

'Torture warehouse:' Mayor demands investigation of BRPD facility after officer accused of beatings

BY ELYSE CARMOSINO and LARA NICHOLSON | Staff writers Aug 29, 2023 5 min to read



In one of two lawsuits filed this week, a 21-year-old man is accusing BRPD Officer Troy Lawrence Jr. of taking him to a warehouse and beating him. Lawrence, who has a history of abuse complaints, resigned from the department Tuesday.

A Baton Rouge police officer with a **history of abuse complaints** resigned Tuesday after two more lawsuits were filed accusing him of excessive force, including one that spurred Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome to order the department to stop using an interrogation site while it investigates the newest allegations.

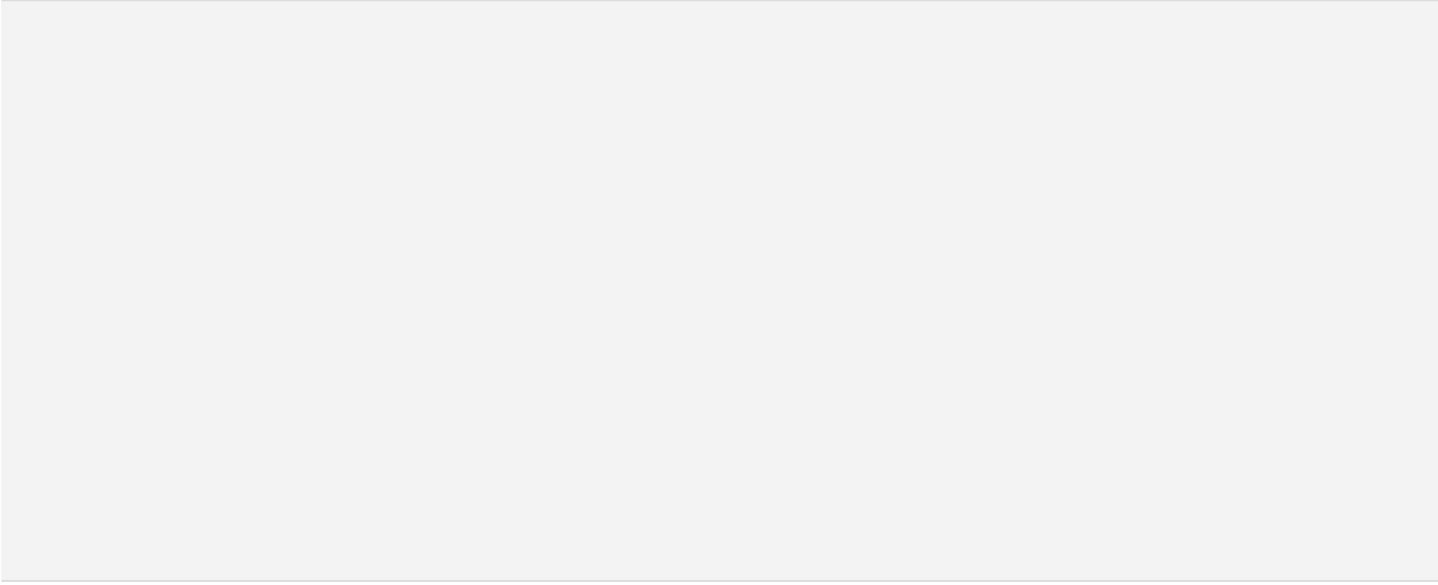
Before Tuesday, Troy Lawrence Jr., the son of a BRPD captain, had already been **reprimanded and suspended** multiple times, was the subject of two lawsuits and was on administrative leave due to complaints from supervisors. But then two new groups of plaintiffs accused him of battering four different people in 90 seconds and beating someone in his custody at what attorneys described as a "torture warehouse."

Lawrence was **placed on paid leave earlier this month** after supervisors sent Police Chief Murphy Paul a letter saying they didn't want him in the unit anymore and that he was "not responding to training," Paul said at a press conference Tuesday.

Paul also said he was in the termination process prior to Lawrence's resignation.

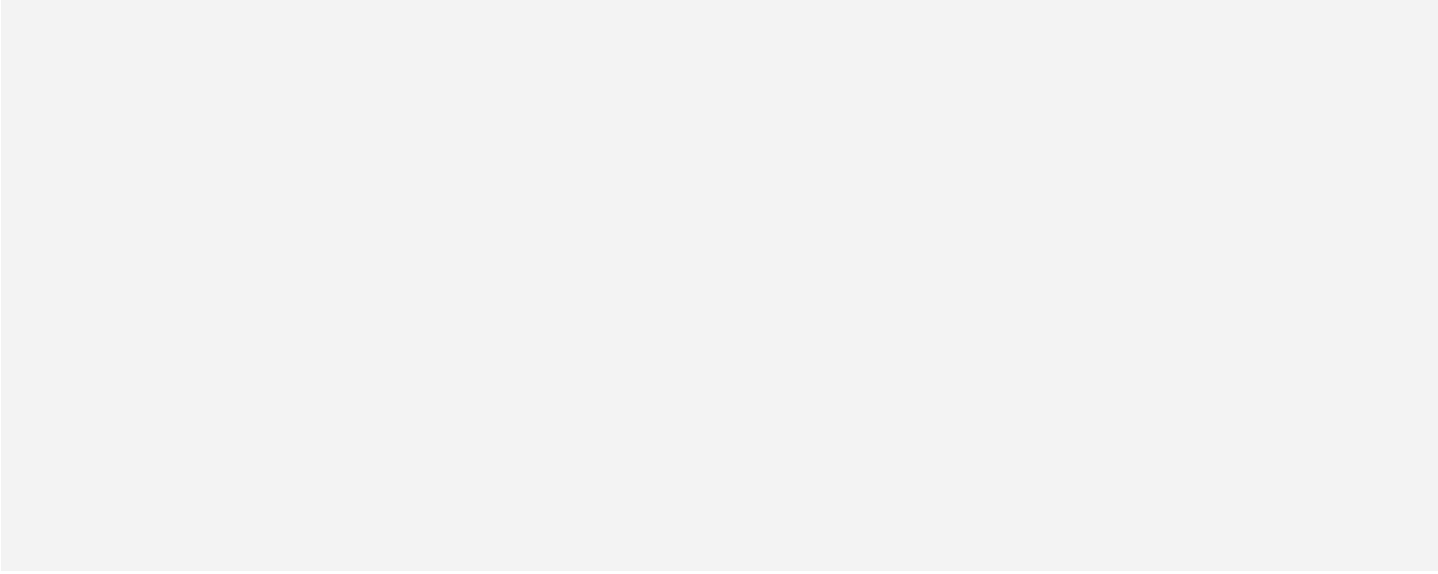
On Tuesday, Broome announced that she directed Paul to suspend all operations at the warehouse facility pending a "thorough investigation" by the Baton Rouge Police Department.

"The severity of these allegations deeply concerns me, especially given the potential impact on the trust our community places in us — a trust we've worked tirelessly to establish and maintain during my administration," said Broome, who added that she was previously unaware of the facility's existence.



BRPD officials said Tuesday an Internal Affairs investigation into the incident was underway, and that the warehouse in question was a narcotics processing facility that had been used for about 20 years to process “thousands of suspects,” drugs and other evidence.

“I would like to assure this community there’s nothing secretive about this narcotic processing facility,” said Administrative Chief Myron Daniels.



Paul said use of the facility would be suspended until changes identified by the administration were made, including the construction of an interview room consistent with other BRPD facilities and better external lighting, and it would likely reopen in September.

A 'torture warehouse'

In a lawsuit filed Tuesday evening, a 21-year-old man, identified as Jeremy Lee, accuses Lawrence of taking him into custody “without reasonable suspicion or probable cause” and placing him in the back of a BRPD vehicle before taking him to a warehouse, where he proceeded to beat him so badly that Lee was left with fractured ribs and other visible injuries.

According to the document, Lawrence arrived at a scene of a drug-related call on Cadillac Street on Jan. 9 and began discussing possible

evidence with another officer, Matthew Wallace, while periodically turning the audio and footage on his body camera off and on. He then approached the police car Lee was sitting in and began to swear at him and push him. Both officers at the scene “repeatedly accused Mr. Lee of 'resisting,’” the lawsuit says.

Despite Lee’s compliance with the officers, the men handcuffed Lee, forced him down in the middle of a paved street and pulled his pants down to search him, according to the lawsuit. While Lee was on the ground, Lawrence told him that he was “about to bat the living crap” out of him, the suit continues.

When Lee asked the officers why he was being arrested, they refused to give him a reason, the document states.

After going back and forth with onlookers for several minutes, Lawrence, sensing a “sudden mood change in the crowd,” decided to put Lee in a vehicle and transported him not to the police station, but to a “torture warehouse known to BRPD staff as ‘the BRAVE Cave,’” the lawsuit states.

Paul and his administration said at Tuesday’s press conference they had never heard the term “BRAVE Cave” used to describe the space prior to these allegations coming to light.

Once there, Lee was handcuffed in a holding cell.

He was then taken to a separate warehouse room by Lawrence, Wallace and a third officer, identified as Joseph Carboni, where they began to repeatedly kick and punch Lee as he screamed for help, according to the suit. The officers had their body cameras turned off during the incident, the complaint states. When subpoenaed, BRPD was unable to provide camera footage from the warehouse, responding that “no such footage exists.”

Lee’s injuries were so severe, the local jail refused to admit him until he was treated by a nearby hospital, the lawsuit says. He was taken to Our Lady of the Lake hospital and treated for a fractured left rib, chest pain and facial pain, as well as difficulty breathing.

Lee was ultimately booked on two counts of battery of a police officer and one count of resisting an officer, as well as multiple drug-related counts.

Four batteries in 90 seconds

A second federal lawsuit, filed Monday, alleges that Lawrence used profanity and excessive force while intervening in an argument outside a hospital on Oct. 8, 2022, resulting in the arrest of two people on charges that were later dropped.



A photo included in a lawsuit against Baton Rouge police depicts BRPD Officer Troy Lawrence Jr. grabbing the neck of Holden Sanders in an attempt to physically remove him from the car.

According to the document, a man who had been shot by BRPD was taken to Our Lady of the Lake Hospital, where an argument among his family members broke out outside the front entrance.

Two plaintiffs, Holden Sanders and Emanuel Chavis, allege that Lawrence overheard the argument and almost immediately began cursing as he ordered them to disperse. As Sanders and Chavis got into a car, Sanders asked Lawrence to stop talking to them aggressively.

The lawsuit claims that Lawrence responded by grabbing Sanders' wrist and asking him, "whatcha going to do?!" before proceeding to push both men into the vehicle on each side, telling them to "get in the f***ing car."

Once seated in the car, Sanders couldn't close the door because Lawrence stood in his way. When Sanders explained this to Lawrence, the officer stated, "I'm going to help you out," and grabbed Sanders' neck, shoving him into the car and slamming the door shut, the document says. He then grabbed a third person, who was not posing a threat, four seconds later.


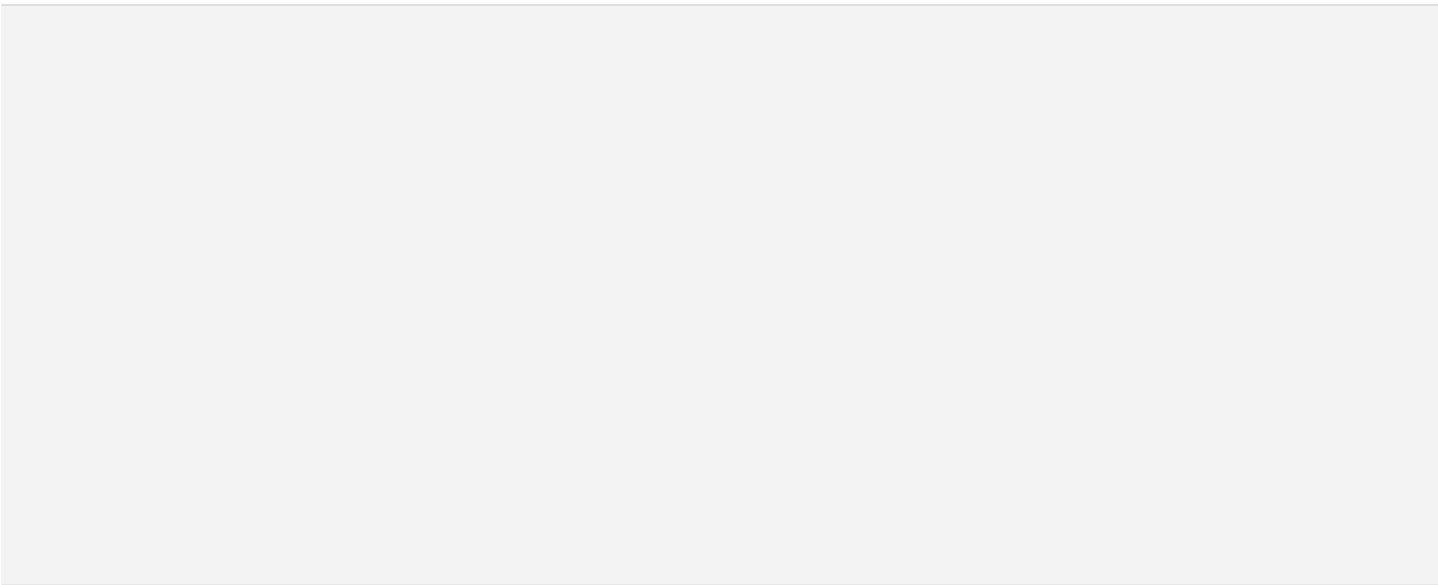


A photo included in a lawsuit against Baton Rouge police depicts BRPD Officer Troy Lawrence Jr. grabbing the neck of Holden Sanders in an attempt to physically remove him from the car.

When Sanders' mother, Shona Chavis, who is also named as a plaintiff

in the lawsuit, attempted to intervene, Lawrence struck her multiple times with his hand, the complaint alleges. Lawrence then choked Sanders and grabbed his hair to try to get him out of the car, shouting for assistance from surrounding police officers, who refused to get involved.

Lawrence arrested the two men for resisting an officer and disturbing the peace. Charges against both men were dropped by the city-parish attorney's office in May.



The plaintiffs say Lawrence's police report of the incident misrepresented what happened and omitted his use of force and profane language at the scene. The lawsuit referenced Lawrence's multiple past

A photo included in a lawsuit against Baton Rouge police depicts BRPD Officer Troy Lawrence Jr. grabbing a man's arm.

infractions, noting that no BRPD employee has been suspended for misconduct more than Lawrence has in the past two

years without being terminated.

“This has been going on for years now,” said Thomas Frampton, the attorney representing the plaintiffs in the second lawsuit. “Numerous Baton Rouge residents have been put in the hospital because Chief Paul and other city leaders refused to take the reasonable steps that we’ve been begging them to take up until this point.”

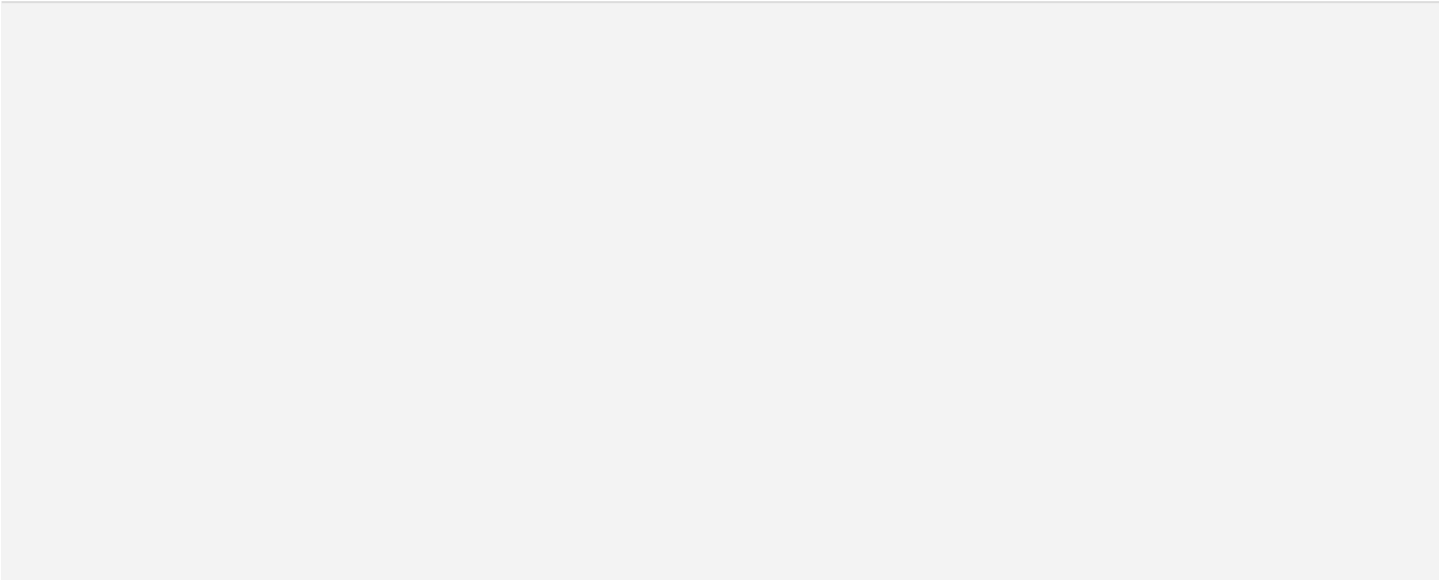
Previous allegations

Lawrence, a four-year officer with the department and son of Deputy Chief Troy Lawrence Sr., was previously the focus of a 2021 lawsuit filed by a woman, identified as Shermaine Reed, 28, who said the officer shouted at her and forced her out of her own vehicle the previous Halloween when she went to help her sister, who had been in

a car accident on Harding Boulevard.



According to the complaint, Lawrence arrived at the scene and quickly muted the audio on his body camera. He then began shouting expletives at everyone and said he wouldn't file a report because the damage wasn't severe enough, the suit says. When Reed told Lawrence he was acting inappropriately, he responded by shoving her and telling her with vulgar language to get back in her car.



Reed filed a complaint with the department. Following interviews with Lawrence and other witnesses from the scene, BRPD ruled his behavior fell in line with policies on use of force, but determined that he had violated policies regarding officer conduct and body camera use and initially issued him a two-day suspension.

That suspension was later downgraded to a letter of reprimand after Lawrence sent Chief Murphy Paul a request for reconsideration, and the department ultimately agreed to pay Reed \$55,000 in damages after parish attorneys refused her initial settlement demand of \$40,000 and an apology from Lawrence.

Prior to that incident, Lawrence was the subject of controversy when he and another officer, Ken Camallo, conducted a warrantless search of an apartment after Camallo searched a man and his teenage brother during a traffic stop by looking in their underwear and groping their genitals, body camera footage showed. A police report from the time

states that the officers found a loaded gun and marijuana during the search and traffic stop.

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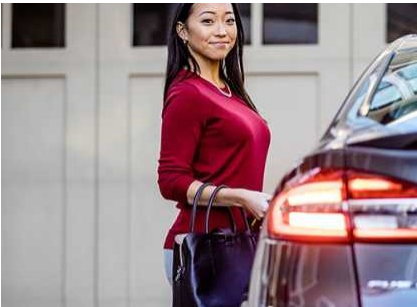
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