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Statement of San Francisco Chief of Police William Scott on the passing of former SFPD Chief Prentice 'Earl' Sanders 21-005



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All of us in the San Francisco Police Department are saddened to learn of the passing of former Chief of Police Prentice “Earl” Sanders, and our thoughts and prayers go out to his family, friends and all who knew him. To all who did not, Chief Sanders should be remembered for a trailblazing legacy that went far beyond the barrier he broke as San Francisco’s first Black chief of police.

Earl Sanders joined SFPD as a young Army veteran in 1964, at a time when there were few other African American police officers. He earned widespread respect from the diverse communities he served as a beat cop, homicide inspector, and member of the command staff. Yet he heroically risked his ascent through the ranks to remedy the injustices of racial bias. Chief Sanders was a founding member of Officers for Justice, which in 1973 filed a discrimination suit against the department. He was the first police officer to testify in federal court about the racism he endured in service to a city he loved and a police department he ultimately made better and more inclusive.

Members of the San Francisco Police Department today take justifiable pride in a legacy of progressive innovation that animates our quest for improvement and reform to be a national model of 21st Century policing. That legacy owes in large part to the leadership and courage Earl Sanders demonstrated throughout his career here. We are enriched by the life he lived, and we join San Franciscans in mourning his loss today.

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