

Francisco Colon



Francisco “Frank” Colon is a lieutenant and Inspector in the Providence, Rhode Island, Police Department, serving as Commanding Officer of the Internal Investigations and Inspections Division. He was named to this post in 2003 by newly hired Providence Chief Dean Esserman. Over the years since he joined the Department in 1987, he has worked in patrol, as a narcotics investigator with the Special Investigations Bureau, in a uniformed community policing unit, and as a detective.

Colon’s transformative contribution to the professionalization and public reputation of the Providence Police Department lies in his work commanding the Internal Investigations and Inspections Division. He took that post against a long and sordid history of local government corruption involving the former mayor of Providence, various other city officials and police officers. During the years prior to 2003, the Internal Investigations and Inspections Division was not organized or led in a way that made much of a contribution to stemming police misconduct. Working in the unit was a Monday through Friday assignment with weekends and holidays off. The unit had lost the trust and respect of the good officers and the trust and confidence of the citizens of Providence. The managers and investigators who were assigned to this office were not interested in holding officers accountable or in building the trust of the community. Partly as a consequence of this neglect, the Department was plagued by cronyism and corruption at the highest levels. It was a culture of pay to play.

As part of a new wave among the Department’s command staff, Colon made a commitment to hold officers accountable and to build the respect, trust, and confidence in this office, not only with the officers but especially within the community. He considers the most important of many decisions he made during this period to be the appointment of certain investigators and supervisors to this bureau. He recalls that as the members of his staff were slowly selected and transferred you could almost hear the gasps in the halls of headquarters. Officers were shocked that these individuals, who were highly respected, great street cops, with a history of great arrests, would accept an assignment to internal affairs. He admits that he too was pleasantly surprised that they agreed to join the team.

To help break old habits in the Internal Investigations and Inspections Division and old impressions of the character of the unit, Colon spear-headed some unconventional initiatives. For instance, he and members of his command began responding to calls for service from the public. Members of Internal Affairs now regularly respond to calls for service and often assist in arrests and investigations, and not only when misconduct is reported. Initially other responding officers appeared concerned but have become accustomed to seeing members of Internal Investigations at different jobs, which Colon believes helps to curb inappropriate behavior. In addition to demanding appropriate behavior by officers and taking swift action when rules are violated, another practice that seems to have helped build confidence and trust in the Internal Affairs Division is commending an officer when he or she has performed satisfactorily. A pat on the back by the Commanding Officer of Internal Affairs, he believes, goes a long way in helping build an organization of character. Similarly, Colon sees his unit as having a training function. He and his staff speak with every officer and his or her commanding officer when an allegation is made regardless of whether a formal complaint is filed. If information is received regarding an

allegation of misconduct the officer has a right to know—and may reflect on the encounter and figure out how to approach some jobs even more successfully in the future. His unit also is making the Providence Police Department more of a “learning organization” because even if a citizen doesn’t utter the words, “I have a complaint,” there is still an opportunity to use the incident to continuously improve the Department.

Colon earned an Associate’s Degree in Criminal Justice from Roger Williams College and a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Public Administration from Roger Williams University. He is a graduate of the Senior Management Institute for Police presented at Harvard University. He has participated in a variety of advanced training programs covering problem-oriented policing, internal affairs investigations, and other topics.

His awards and commendations include the Chief’s award for an 18 month investigation with the FBI’s Boston office which resulted in 14 arrests and the seizure of 1,353 pounds of cocaine; an award for the investigation and arrest of two subjects involved in an armed robbery; the American Legion Award; a commendation for the investigation and arrest of suspects involved in a major heroin and cocaine trafficking operation and the seizure of a large quantity of narcotics; the Chief’s award for an outstanding act in the performance of duty; a commendation for the arrest of 7 suspects involved in two armed robberies; a U.S. Customs Award for investigation into the illegal exportation of firearms; a commendation for the apprehension of a suspect involved in a shooting and recovery of the firearm; recognition by FBI Director Louis Freeh for undercover work and participation in a money laundering and cocaine-trafficking investigation; a commendation for the arrest of a murder suspect, the seizure of a large quantity of narcotics, and the seizure of two loaded firearms; a certificate of recognition by then Governor Lincoln Almond and appointment as Rhode Island Diversity Ambassador; a Citizens Citation awarded by Providence Mayor David Cicilline; and a citation from the Rhode Island House of Representatives for outstanding police work and commitment to public service.