



NOPD chief, police monitor sign agreement



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by Kevin McGill / Associated Press

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NEW ORLEANS -- New Orleans police chief Ronal Serpas signed an agreement with the city's independent police monitor Wednesday that both say will ensure the monitor can help hold accountable a police department long troubled by misconduct, including deadly use of force.

The signing took place at New Orleans City Hall, blocks from the federal courthouse where five officers were on trial in connection with the killing of Henry Glover, whose burned body turned up in Hurricane Katrina's aftermath in 2005.

Looking on as Serpas and police monitor Susan Hutson signed the document was Jasmine Groves, whose mother Kim was killed in 1994 on the orders of a police officer against whom she had filed a brutality complaint. The officer, Len Davis, has been sentenced to death in the killing.

"She stood for what she knew was right," Jasmine Groves said, her voice breaking as she clutched a photograph of her mother.

The memorandum of understanding assures police department cooperation with Hutson, a civilian employee in the city Inspector General's Office, as her staff monitors complaints about misconduct or use of force and makes policy recommendations.

Wednesday's signing was the latest effort by Serpas and Mayor Mitch Landrieu, who appointed Serpas chief shortly after taking office in May, to demonstrate the department's willingness to open itself to outside scrutiny and encourage people to come forward with any evidence of police misbehavior.

At Landrieu's request, the U.S. Justice Department announced in May a thorough review of the troubled department. The mayor said he would welcome a court-ordered agreement between the Justice Department and the city that would spell out and "institutionalize" specific reforms.

Serpas made clear Wednesday that Hutson will have a role in the overall reform effort, a role that was uncertain at times, before Landrieu took office.

Authorized by a City Council vote in July 2008, the police monitor's office was established in the city's relatively new Office of Inspector General. But early on, Inspector General Edward Quatreveaux complained that then-police chief Warren Riley was holding back documents and impeding the monitor's work.

Riley left when former Mayor Ray Nagin left office. Quatreveaux hired Hutson in April and she began work in June.

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