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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM NJSPBA PRESIDENT PATRICK COLLIGAN ON THE
NJ ADVANCE MEDIA "REPORT" ON POLICE USE OF FORCE.***

A story today from NJ Advance Media (nj.com) on law enforcement use of force will look to develop controversy and discontent by providing data with little context about the use of force officers are required to use. Police officers face an unparalleled challenge of saving lives, restoring peace, and bringing criminals to justice. The situations they face are dynamic and involve split second decisions. They are not done within the safety and security of a newsroom. The actions they take can mean life or death. In 2016 alone over 1,800 New Jersey Police Officers were assaulted while doing the job of protecting the communities they serve. The number of assaults on officers increased 8% and contempt for law enforcement is a growing trend nationwide. Often thanks to irresponsible and half-written articles like the one released today.

Yes, law enforcement is permitted to use force, and newspapers buy ink in barrels. No revelations there. Unfortunately print media has all but disappeared and has been replaced with online news. When you can't count newspapers anymore to tout your commercial success you have to generate "clicks" to sell advertising at top dollar. Regretfully, that has led to the demise of legitimate journalism in this country.

I knew where this "investigative report" was going the moment I saw the teaser headings and salacious preview video. It worked a few months ago for another NJ news organization so why not give it a crack here at nj.com. They have provide d you with a clickable database for watercooler banter today, nothing more. Like TMZ, Inside Edition and the like they are giving you a suggestive bit of sensational data to keep an unsuspecting public engaged. Regretfully and unfortunately they have only told half the story. True journalists at least *attempt* to tell an entire story.

WHY was force used? Was it justified? Did the officer prevent a violent rape or violent assault? Did they tackle a fleeing robbery suspect? Was the suspect resisting arrest? You will never know. You see, NJ.com only used the *single page* Use of Force reports. The Investigation report, supplemental reports and witness statements would tell the whole story but nj.com didn't work on getting them. That would require significantly more work and journalistic ability instead of having interns entering data into a spreadsheet for the last several months. Time is money when you need to generate clicks to sell advertising. Regrettably, "clicks" are today's benchmark for journalistic success.

Unreasonable or criminal uses of force are discovered more quickly today than ever before thanks to body cams, dash cams and the omnipresent cell phone. I say "thanks to" because I don't want those officers in our ranks as much as the public doesn't. They don't belong in our profession. But use of force isn't pretty and what may look like unreasonable force to the untrained eye is an acceptable use of force under the law. That decision will be determined by a prosecutor, judge and jury, not the amount of clicks it received online or irresponsible comments under a suggestive and misleading headline to make you click.

Articles like this only makes a difficult job today incredibly more difficult. The officer that is "number one" today in your community on the database is likely the officer that consistently leads the agency in arrests. Good arrests. He is the officer that is proactively patrolling and attempting to put a dent in crime in your community. And congratulations nj.com, now that officer will be doing everything he can to stay off your "half story" spreadsheet next year and the year after that.

Improvements to our profession will continue with the support and assistance of the communities and citizens we serve, not with click bait entertainment.

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