring the fair and effective resolution of matters brought forward to us.

It cannot be over-emphasized that a proper and effective running of internal affairs units is to the benefit of all involved. On one hand, it ferrets out officers who violate their oath to serve the citizens that they have sworn to protect. On the other hand, officers are also benefited in cases where frivolous complaints filed by citizens against police officers are brought forward. Hence, on the whole we as a citizenry are benefited by a cognizably potent, thorough, and effective complaint resolution procedure.

Each Police Department within Morris County, including the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, has formal procedures for investigating your internal affairs complaint. These procedures ensure fairness and protect the rights of both citizens and law enforcement officers.

- Your complaint will be sent to a superior officer or a specially trained Internal Affairs Officer who will conduct a thorough and objective investigation.
- You may be asked to help in the investigation by giving a detailed statement about what happened or provide other important information.
- All complaints against law enforcement officers are thoroughly investigated. You will be advised in writing of the outcome of the investigation.
- If the investigation shows that a crime may have been committed, the Morris County Prosecutor's Office will be notified. In the event that a member of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office is the subject of a criminal investigation, the Attorney General's Office will be notified. As a result, you may be asked to testify in court regarding this matter.
- If the investigation results in an officer being charged with a violation of department rules and regulations, you may be asked to testify in a departmental administrative hearing.
- If the investigation shows that the complaint is unfounded or that the officer acted properly, the matter will be closed.
- It is unlawful to provide information in this matter which you do not believe to be true.
- You may contact the department/agency's Internal Affairs Officer with any additional information or any questions you have about the case.

If anyone should have any questions with regard to this policy, please feel free to contact the Morris County Prosecutor's Office at (973) 285-6200.