



Everything New Orleans

The Times-Picayune

NOPD to expedite crime reports

TP had sued over getting them sooner

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From staff reports

The New Orleans Police Department agreed Friday to make incident reports available after they are approved by a shift supervisor, settling a court dispute with The Times-Picayune over how long it should take before the public can see the reports.

The department had contended that the reports should be shielded from public view until they arrived at a records room in police headquarters, a process that can take two weeks.

The newspaper said the reports are public records as soon as they are written. Generally, an officer writes the reports before his or her shift is over.

State law says that initial incident reports are public records and it includes a list of details they are supposed to contain, such as the location of the crime and a description of what happened. Other documents, such as reports from detectives on the status of their investigations, are shielded from public view and the newspaper did not seek those in its suit.

Under the terms of the settlement, the Police Department is allowed to contend that some sensitive details of a police report may be exempt from public view. In those instances, the department must provide a copy of the document that omits those details.

The newspaper sued the department over a variety of public access issues April 18.

The Police Department agreed to comply with other public records requests from the newspaper, most of which sought crime statistics.

Under state law, the losing party in a public records dispute must pay the winner's legal fees. As part of their deal, the newspaper and the Police Department agreed to try to resolve the question of what legal fees are owed to The Times-Picayune. If they cannot agree, the issue will be decided by Civil District Judge Kern Reese, who approved the settlement Friday.