
New Jersey Adopts Ban on Racial Profiling

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TRENTON, March 13 — Nearly five years after New Jersey state troopers shot three unarmed minority men and ignited a furor over racial profiling, the State Legislature today passed a bill making it a crime for the police to use race as the primary factor in determining whom to stop and search.

The General Assembly today passed a bill that would make such profiling punishable by five years in prison and a \$15,000 fine. A corresponding bill has already cleared the Senate, and Gov. James E. McGreevey immediately announced plans to sign the bill Friday morning.

Although the state acknowledged in 2000 that some officers routinely singled out drivers because of their skin color, the move to criminalize the practice has languished for three years amid bitter partisan fights and furious lobbying from law enforcement groups and civil rights activists.

In recent weeks, the proposal had been blocked because of concerns by law enforcement officials, who worried that the bill's language might prohibit police officers from broadcasting the race of a crime suspect in radio bulletins. But Peter C. Harvey, New Jersey's acting attorney general, this week sent lawmakers a letter assuring them that the measure did not prohibit the use of racial descriptions to search for suspects.

Assemblyman William D. Payne, who sponsored the bill, said he was relieved that New Jersey had finally managed to outlaw a tactic that was already a violation of federal civil rights laws.

"It's been a long road to get there," said Mr. Payne, a Newark Democrat, "but we are finally at the threshold of having a law that will stop heinous, humiliating, degrading acts by police officers."

After the Assembly passed the bill by a vote of 50 to 21, the head of the State Troopers Fraternal Association said he hoped that the bill would help put the issue of racial profiling to rest, and allow the state police to regain the public's confidence.

Though the union had fought angrily for years to block the bill, its president, Ken McClelland, said today that he was satisfied that the revised version would not interfere with police officers' trying to apprehend suspects. "No police officer should pull over a person because of what they look like, these actions diminish all the good we do every day, and this bill sends a strong message that such activity will be punished," he said. "It also will not prevent an officer from doing good police work."

Civil rights leaders said they were relieved that the bill was now set to become law, but some were surprised that 21 assemblymen opposed it, and 6 others abstained from voting.

"It is encouraging that the gap between the minority community and the troopers was bridged so that both could support this bill," said the Rev. Reginald T. Jackson, executive director of the Black Ministers Council of New Jersey. "That makes it all the more unfortunate that 27 members of the Legislature did not vote to outlaw something that is so obviously immoral and should be illegal."

But legislators who did not support the measure said they were simply troubled by the language of this particular bill, and would be willing to vote for an antiprofiling proposal that was more clearly, and narrowly, written. "Today we should not vote for this knowing that the attorney general has had to write us a letter to tell us that the bill is fundamentally flawed," said Assemblyman Guy R. Gregg, a Flanders Republican.

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