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City of New York Announces Inaugural James Blake Fellow

Bernadette Brown, Nationally-Recognized Criminal Justice Reform Advocate, to Identify Best Practices for Supporting Civilians Who File Complaints of Police Misconduct

New York, NY – Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) Chair Fred Davie, in conjunction with Mayor Bill de Blasio, Corporation Counsel Zachary W. Carter, Police Commissioner James P. O’Neill, and tennis professional James Blake, today announced that former New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) Deputy Legislative Director Bernadette Brown will serve as the Agency’s inaugural James Blake CCRB Fellow.

Brown will work closely with the CCRB’s Investigations Division and its Outreach and Intergovernmental Affairs, Policy and Advocacy, and Administrative Prosecution Units during the two-year fellowship to identify ways the Agency can better serve New Yorkers. Chief among the objectives of the fellowship is addressing barriers that impede civilians’ ability to complete the complaint process.

Brown will focus her efforts on select geographically-clustered precincts with similar truncation rates and demographics. In 2017, 55 percent of CCRB complaints were truncated, or closed without a full investigation conducted. More than half of these “truncations” were a result of an individual filing a complaint and subsequently not remaining in the process for the length of a full investigation or failing to provide an official statement as required as part of the process. In such cases, the CCRB is unable to complete an investigation and thus unable to determine whether misconduct occurred. The Blake Fellowship will be an avenue for the CCRB to continue reducing the truncation rate, which has declined since reaching an all-time high (65 percent) in 2013. A more detailed review of truncation statistics can be found in the [CCRB 2017 Annual Report](#).

Brown is an expert on policing, criminal justice, and juvenile justice reform with experience serving vulnerable populations such as youth, LGBTQI communities, survivors of sexual violence, and communities of color. She has worked at various organizations focused on civil rights and justice, including the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, the Urban Strategies Council, and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and is a consultant for the National Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Resource Center, where she assists jails, prisons, and juvenile detention facilities throughout the country on the implementation of PREA.

Within each organization, Brown has excelled as a respected liaison between prosecutors, corrections officers, police officers, and community members. The Columbia University and Boston University School of Law graduate also has conducted nationwide trainings and presentations on law enforcement and the correctional system with an emphasis on the impact of criminal justice institutions on members of underrepresented groups.

About the James Blake CCRB Fellowship

Established in June 2017, the James Blake CCRB Fellowship aims to help the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board, the nation's largest independent police oversight entity, reduce the number of complaints closed without a full investigation.

Tennis professional James Blake worked with the City to create the fellowship as part of a settlement agreement of Mr. Blake's notice of claim after a September 2015 excessive force incident. Blake was briefly taken into custody by a police officer, but later released when a fellow officer realized that Blake had been mistakenly identified as a suspect. Since the encounter, in an effort to bring greater accountability to policing, Blake has actively engaged the City to identify ways to prevent similar incidents going forward.

Through the fellowship, Blake and the City hope to improve the CCRB's operations and bolster police oversight in New York.

Statement from Mayor Bill de Blasio:

"Growing trust between police and communities starts with transparency and accountability. The James Blake CCRB Fellow carries the responsibility of deepening that effort and upholding those principles by helping civilians navigate the complaint process to ensure that all incidents of alleged police misconduct are fully investigated."

Statement from CCRB Chair Fred Davie:

"The strength of the CCRB's relationship with New Yorkers is essential to ensuring the CCRB can hold the NYPD accountable and improve police-community relations, but it is just one of many factors that may determine whether someone who files a complaint remains in contact with the Agency."

"Bernadette Brown comes to the CCRB with a wealth of experience in evaluating institutions, building relationships within communities, and implementing data-driven solutions for positive change. I look forward to working with Bernadette on the important task of identifying barriers that influence the truncation rate and exploring new strategies for facilitating navigation of the complaint process."

Statement from New York City Corporation Counsel Zachary W. Carter:

"The James Blake Fellowship is named in tribute to a professional athlete who chose to make his encounter with the police a teaching moment. The James Blake Fellow will provide guidance and support to individuals who file CCRB complaints so that they are more likely to see the process through to its conclusion."

Statement from Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill:

"The James Blake CCRB Fellowship will enhance the Civilian Complaint Review Board process by ensuring complaints are investigated both quickly and thoroughly."

Statement from James Blake:

"In the spirit of making the best effort to turn a negative into a positive, today it's an honor to announce the first James Blake CCRB Fellow in New York. After a distressing encounter with a police officer in 2015, I was lucky to not suffer worse injuries and also fortunate that I had the ability to stand up and fight

for what's right. While improving police-community relations is an ongoing endeavor, this fellowship is a large step in the right direction.”

Statement from Blake Attorney Kevin H. Marino:

“We are pleased to inaugurate the Blake CCRB Fellow dedicated to the goal of police accountability. We are hopeful that this Fellowship, which is the product of the cooperative relationship we forged with the City and the Mayor in light of Mr. Blake’s unlawful seizure, will enable the CCRB to more effectively investigate and prosecute cases of police misconduct.”

Statement from Blake Fellow Bernadette Brown:

“As the first James Blake CCRB Fellow, I’m honored to have the opportunity to serve an agency that is a national civilian model for police oversight. As I work alongside various units within the CCRB and build relationships with community members, I hope to identify potential policy changes that ultimately can lead to behavioral changes at the Agency and within the City.”

“After years of examining law enforcement and criminal justice institutions, I have learned that progress starts with meeting people where they are, listening to their concerns, and taking action based on what they need. I am eager to work closely with both civilians and members of the NYPD over the next two years to build upon the steps the Agency already has taken to more thoroughly investigate complaints and resolve cases.”

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The New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) is the largest police oversight entity in the nation and is empowered to investigate, mediate, prosecute, and recommend disciplinary action for complaints alleging misconduct by NYPD officers. See NYC Charter § 440(c)(1). The agency's jurisdiction includes excessive and unnecessary force, abuse of authority, discourtesy, and use of offensive language. To further this mission, CCRB issues monthly, biannual, and special statistical and qualitative reports analyzing trends and recurring issues arising from the many thousands of civilian complaints it receives each year.