



**For Immediate Release**

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**BLM Protesters Sue City of South Pasadena for Police Department's  
Infringement of Their First Amendment Rights,  
Failure to Protect Them from Hate Crimes, and Racial Bias**

**South Pasadena, CA** - Yesterday, two Black Lives Matter protesters who were the victims of multiple hate crimes while peacefully protesting for racial justice and police accountability in South Pasadena filed a [civil rights lawsuit](#) against the City. Fahren James, the founder of Black Lives Matter South Pasadena, and Victoria Patterson, a BLM ally and a nearly thirty-year resident of the City, allege the City's police department failed to carry out its mandatory duties to protect them from repeat and escalating attacks by White supremacist vigilantes. Ms. James also alleges claims against the City for infringing on her First Amendment right to peacefully protest, her right to bodily safety, and her right to be free from discrimination on account of her race. The lawsuit is brought by the law firms Hoq Law; Schonbrun Seplow Harris, Hoffman & Zeldes, and V. James DeSimone Law.

The lawsuit focuses on a string of disturbing attacks on BLM demonstrators in the summer and fall of 2020, when Ms. James led a series of peaceful racial justice protests in the wake of the callous killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. The lawsuit alleges that during the protests, a man armed with a sharpened stick and spewing racist comments spat on Ms. James and Ms. Patterson. Two days later he struck Ms. James with a fist-sized rock. A week after that he returned with a lead pipe under his arm to threaten physical harm on a group of protesters including Ms. James and Ms. Patterson. Later, a different man - Richard Cheney, a supporter of the Proud Boys who is also a Defendant in the case - jumped a sidewalk and nearly ran Ms. James over in his commercial truck to stop her from putting up a protest sign.

The lawsuit alleges that when Ms. James and Ms. Patterson reported the attacks, the South Pasadena Police Department ("SPPD") responded with apathy, dereliction of their duties, discriminatory enforcement, and complicity with the attackers. Among other things, SPPD blamed the BLM protesters for bringing "hate" to the City.

"I am an African American woman who was the victim of multiple hate crimes, but SPPD treated me as less than human, particularly when they sided with my White attackers, leaving them free to attack me again and again. I felt like SPPD was emboldening White supremacists because of a misconception that Black Lives Matter was anti-police. I am hurt and sickened by it all, but cannot rest until I get justice," said Plaintiff Fahren James. Ms. James and Ms. Patterson allege that SPPD's response was a reflection of a top-down culture of White supremacy and racial bias supported by many throughout the ranks of SPPD. At the time of the attacks, the police

department was headed by a police chief who promoted a far-right prayer breakfast in front of City Hall, who was later put on administrative leave and retired early without discipline.

The lawsuit is the latest effort to hold the City to account for the rogue and unchecked actions of its police force. “The City’s actions not only directly violated the civil rights of Ms. James, Ms. Patterson and other racial justice protesters, but also allowed the perpetrators of hate crimes to act with impunity, leaving the racially diverse South Pasadena community unsafe,” said Laboni Hoq, lead attorney for the Plaintiffs. Following the string of attacks in 2020, scores of community members filed [53 formal complaints against SPPD](#). The City investigated those complaints, and sustained 21 of them, finding that a quarter of the department’s sworn officers failed to comply with hate crimes obligations, failed to take detailed and accurate reports of the incidents, were hostile and dismissive of individuals seeking to lodge complaints, and turned off their body cameras during critical interactions with witnesses and perpetrators.

Despite these disturbing findings, the City has failed to hold the police department accountable. Instead, it allowed the police department to quietly amend its policy manual to downgrade its hate crimes procedures to make it easier for the police to do nothing. “The City had mandatory duties to both undertake heightened investigations and protect our clients, for which it must now be held to account,” said Will Harris, counsel for the Plaintiffs. The City’s investigation also failed to sustain a single complaint of biased policing, despite documented reports of SPPD officers making overtly biased comments against BLM protesters, and the fact that its collective actions reveal a pattern of bias against those reporting hate crimes.

In the face of the City’s brazen attempt to try to brush these disturbing findings under the rug, Ms. James, Ms. Patterson and local community groups filed a [complaint with the California Attorney General’s Office](#), asking it to investigate SPPD. That complaint is currently under review. They also have lobbied the South Pasadena City Council to undertake a racial bias audit of SPPD, to both root out officers who are affiliated with White supremacists and other extremist ideologies, and also address any disparate impact that department’s policies and practices have on racial minorities and other diverse communities. The City Council has not committed to do so. “The City Council’s silence is deafening - week after week we have made public comment at their meetings, pleading with them to root out racism in the police force, to no avail. I am living proof that this issue affects all of us, and the City must be forced to do the right thing to protect our safety,” said Plaintiff Victoria Patterson.

“We have First Amendment rights to free speech, freedom of assembly and the right to redress grievances. Ms. James and Ms. Patterson were exercising those rights peacefully. If the City of South Pasadena won’t enforce the law equally, we intend to hold them accountable through a Federal Civil Rights lawsuit. We are honored to represent them in their righteous pursuit of justice,” said V. James DeSimone, counsel for the Plaintiffs. Ms. James and Ms. Patterson seek damages and injunctive relief, so they and their fellow protesters will be able to exercise their right to free speech without fear for their bodily safety.