

LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

# PBA calls for ouster of Southampton Village Mayor Jesse Warren



Southampton Village Mayor Jesse Warren denied the allegations from the PBA criticizing his leadership and said the police union is being manipulated in a smear campaign against him. Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfost

**By Vera Chinese**

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The Southampton Village Police Benevolent Association has passed a vote of no confidence calling for the removal of Mayor Jesse Warren as police commissioner of the department, citing in part his support of an organization with an “anti-police message.”

The PBA recently conducted the nonbinding vote in favor of Warren's ouster, according to an Aug. 18 letter addressed to the village board of trustees and obtained by Newsday. It is not clear how many of the department's approximately 30 members took part in the vote. The letter cites six ways the mayor “has shown a lack of support and leadership for the department,” including support for the unnamed organization.

Warren has displayed “Black Lives Matter” signs in the two stores he owns in the village, spoke at a vigil in June following the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and posted messages in favor of the BLM movement on social media.

“The PBA respectfully requests Commissioner Warren be immediately replaced with someone that provides leadership and a willingness to work and communicate with the Department and the PBA,” reads the letter signed by village PBA president Michael Horstman.

The letter goes on to state that Warren requested the Southampton Town police assist the village in COVID-19 guidelines enforcement without discussing it with the PBA, conducted a “subversive investigation” into a graffiti incident, refused to hire a public safety dispatcher, did not approve purchase orders for the department and discussed “defunding” the department with village residents.

When reached Monday, Horstman declined to comment on the letter or the vote.

Trustee Kimberly Allan said Tuesday that the matter was between the police department and the mayor. Trustee Richard Yastrzemeski said he understood the officers' frustration, citing the national climate. Trustees Mark Parash and Andrew Pilaro did not return calls seeking comment.

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Warren denied the allegations, noting his proposed 2020-21 budget raised police spending from \$7.6 million to more than \$8 million and said he did hire a public safety dispatcher. He said he requested surveillance footage after pro-police and vulgar remarks about the mayor were posted to a wall in Southampton's Doscher Park but was denied since the investigation is active.

Warren said he did not request that the town police assist the village and that the directive came from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo. He added that he suspects the letter was politically motivated.

“I fully support our law enforcement community,” Warren said. “It's unfortunate that our police union is being

manipulated in what is very clearly a smear campaign driven by a certain former mayor who is trying to get his son elected. I'm confident most village residents will see through it. I applaud the officers who continue to put their lives on the line every day."

Zach Epley, son of Warren's predecessor, Mark Epley, is running for a seat on the village board in the Sept. 15 election. Warren is not up for reelection this year.

Mark Epley, who was mayor from 2005 until 2017 before deciding to step down, on Wednesday denied that he had influenced the PBA.

"It's him [Warren] not wanting to take responsibility for any of his actions," Epley said.

A PBA passing a vote of no confidence against its police commissioner is unusual, but not unprecedented. Last year the NYPD passed a vote of no confidence against Mayor Bill de Blasio and then-Commissioner James O'Neill after the firing of Daniel Pantaleo, the police officer involved in the 2014 chokehold death of Eric Garner.

Hempstead-based civil rights attorney Frederick Brewington, who is representing Southampton Village Police officer Kareem Proctor in a federal racial discrimination lawsuit against the village, said the PBA should be more specific if it is referring to the Black Lives Matter movement.

"The Black Lives Matter movement is not anti-police," Brewington said. "It is a historical tool to bring about recognition of the value of Black lives that has for far too long been ignored. This [PBA] action is yet another example of blatant ignorance."



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Vera Chinese joined Newsday in 2017 and covers the towns of Southampton, East Hampton and Shelter Island. A Long Island native, she has reported on East End issues for 10 years.



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