



STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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DIVISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE  
LAW ENFORCEMENT MISCONDUCT INVESTIGATIVE OFFICE

May 2, 2025

Commissioner Jessica Tisch  
New York City Police Department  
One Police Plaza  
New York, NY 10038

***Via Email***

Re: Letter regarding Executive Law 75(5)(b) Referral of Officer Dennis Vargas  
OAG Matter No. 1-794587467

Dear Commissioner Tisch,

We have reviewed your agency's referral of Officer Dennis Vargas pursuant to Executive Law Section 75(5)(b). Based on our review, we have concluded that Officer Vargas engaged in a pattern of unlawful stops and frisks in contravention of the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 12 of the New York State Constitution, and NYPD rules and regulations.

Our findings are based on a review of following incidents:

- CCRB 202002669: On April 8, 2020, Individual One was walking at the intersection of East 165th Street and Boston Road in the Bronx when Police Officers Dennis Vargas, Merita Hoxha, and Anthony Alvino, in plain clothes, exited their unmarked vehicle. They stopped him, frisked him and, finding no contraband, returned to their vehicle without providing him with their names, shield numbers, or business cards. CCRB substantiated abuse of authority allegations against all three officers regarding the unlawful stop and frisk of Individual One and further substantiated allegations that they failed to provide names, shield numbers and business cards to them. Charges and specifications were served on PO Vargas. NYPD imposed a penalty of Schedule "B" Command Discipline with the forfeiture of six vacation days.
- CCRB 202002792: On April 11, 2020, at 2:46am, Individual Two made a complaint to CCRB that he and his wife were standing with his brother-in-law outside of his home in the Bronx when an unmarked blue sedan stopped near them. He described three officers, identified by CCRB as Police Officers Dennis Vargas, Merita Hoxha, and Anthony Alvino, who approached the group. Individual Two alleged that PO Vargas unlawfully

frisked and searched him, and that he did not provide a business card. PO Vargas provided testimony to CCRB on September 22, 2021, stating that he and his team were working in unmarked Vehicle #283 the night of the incident. CCRB reviewed documents provided by NYPD confirming that Vehicle #283, an unmarked blue Ford Fusion, was at the incident location for three minutes at approximately the same time as Individual Two alleged he was stopped. Given the pedigree information provided by Individual Two and that PO Vargas's vehicle was at the location at the incident time, CCRB concluded that the officers exited their vehicles and interacted with Individual Two. However, CCRB did not have enough evidence to determine whether the stop of Individual Two was unlawful, as all three officers provided testimony to the CCRB in which they stated that they did not recall the incident. PO Vargas was interviewed a second time by CCRB on November 16, 2021 where he was shown an NYPD document confirming that Vehicle #283 was at the incident location at the incident time. PO Vargas stated that, having seen the document, he did not wish to amend his previous testimony in any way, and that viewing the document did not refresh his recollection of the incident. POs Hoxha and Alvino provided similar testimony. The CCRB found that all three officers provided inaccurate statements to CCRB and recommended a penalty of a Schedule "B" Command Discipline. The Police Commissioner responded to CCRB that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate the officers made inaccurate statements to the CCRB and determined that their actions did not warrant a penalty.

- CCRB 202003654: On May 21, 2020, Individual Three was taking out the garbage outside his apartment building on Selwyn Avenue in the Bronx. Sgt. Signorile and PO Vargas, in plain clothes and an unmarked car, observed Individual Two. Upon PO Vargas calling out to Individual Three from the unmarked car, he ran into his building. Sgt. Signorile and PO Vargas unlawfully pursued him, as they did not have reasonable suspicion of criminal activity to justify the pursuit. The encounter escalated. Individual Three, who apparently was not aware that PO Vargas and his partners were police officers, ran into his building, followed by PO Vargas, Sgt. Signorile, and several other officers. He entered his apartment and locked the door. Officers knocked on the door for approximately three minutes. His father looked through the peephole, saw the officers, and likewise did not recognize them as police. Individual Three's brother opened the apartment door, and Individual Three and his father exited the apartment with knives in their hands for protection. PO Vargas and another officer drew and pointed their firearms at the three individuals, and another officer drew but did not point his firearm. Individual Three's father was guided to the ground, and Individual Three was frisked. The officers conducted a protective sweep of the apartment after the three individuals were removed from the premises and handcuffed. CCRB substantiated the allegation that Officer Vargas abused his authority when he stopped Individual Three by pursuing him into his home, which precipitated the officers' escalating behavior. NYPD received CCRB's findings and recommendation that NYPD impose Command Discipline, Schedule "A" on April 22, 2022. NYPD did not impose discipline, instead administratively closing the case, citing its receipt of CCRB's findings within 60 days of the expiration of the statute of

limitations.<sup>1</sup>

- CCRB 202004217: On June 11, 2020, Individual Four was with a group of people on the sidewalk on East 174th Street and Ward Avenue in the Bronx. They were stopped by Sgt. Signorile and a group of officers including Police Officers Dennis Vargas, Bory Echanique, and John Echevarria. Sgt. Signorile and PO Echanique each frisked an unidentified individual and Sgt. Signorile frisked another. CCRB substantiated allegations that Sgt. Signorile and PO Echanique abused their authority when they frisked the individuals without sufficient legal justification. CCRB also substantiated abuse of authority allegations for POs Vargas, Echanique, Echevarria and Sgt. Signorile's failure to provide business cards to the individuals they stopped. While Officer Vargas did not conduct the frisks, his participation in this incident is consistent with the pattern we have identified. CCRB recommended that NYPD provide formalized training to Officer Vargas, which it declined to do.

We conclude that PO Vargas engaged in a pattern of unlawful stops and frisks.

While the incidents supporting this finding occurred in 2020 and were substantiated by the CCRB, NYPD did not take appropriate remedial or disciplinary action with respect to three of the four incidents.

In addition to the issues outlined above, Officer Vargas was not placed in the Monitoring Program for almost five years despite having been eligible since 2019. In March 2024, PO Vargas was placed in Level I CCRB Monitoring by the Risk Management Division. According to the department, PO Vargas was eligible for monitoring based on two separate criteria: (1) six or more CCRB complaints in the past five years, and (2) two or more substantiated F.A.D.O. (force, abuse of authority, discourtesy, and offensive language) complaints in the past five years. PO Vargas met the criteria for monitoring as early as May 2019, when he was the subject of six CCRB complaints in a five-year period. The following year, he was the subject of seven additional CCRB complaints. In October 2021, despite the substantiated CCRB matters, he was transferred to the Patrol Borough Bronx Public Safety Team (PST).<sup>2</sup>

When PO Vargas was ultimately placed on Monitoring in March 2024, the approved plan of action did not account for his previous change in assignment from field enforcement to

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<sup>1</sup> The NYPD Independent Federal Monitor identified at least 425 substantiated misconduct cases dismissed by former Police Commissioner Edward Caban in 2022 on the grounds that they were submitted to NYPD too close in time to the statute of limitations date. "Of particular concern to the Monitor, 48 of the cases were findings of improper stop, question, frisk or search of person ("SQFS") by the officer." New York Police Department Monitor, Twenty-First Report of the Independent Monitor, NYPD MONITOR (Sept. 4, 2024), available at [https://www.nypdmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/21st-Monitor-Report-General-Compliance-Report\\_Stamped.pdf](https://www.nypdmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/21st-Monitor-Report-General-Compliance-Report_Stamped.pdf). CCRB 202003654 appears to be consistent with those cases.

<sup>2</sup> Public Safety Teams are command units similar in enforcement duties and responsibilities to Neighborhood Safety Teams, which "are tasked with taking illegal guns off the street[,] . . . are not expected to handle 911 calls-for-service from the public and are expected to engage in proactive enforcement to address violent crimes." New York Police Department Monitor, Twenty-First Report of the Independent Monitor, NYPD MONITOR (Sept. 4, 2024), available at [https://www.nypdmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/21st-Monitor-Report-General-Compliance-Report\\_Stamped.pdf](https://www.nypdmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/21st-Monitor-Report-General-Compliance-Report_Stamped.pdf).

administrative duty in 2022, following a line of duty incident in which Officer Vargas was shot in the arm and he and another officer shot and killed an individual.<sup>3</sup>

Given the expectation that officers in PST engage primarily in self-initiated enforcement and PO Vargas' substantiated unlawful stops and frisks during those encounters, we recommend that he be prohibited from working within a unit like this in the future. We also recommend that RTCC work with the Risk Management Division to develop a more appropriate Monitoring Plan for PO Vargas, as his current plan does not account for his duties in RTCC. Finally, we request that NYPD provide a response in writing regarding the monitoring deficiencies identified above.

We request a written response from NYPD within 90 days pursuant to Executive Law § 75(5)(c).

Thank you,

LETITIA JAMES  
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<sup>3</sup> In May 2022, PO Vargas was involved in an incident in which he was shot in the arm by Rameek Smith, who was subsequently shot and killed by PO Vargas and another officer. This death of Mr. Smith was investigated by OAG's Office of Special Investigations, which did not seek criminal charges against PO Vargas. *See* New York State Office of the Attorney General, Office of Special Investigations, Report on the Investigation into the Death of Rameek Smith (Sept. 13, 2024), available at <https://ag.ny.gov/sites/default/files/reports/osi-rameek-smith-final>.