

DOI Finds NYPD Kept HA in Dark on Felons

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, December 14, 2015 5:00 pm

The NYPD consistently failed to share information with the Housing Authority about violent offenses and serious drug arrests involving its tenants, potentially helping to drive crime higher in public-housing developments, the Department of Investigation said Dec. 8.

The breakdown violated a 19-year-old agreement between the two agencies to help stem crime by increasing security and evicting lawbreakers from the HA.

Union: Must Do More

Though the de Blasio administration initiated a series of policy changes in response to the findings, Greg Floyd, the president of Teamsters Local 237, which represents many front-line HA employees, said conditions remained dangerous and warranted more-serious interventions.

The DOI released the report as crime in the HA's 328 developments stubbornly persisted, bucking the citywide drop in serious offenses. Though there are some declines at 15 sites targeted by the administration, one-fifth of the city's shootings occur in public housing and residents are four times more likely to be shot on HA property than in the five boroughs overall, the DOI said. It concluded that some of the agencies' lapses "have contributed to disproportionately high violent-crime rates at NYCHA."

The findings were issued two months after the fatal shooting of Police Officer Randolph Holder while he chased a suspect following a gun battle at an East Harlem housing project. Police charged Tyrone Howard, an HA resident who remained as a tenant even though he had been arrested several times since 2005.

Faults Both Agencies



Mark Peters

MARK PETERS: NYPD didn't inform, HA didn't act.

“DOI’s year-long investigation demonstrated, first, that the NYPD did not fully inform NYCHA about criminal activity in public housing, and second, that even when NYCHA knew of such activity, it simply failed to address the real and present danger,” DOI Commissioner Mark G. Peters said in a statement.

The NYPD is required to give the HA reports on residents arrested for particular violent and drug crimes, according to an agreement signed in 1996 after the Housing Authority Police Department was merged into the NYPD. But police “routinely” violated the terms since 2011, when the department stopped providing the bulk of the results “without explanation.”

Looking over a one-month sample of incidents from March, investigators found that of 27 major arrests of residents on HA property, only two-thirds were reported to housing officials. Among those not shared included arrests for gun and Taser possession, snorting heroin outside and two instances of attempted rape by the same person.

‘Toothless’ on Evictions

But even in cases when the HA got the data on crimes committed on its grounds or by tenants, it was “toothless” in pushing out potentially dangerous residents. The authority’s “permanent exclusion” policies let it bar offenders, but allowed other members of their households to stay. The DOI found that the ranks of investigative and legal staff charged with looking into 5,000 expulsion cases had been cut by nearly 70 percent, they lacked radios and vests, and suffered from an overly bureaucratic case-management system.

“It is notable that NYCHA withdraws over 40 percent of tenancy-termination cases brought based on NYPD-referred allegations of serious criminal misconduct,” the report said. “Likewise, it is startling that only 6 percent of cases are brought to the administrative-hearing stage. These raw numbers appear to demonstrate that NYCHA is not aggressively pursuing criminal offenders in order to remove them from public housing.”

Mr. Howard was arrested on or near HA property in 2005, 2007 and 2009. Though he told police he lived in the East River Houses, they didn’t tell public-housing officials about the arrests. After subsequent police run-ins in 2011 and 2014, the authority took steps to bar Mr. Howard but the process was still ongoing when Officer Holder was shot.

Will Speed Evictions

After the DOI shared its report with the administration, Mayor de Blasio announced Dec. 2 that it would change HA policies to include starting eviction or permanent-exclusion procedures within one week of being informed of a “high-risk” case and by kicking out some suspects within two months of getting cases from police. The HA will also look beyond the most-recent arrest to

decide which cases to prioritize.

“We will not allow individuals who pose serious risk to public safety to put lives in jeopardy,” Mr. de Blasio said last week. “Improved NYPD and NYCHA communication and process will shorten eviction and exclusion proceedings from public housing to weeks, as opposed to months, for serious offenders.”

Police officials said the department was reviewing the “reporting inconsistencies.”

“The NYPD has been working closely with NYCHA in establishing formalized reporting criteria and protocols and developing an interactive database for documenting, communicating and following up on case referrals as required,” an NYPD spokesman said in an e-mail.

Union Leader Skeptical

Mr. Floyd said he wasn't convinced his members would see safety improvements without more police presence, better law-enforcement response rates and more input from residents and employees about security concerns. “We are not going to be fooled by any reports put out by this administration,” said Mr. Floyd, who recently has been critical of the Mayor on several issues. “The bottom line is NYCHA is a dangerous place to live and work, and until something is done, it's going to remain that way.”

He said instances of employees being attacked or victimized were piling up, citing a Dec. 6 robbery of an employee at the Mitchel Houses in the South Bronx to which police didn't respond. “There's always one excuse after another,” he said. “When are we ever going to solve the problems?”