

New York Civil Liberties Union
125 Broad Street, New York, NY 10004
www.nyclu.org

Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP
600 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10020
www.ecbalaw.com

Black Intelligence Detectives Bring Federal Suit Over Bias in NYPD Promotions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

NYCLU Press Office, 212.607.3372 / Elizabeth Saylor, ECBA, 212.763.5000

September 25, 2017 – The law firm of Emery Celli Brinckerhoff & Abady LLP (ECBA) and the New York Civil Liberties Union today filed a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of black detectives who were denied promotions for years within the elite Intelligence Division of the NYPD. For well over a decade the division has maintained a subjective promotions policy, administered by white supervisors, who refuse to promote deserving black detectives.

“Minority communities have for decades distrusted the NYPD, and for good reason,” said Elizabeth Saylor, a partner at ECBA and lead counsel for the plaintiffs. “Pervasive discrimination against black detectives only deepens that distrust. The NYPD’s discriminatory culture needs to change.”

The lead plaintiffs in the case are Jon McCollum and Roland Stephens, as well as Sara Coleman, widow of Theodore Coleman. The three detectives each joined the Intelligence Division in 2001 and assisted with the cleanup and investigation of the September 11 attacks. They tracked hundreds of leads and suspects. In spite of their achievements and strong recommendations from their direct supervisors, they were repeatedly passed up for promotion because of their race.

“I hit a brick wall when it came to my career in Intel,” said Detective Stephens. “I came to the painful realization that my skin color mattered more than my skills and achievements.”

“I watched countless white detectives from my class move up in rank, but not me,” recalled Detective McCollum. “Multiple supervisors told me if I were white I would have been promoted.”

In 2011 the detectives filed a complaint with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). At the time, there was not a single black individual in the entire Intelligence Division above the rank of sergeant, including no lieutenants, captains, deputy inspectors or chiefs. After reviewing data and interviewing witnesses the EEOC concluded in 2016 that “black detectives do not receive equal treatment in promotion[s]” and that there was a “wholly subjective and secret [promotion] process” in the Intelligence Division.

“My husband Theo Coleman joined the NYPD to make a difference in his lower-income African-American community, said Sara Coleman. “His love of the job turned to disappointment and embarrassment when he realized his work would not be recognized because of his race.”

When the plaintiffs filed their complaint with the EEOC, the vast majority of black detectives in the Intelligence Division were of the lowest grade. Third Grade Detectives make approximately \$20,000 less a year than Second Grade Detectives, and approximately \$30,000 less a year than First Grade Detectives. Despite the plaintiffs’ complaints for years and despite the EEOC findings, the NYPD has yet to take even the basic step of adopting and implementing a formal, non-discriminatory promotions policy with clear criteria for promotion.

“Jon McCollum, Roland Stephens and Theo Coleman were accomplished and committed detectives who are exactly the types of people the NYPD should be proud to have in its ranks,” said NYCLU Associate Legal Director Chris Dunn, who serves as co-counsel. “The only reason they were not promoted is because they are black, and that is a grievous insult not only to them but to every New Yorker.”

- ### -