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CITY OF NEW YORK & TENNIS PRO JAMES BLAKE ANNOUNCE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM TO INVESTIGATE MORE CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARD CASES

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio, Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), and tennis professional James Blake today announced the creation of the James Blake CCRB Fellowship, a program to help the CCRB reduce the number of complaints closed without a full investigation. These cases comprised slightly over half (55 percent) of CCRB's cases in 2016, and are largely the result of complainants, victims, or witnesses who—for various reasons—do not participate in the CCRB's investigation of their complaint. As a result, in these cases the CCRB cannot determine whether misconduct occurred.

Mr. Blake's interest in this issue arose out of an incident that occurred in September of 2015, when in a case of mistaken identity, he was taken to the ground and cuffed by a New York City police officer while standing in front of his hotel in midtown Manhattan. He was released from custody once another officer recognized Mr. Blake and realized the mistake. In the course of discussions with City officials concerning the incident, the idea emerged for providing assistance to CCRB complainants in navigating the system by which civilian complaints against police officers are investigated and ultimately adjudicated.

Through the CCRB, civilians have recourse to investigate and hold accountable law enforcement for police misconduct. As part of the administration's larger effort to improve police-community relations, James Blake has chosen to assist the City in filling an important unmet need. Helping the CCRB investigate more complaints, more completely, is critical to addressing instances of alleged police misconduct. The James Blake CCRB Fellowship acknowledges the essential role of civilians in improving police-community relations and it is created in service of the City's ongoing mission to improve its work with New Yorkers at all levels of government.

The first fellow, slated to start in January 2018, will support complainants by helping them navigate the CCRB process. Additionally, the fellow will foster relationships with community leaders and increase awareness of CCRB across the City, but particularly in neighborhoods with the highest truncation rates.

“Transparency and accountability are critical to further strengthening the bonds between law enforcement officials and the communities they serve. The James Blake CCRB Fellowship is rooted in this administration's deep commitment to improving those relations,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “The tireless efforts of committed and qualified fellows will help deliver on the transparency and accountability civilians and police officers deserve by ensuring that more complaints are thoroughly investigated and more cases are closed.”

“To do our job well, we have to better understand what it takes to support community members through the CCRB complaint and investigation process,” said **CCRB Chair Maya Wiley**. “We have accomplished much over the past few years—reducing case processing times, eliminating a backlog of complaints, and exponentially increasing CCRB’s presence in the community. And we know we need to do more. The James Blake CCRB Fellowship is an investment in our efforts to address these questions. Building upon improvements the Agency has already made, future fellows will aid CCRB by exploring new approaches to completing investigations.”

“The James Blake CCRB Fellowship will enhance the Civilian Complaint Review Board process by ensuring complaints are investigated both quickly and thoroughly,” said **Police Commissioner James P. O’Neill**.

“The James Blake CCRB Fellowship ensures that civilian complainants better understand the CCRB process so that complaints supported by sufficient evidence are fully and fairly resolved,” said **New York City Corporation Counsel Zachary W. Carter**.

James Blake said, “I want to thank the City of New York and the Mayor’s Office for sharing my belief that this is an important issue that deserves to be a priority. I also want to thank my attorney, Kevin Marino, who has worked tirelessly to make this fellowship happen. It has been my intention since Day One to turn a negative situation into a positive, and I think this fellowship accomplishes that goal.”

“Residents of New York have a right to a fair, comprehensive, and transparent complaint process for adjudicating potential police misconduct. This fellowship has the potential to resolve cases in a timely manner that usually go unsolved. In order to best protect New Yorkers, we need to be able fully investigate all cases before the CCRB,” said **Council Member Richie Torres**.

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