



Case Extension Update

On April 1, OPA sought and received a second 30-day extension from SPOG for the 67 active investigations involving its members. This is because of interruptions to normal OPA functions, such as interviewing named and witness employees, due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements. Please contact OPA by email if you'd like to know the current investigation deadline for your case.

Unsubstantiated Misconduct Screening

In collaboration with Patrol, OPA began a pilot program in 2018 in which allegations of misconduct that are clearly refuted by evidence can be investigated and documented by the chain of command and then screened with OPA via email. The OPA Director reviews the information and relevant video to determine if the allegation is disproved by the evidence and whether it is necessary for the supervisor to formally submit the allegation of potential misconduct to OPA.

This program was initiated to address two concerns: 1) Employee morale was low, in part because OPA was conducting full investigations into demonstrably false claims, which was perceived as procedurally unjust; 2) OPA was spending significant resources investigating these demonstrably false claims, which diluted efforts to focus on viable allegations of misconduct.

In 2019, SPD supervisors screened 242 potentially-refutable allegations of misconduct with the OPA Director. Of these, the Director requested a formal complaint referral in 23 cases. The rest were investigated and documented in the field by the chain of command rather than referred to OPA as complaints. This means that last year, 219 cases—that would have been investigated prior to the creation of this program—never resulted in a complaint against an officer.

SPD supervisors should be recognized for their work in helping this program become a success. The screenings often require significant video review and in-depth analysis. This has been done with little fanfare and appreciation for the time this takes for the supervisors, particularly given their multiple other responsibilities.

OPA believes that this program has also achieved several less tangible results, including: increasing procedural justice for officers, expanding the accountability of SPD supervisors, improving the quality of supervisor reviews, developing a more positive and collaborative relationship between OPA and Patrol, preserving OPA and SPD resources, and allowing OPA to focus its investigative efforts on serious misconduct.

Below are two examples of situations in which OPA agreed that the screened allegations were unsubstantiated.

Sexual Assault Screening: An officer reported to his supervisor that a subject claimed the officer touched him sexually and “peeked” at his buttocks while conducting a search during an arrest.

The supervisor reviewed the officer's body-worn video and determined that the officer's behavior was appropriate throughout the interaction. The OPA Director reviewed the body-worn video and concurred with the supervisor's assessment. As a result, no formal complaint alleging improper search was submitted to OPA.

Excessive Force Screening: Officers responded to a 911 call regarding an assault. The caller reported the suspect fell and was bleeding from the head. After placing the subject under arrest, officers took him to the hospital to get stitches for his injury. The subject told hospital staff that the officers "roughed [him] up" resulting in the head injury, but later admitted he did not remember how he obtained the injury. A supervisor reviewed security footage, as well as the involved officers' body-worn video, and determined the subject already had the head injury prior to officers arriving and confirmed that the officers used no force on the subject. The OPA Director reviewed three officers' body-worn video and agreed that it was not necessary to submit an OPA complaint.

If you have questions, feedback, content requests, or to add/remove your name from this distribution list, please contact Anne Bettesworth, OPA Deputy Director of Public Affairs, at anne.bettesworth@seattle.gov.