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## Commentary: Police sex scandal needs outside investigation (East Bay Times)



Patrick Tehan/Bay Area News Group

Celeste Guap, the Richmond 19-year-old at the center of a police sex scandal, was freed Wednesday from a Florida jail. Supervisor John Gioia calls for an outside investigation of the scandal

By **JOHN GIOIA**

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Like so many throughout the Bay Area, I am concerned by the allegations that a 19-year old Richmond woman was sexually exploited by 29 law enforcement officers from multiple jurisdictions in Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco and San Joaquin counties.

While there's been substantial media coverage of this issue, we don't know all the facts. We only know what we see in the media or on social media, which are often layered with opinions and rumors.

One thing that's overwhelmingly clear is that this situation is complex and troubling on many fronts. It's especially concerning when allegations of sexual exploitation are against individual law enforcement professionals who are entrusted with the duty to protect the public and prevent human trafficking.

Law enforcement agencies are conducting internal investigations, and releasing their reports. But this case raises important issues of who should oversee these types of complicated, multi-jurisdictional investigations, and how can we best maintain public trust in our law enforcement institutions.

This situation calls for an outside investigation by the state Attorney General.

There is precedent for having the state or U.S. Attorney General's Office step in and conduct investigations and prosecutions of potential criminal allegations that are made against local law enforcement personnel.

We must completely remove any perception of bias by asking the attorney general to initiate an investigation. This level of review is an important step in preserving and restoring public trust in our justice system, which is what all of us in the public and in law enforcement really want.

As a co-founder of the County's Family Justice System, I have had extensive conversations with advocates and victims, and understand that sexual exploitation and human trafficking are complicated, challenging problems. Traditional distinctions between perpetrators, victims and witnesses are often unclear, and achieving justice requires careful discernment and empathy.

State Attorney General Kamala Harris highlights the important issue at the core of this case when her office stated, "The allegations of police misconduct are

extremely disturbing and an alarming breach of trust placed in law enforcement by the communities we are sworn to serve.”

This theme of public trust was reiterated by Richmond Police Chief Allwyn Brown in his recent report to the City Council when he stated, “Police officers are held to a higher standard with regard to both their personal and professional conduct because the nature of their duties requires the public’s trust.”

Alameda County’s district attorney recently announced that criminal charges will be filed against seven police officers from Oakland, Livermore and the Contra Costa Sheriff’s department.

The district attorney has publicly stated she was not consulted when Richmond and Contra Costa officials helped arrange for the young woman to attend a drug rehabilitation program in Florida. As a result, the district attorney has stated that she cannot file criminal charges until her main witness returns to California.

The Richmond Police Department’s internal investigation concluded that “The facts show individual, unconnected, non-criminal engagements and other activities that violate multiple department policies and the professional Code of Ethics on the part of several RPD officers” and recommended that some unstated number of officers be either fired, reprimanded or offered counseling.

I have great respect for the dedicated and competent work of our local prosecutors and law enforcement professionals, including the role of internal investigations. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the men and women in law enforcement serve the public responsibly and with the highest level of integrity.

I have heard from many community members that this case is testing public trust in police. Everyone, the public and law enforcement, deserve a process which is impartial, transparent and respectful of public trust.

*John Gioia represents West County on the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors.*