



February 27, 2025

## **East Cleveland Police Officer James Covell Indicted on Felony Charges of Tampering with Records and Tampering with Evidence Among Other Charges for Two Incidents in May 2024**

CLEVELAND - Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced that a Cuyahoga County grand jury has returned an indictment charging East Cleveland Police Officer James Covell, 48, on felony charges of tampering with records and tampering with evidence among other charges for two incidents in May 2024. In addition, former East Cleveland dispatcher Christopher Rashad Cotton, 20, was indicted on improperly handling firearms in a motor vehicle for the May 24, 2024, incident.

"It is an honor and a privilege to serve the public and to hold a position of trust," said Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley. "Officer Covell not only betrayed the trust of the community he swore to protect — he broke the law and will be held accountable."

On May 9, 2024, Officer Covell attempted to conduct a traffic stop on a silver Hyundai. The Hyundai fled and entered the city of Cleveland with Officer Covell in pursuit. The Hyundai came to a stop and two females inside the Hyundai exited the Hyundai and were apprehended. The Hyundai, now driven by a 25-year-old male, continued to flee and came to a stop near Parkhill Avenue and East 130th Street in Cleveland. Officer Covell did not stop his police cruiser and rear-ended the Hyundai. After the Hyundai was hit, it accelerated around Covell's cruiser and continued to flee. The 25-year-old male was later apprehended. The Cleveland Division of Police (CDP) responded to the scene.

Officer Covell told CDP officers on scene that the Hyundai rammed his police cruiser before fleeing. Officer Covell then proceeded to tell this version of events to East Cleveland Police Department (ECPD) supervisors. The version he told both police departments were false. Afterward, Officer Covell filed a workers' compensation insurance claim stating the Hyundai accelerated in reverse and rammed his police cruiser causing him injury.

On May 24, 2024, around 2 a.m., former East Cleveland dispatcher Christopher Rashad Cotton was intoxicated and involved in a motor vehicle crash with an RTA bus near Euclid Avenue and Doan Avenue in East Cleveland. Officer Covell responded to the scene of the crash. Before the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) police arrived to the scene to investigate, Officer Covell removed an AR-15 style pistol from Cotton's vehicle. When GCRTA arrived at the scene, they were not informed about the firearm. After police learned about the firearm in Cotton's vehicle, Covell turned it over to police.

The investigation was conducted with assistance from the Cleveland Division of the FBI.

On February 26, 2025, James Covell was indicted on the following charges:



- **One count of Tampering with Records (F3)**
- **One count of Tampering with Evidence (F3)**
- **One count of Telecommunications Fraud (F5)**
- **One count of Obstructing Justice (F5)**
- **One count of Falsification (M1)**
- **One count of Insurance Fraud (M1)**
- **Two counts of Obstructing Official Business (M2)**
- **Two counts of Dereliction Of Duty (M2)**

Christopher Rashad Cotton was indicted on the following charge:

- **One count of Improperly Handling Firearms In A Motor Vehicle (F5)**

Christopher Rashad Cotton was previously convicted and sentenced in a separate case for his involvement in the RTA crash.

You can view the indictment [here](#).

They will be arraigned at the Cuyahoga County Justice Center at a later date.