

Louisville Metro Police Department and city officials implicated in cover-up of child sexual abuse ring

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The Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) has been implicated in deliberately concealing and destroying at least 738,000 records detailing the sexual abuse of youth involved in the department's Explorer Scouts program. The Explorer Scouts program is designed for children and teens who aspire to be police officers.

The crimes committed by LMPD officers and the subsequent cover-up demonstrates the backward culture that runs rampant in the repressive agencies of the state. According to the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, which broke the story, the sexual abuse allegations first came to light in October 2016, when police acknowledged that an officer had been under investigation for misconduct in the program.

In April 2017, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) opened an investigation into the LMPD's Explorer Program after officers Kenneth Betts and Brandon Wood were charged with rape in a lawsuit by an anonymous 22-year old. The young man had allegedly been raped by the two when he was a minor several years earlier. The lawsuit also incriminated the city and the police department for conspiring to cover up the abuses. Several other lawsuits were filed by former participants in the program throughout 2017.

In a total of seven lawsuits, Betts, Wood and a number of other officers were named. In May of 2019, Wood was sentenced to 70 months in prison after having pled guilty to attempted enticement. He also pled guilty in a state court to seven counts of first-degree sexual abuse. Two months later, Betts was sentenced to 16 years in a federal prison for enticing minors and possession of child pornography. He also pled guilty in state court to sodomy charges.

A third officer has been indicted in the sexual-abuse case. Brad Schuhmann is charged with sexually abusing a minor in 2010. The same minor had previously filed a lawsuit against Schuhmann in 2017, alleging that five other officers were aware of Schuhmann's conduct. These officers included Woods and Betts, as well as former LMPD Major Curtis Flaherty, who headed the Explorer Scouts program.

According to the lawsuit, the officers used intimidation to bully the plaintiff into keeping silent about the abuse. Flaherty never reported the accusations, nor was he ever charged. In fact, the commanding officer even received a promotion during the investigation.

The *Courier-Journal* reported that it had requested all the relevant records pertaining to the Explorer Program in 2019. The LMPD and the Jefferson County attorney's office refused to turn them over, saying that all the records had been provided to the FBI.

According to the *Courier-Journal*, LMPD claimed to have found 9,000 documents on a "hidden folder," which it refused to turn over and instead immediately forwarded to the FBI. The newspaper appealed its case, citing the Open Records Law, and was able to obtain documents proving that LMPD had initiated a cover-up.

The police department, meanwhile, still had hundreds of thousands records in its possession. Assistant County Attorney Roy Denny admitted in a letter to the *Journal's* lawyers that 9,700 folders comprising 738,000 records, containing 470 gigabytes of data, were discovered on the hidden file. Instead of being turned over, according to the law, the records were deliberately deleted.

It is highly unlikely that the trove of deleted records merely pertained to the handful of officers charged and sentenced thus far. It is entirely likely that many more officers up the chain of command and city officials knew of this behavior and attempted to sweep it under the rug.

Jon Fleischaker, an attorney for the *Courier-Journal*, told the newspaper, “I have practiced open records law since the law was enacted 45 years ago, and I have never seen anything so brazen.” He added, “they have destroyed their ability to comply with the open records law, and they did it purposely, and they didn’t tell the truth about it.”

The city government, under Democratic Mayor Greg Fischer, has done everything it can to suppress the details of the case. While the mayor promised an independent investigation, hiring a law firm at the cost of \$140,000 of public funds to prepare a report, *WAVE 3 News* reported in September that the city’s attorneys have worked to block substantial portions of that report from being released to the public.

According to *WAVE 3*, an attorney for one of the victims made requests for 275 pages of the report—which include emails and correspondence between the mayor and ex-LMPD Chief Steve Conrad—but was denied on the basis of a technicality.

The victim, who remains anonymous, expressed outrage at what amounts to a blatant effort on the part of the city to downplay their failure to prevent the rape and abuse of minors. “They said they were going to be transparent about everything, and you know, they’re not,” the victim told *WAVE 3*. “They are not doing what they said they were going to and it makes it hard to trust them.”

Seeking to justify the withholding of information from the media, then-LMPD chief Steve Conrad stated in an affidavit in 2019 that, “at the time of the FBI’s adoption of the investigation, the LMPD investigative records ... were removed from LMPD to be stored and maintained by the FBI, as it was no longer an LMPD investigation.” This was an outrageous falsehood clearly meant to cover up the blatant destruction of evidence that had taken place.

The deliberate deletion of evidence and stonewalling of legal inquiries into the misconduct reveals systemic corruption within the department and malfeasance by city officials in cahoots with LMPD.

The Louisville police department has a long record of outright criminality and abuse of power. To date, no officers have been charged with the March 13 murder of 26-year-old paramedic Breonna Taylor, who was gunned down in her own home by LMPD officers during a no-knock raid.

At least three grand jurors have since come forward to declare that the state attorney’s office never presented them with any option to charge the police with homicide. This has prompted Taylor’s mother to demand an independent investigation into the case. To date, the only person arrested in connection to the killing was Taylor’s boyfriend, Kenneth Walker—who fired at the officers believing them to be intruders. The charge against him was later dropped, underlining the criminality of the officers’ conduct.

One former officer, Brett Hankison, was charged with three counts of first-degree wanton endangerment for firing wildly into Taylor’s apartment from the outside, sending bullets into an adjacent apartment where a family of three was sleeping.

Hankison has since been sued for a sexual assault, alleged to have taken place in 2018. The lawsuit contains statements from nine other women who claim assault or harassment. The suit also names, among other officers, former LMPD Chief Steve Conrad for being aware of and failing to prevent Hankison’s conduct.

Conrad was fired in June when it came to light that LMPD officers present during the killing of David McAtee—who was shot by a National Guardsman in the midst of protests—had not activated their body cameras.

The portrait that emerges is that of a tangled web of corruption that encompasses the LMPD and city officials from top to bottom. Under these circumstances, every action taken by this corrupt servants and protectors of the capitalist system must be questioned.



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