

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

"MEANINGFUL POLICE OVERSIGHT"  
BY MAYA L., AGE 13



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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



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"OPA doubled its community outreach efforts in 2023. Targeting marginalized groups with inordinate police contacts but infrequent OPA complaint submissions, our dedicated community engagement team crisscrossed the city, working tirelessly to raise awareness about OPA's services and how and where to file complaints."

In 2023, my first full year as director, OPA made significant strides in aligning its performance with the expectations outlined in the *Accountability Ordinance*. We were proactive and assertive in our approach, demonstrating our commitment to being "responsive to community needs and concerns."<sup>1</sup> We maintained frequent contact with complainants and named employees, conducted extensive community outreach to inform the public about the police accountability system and how to access it, and gathered community perspectives and concerns about OPA operations,

Specifically, OPA conducted two community surveys: 1) Seeking feedback from complainants about their OPA experience and 2) Gathering information from the community, focusing on demographics with disproportionate police contacts, to identify and better understand barriers to earning their trust. Across the board, community members listed transparency, consistency, professionalism, meaningful communication, and independent and objective complaint processing as the critical elements of trust-building.

With earning community and law enforcement trust as our guiding principle, OPA took proactive steps toward radical transparency. We continued posting closed case summaries biweekly and began publishing OPA's and SPD chain of command's discipline recommendations for cases with sustained findings. To enhance the complainant experience, we expanded the complaint navigator's role to ensure timely and consistent case updates for community members.

To promote independence, objectivity, and transparency, OPA assumed responsibility for responding to OPA-related public disclosure requests, previously handled by SPD for decades.

Moreover, OPA doubled its community outreach efforts in 2023. Targeting marginalized groups with inordinate police contacts but infrequent OPA complaint submissions, our dedicated community engagement team crisscrossed the city, working tirelessly to raise awareness about OPA's services and how and where to file complaints.

Most importantly, OPA charted new waters and achieved significant community outreach wins while maintaining the quality of its core work: administrative investigations. In 2023, the Office of Inspector General (OIG), OPA's auditor, agreed with 96.5% of OPA's classification decisions and certified 91.9% of OPA investigations as objective, thorough, and timely. While our progress is undeniable, our work is far from complete.

When I was sworn in as OPA's civilian director on October 3, 2022, I publicly stated that our success would be measured by our ability to earn the trust of officers and community members. Both demand transparency, fairness, and thoroughness. By continuing to pursue and realize shared interests, OPA will move the needle, however incremental, toward coalescing One Seattle.

Sincerely,



Gino Betts Jr., Director  
Office of Police Accountability

<sup>1</sup>Per City of Seattle [Accountability Ordinance](#) 3.29.100 (j)

# ABOUT OPA

The Office of Police Accountability (OPA) processes allegations of misconduct involving Seattle Police Department (SPD) employees. OPA is comprised of thirty-one civilian and sworn employees. Its leadership, including the director, deputy director, assistant directors, general counsel, and supervisors, are civilians.<sup>2</sup>

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## Who We Are

OPA's hybrid investigations team is made up of nine SPD sergeants and two civilian investigators, and is led by two civilian investigations supervisors and an assistant director of investigations. This blended structure promotes diverse perspectives and builds community and law enforcement confidence in OPA's objectivity and capabilities. Our two-person community outreach team raises awareness about OPA services across Seattle, manages mediations and restorative justice initiatives, and navigates community members through the complaint process.

OPA is operationally independent of SPD and housed outside of SPD facilities. However, OPA is administratively attached to SPD to ensure complete and immediate access to SPD-controlled data, evidence, and personnel. This structure helps OPA process complaints and investigations thoroughly and timely.

## What We Do

*OPA's core functions include:*

- Reviewing, classifying, and investigating allegations of SPD employee misconduct
- Educating the community regarding police oversight processes and OPA services
- Raising public awareness through education
- Identifying SPD policy deficiencies and providing effective solutions and training recommendations
- Helping reduce misconduct and enhancing positive SPD employee conduct

OPA also remains committed to providing staff with relevant and continuous training and professional development opportunities. Each year, sworn and civilian employees attend a variety of conferences and trainings to ensure OPA's implementation of best practices and standards.

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*OPA at the 2023 Annual NACOLE Conference: "Building Better Oversight."*

*Pictured from left to right: Director, Gino Betts Jr.; Sergeant Investigator, Derek Ristau; General Counsel, Nelson Leese; Deputy Director, Bonnie Glenn; Civilian Investigator, Alex Hill; Policy Manager, Justin Piccorelli, and Assistant General Counsel, Joshua Oh.*

<sup>2</sup>Per City of Seattle [Accountability Ordinance](#) 3.29.140



## Vision, Mission & Values

### Vision

To safeguard a culture of accountability within SPD.

### Mission

To ensure SPD employees' actions comply with law and policy by conducting thorough, objective, and timely investigations, recommending improvements to policies and training, and engaging in collaborative initiatives that promote systemic advancements.

### Values

OPA's values guide employee conduct and organizational culture in pursuing OPA's mission.

*These values include:*

#### **Independence**

- Make decisions based on consistent application of facts, policies, and laws.
- Maintain neutrality and exercise impartial judgment.
- Ensure all viewpoints are heard and respected.

#### **Transparency**

- Maintain honest and open communication with all stakeholders.
- Communicate process, reasoning, and conclusions.
- Remain accountable to vision, mission, and values, both internally and externally.

#### **Collaboration**

- Build meaningful and cooperative working relationships.
- Solicit and value the community's perspective and expertise.
- Work with system partners to advance accountability and improve SPD policies and training.

#### **Innovation**

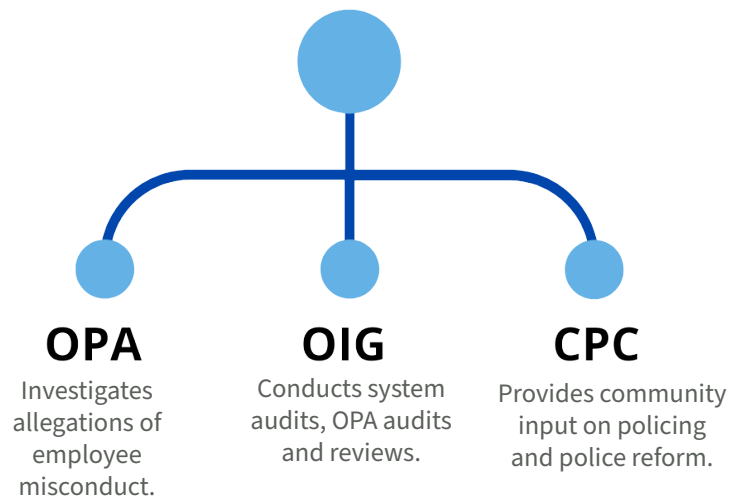
- Set the national standard for police oversight agencies.
- Explore ways to improve processes and services.
- Use data and research to drive decision-making.



# SEATTLE'S POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The City of Seattle has a three-pronged police oversight system comprised of the Office of Inspector General (OIG), Community Police Commission (CPC), and OPA. OIG and CPC are completely led and staffed by civilians.

FIGURE 1: SEATTLE POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM



## Who Holds OPA Accountable?

All institutions must be reviewed and held accountable. Together, the three entities work to generate public trust in SPD and meaningful oversight by upholding a culture of accountability and adherence to policies and laws. OIG is an independent, civilian agency that reviews OPA's complaint handling and investigations. OIG ensures investigations are thorough, unbiased, and timely, and provides feedback about transparency, effectiveness, and accessibility. It also audits OPA's complaint classifications to ensure complaints are appropriately assigned for investigation and that

OIG reviews the following OPA operations:

### Classification

OIG ensures that OPA classifies complaints appropriately, and reviews and approves OPA's requests for expedited investigations.

### Investigation Review

OIG reviews completed OPA investigations to determine whether they are objective, thorough, and timely.

### Conflict Investigations

OIG may classify, investigate and issue findings for administrative complaints against OPA's staff that present a conflict of interest.

### Systemic oversight

OIG also reviews OPA and SPD for systemic concerns.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about OIG, please visit <https://www.seattle.gov/>

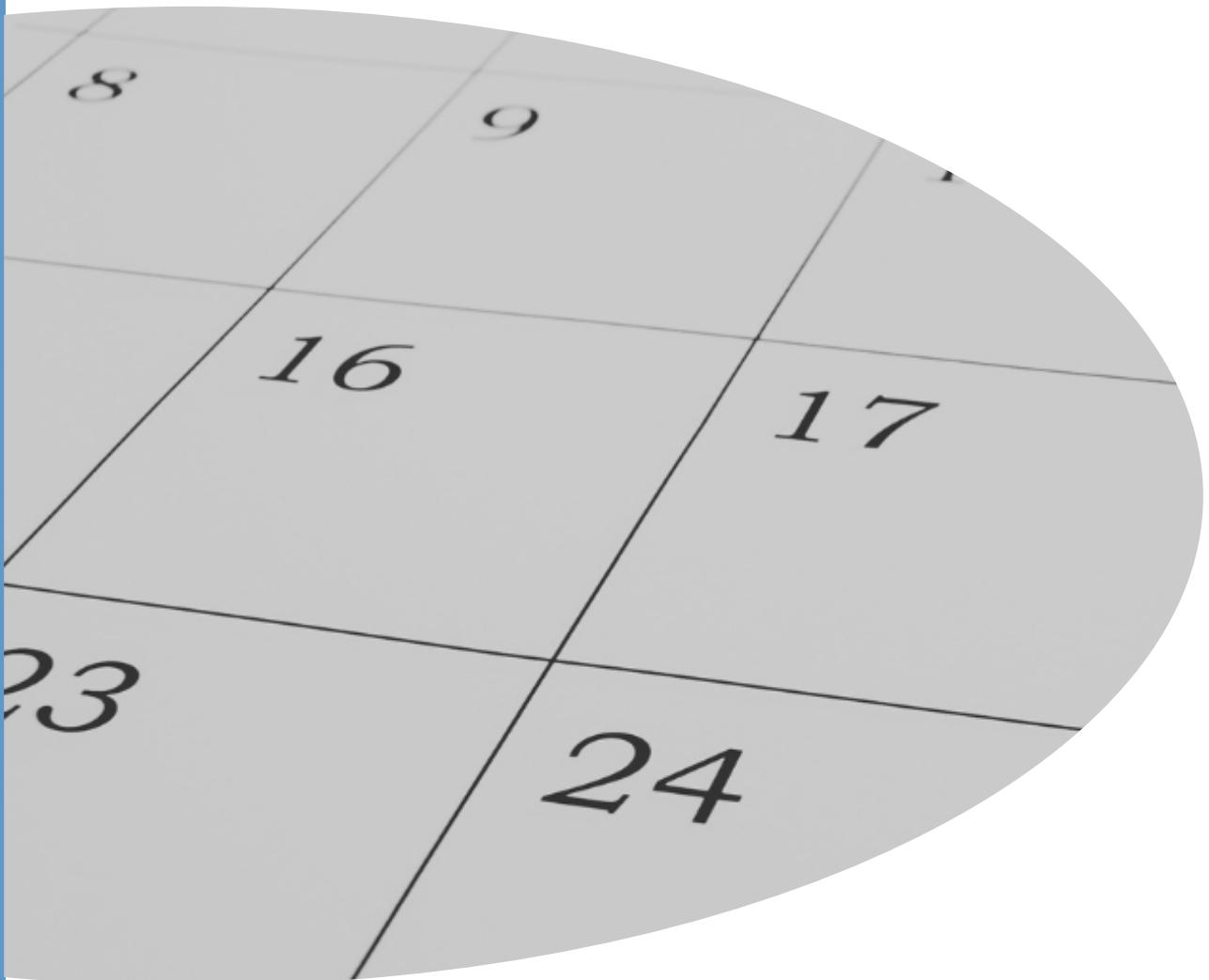


## Timeliness

Under the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG) and Seattle Police Management Association (SPMA) collective bargaining agreements, and the *Accountability Ordinance*, OPA must complete investigations and issue proposed findings within 180 days. Generally, the period begins when OPA initiates or receives a complaint.<sup>4</sup> When OPA fails to meet the 180-day timeline, it is required to send a written notice to the mayor, city council president, public safety committee chair, city attorney, inspector general, and CPC's executive director explaining the delay. Key timelines for OPA include a 5-day notice to the named employee, a 30-day classification notice to the named employee and the complainant, and a 180-day deadline for completing the investigation.

In 2023, **OPA's data shows that 94% (299 of 318) of OPA investigations bound by a 180-day timeline were timely.** OIG found that OPA conducted thorough, objective, and timely investigations in over 92% of cases in 2023. As a result, OIG partially certified 27 investigations, finding 22 untimely.

OIG also approves OPA Expedited Investigations and Rapid Adjudication proposals and audits OPA's bias review processing, policies, regulations and practices. OIG's oversight ensures that OPA's complaint handling is accountable, transparent, and responsive.



<sup>4</sup> This aligns with the [Accountability Ordinance](#) 3.29.130(B)



# COMPLAINTS

## What is a Complaint?

OPA processes complaints of misconduct involving SPD employees. Allegations may range from unprofessional behavior to biased policing to excessive force. SPD has hundreds of ever-evolving policies that OPA references to determine whether a violation occurred.

## Who can file a Complaint?\*

Anyone can file a complaint, including anonymous complaints. However, for those filing a complaint anonymously, we recommend providing as much information as possible to ensure OPA has enough information to investigate. We also accept complaints from outside agencies or witnesses reporting on behalf of others.

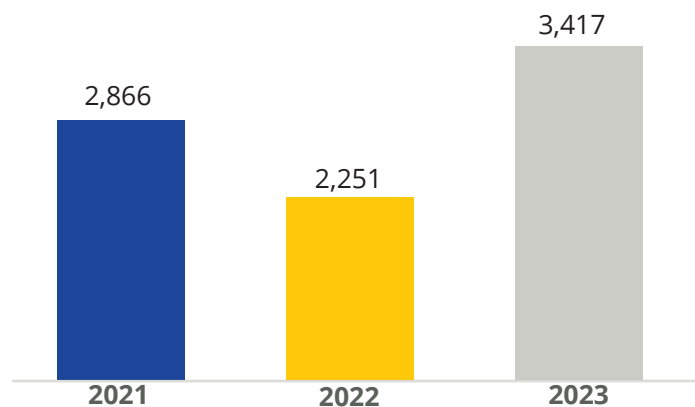
## Contacts Received

Each business day, OPA documents individual contacts made through its complaint-filing channels and responds with a notice of receipt. There are five ways members of the public can directly file a complaint with OPA:

1. Complaint form on [OPA's website](#)
2. In-person during OPA office hours (Monday through Thursday, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm)
3. Email ([opa@seattle.gov](mailto:opa@seattle.gov))
4. Phone (206) 684-8797
5. Postal mail (P.O. Box 34986, Seattle, WA 98124-4986)

Community members may also choose to send their concerns to a [Seattle City Councilmember](#), SPD, or OIG. Each of these entities will forward concerns to OPA.

**FIGURE 2: CONTACTS RECEIVED BY YEAR (2021-2023)**



**OPA logs every contact it receives.** Multiple contacts about the same incident are processed as a single case. **In 2023, OPA had 3,417 contacts – a 51.8% increase since 2022 –** each reviewed by OPA supervisors, investigators, and administrative staff. This increase may have resulted from OPA's community outreach efforts, and having multiple high-profile cases in 2023.

\*All complaints are subject to public disclosure laws.



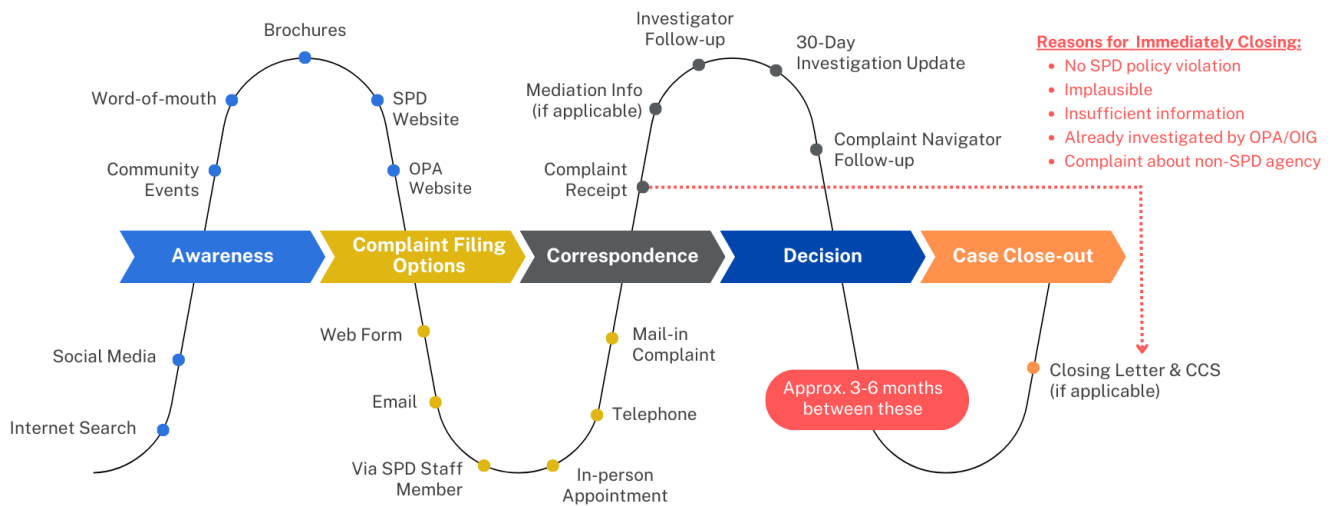
## Complaint Processing

After a complaint is logged, OPA then determines how to process it, including whether an intake investigation is warranted. Before an intake investigation, OPA may conduct a pre-intake screening to establish whether OPA has jurisdiction.

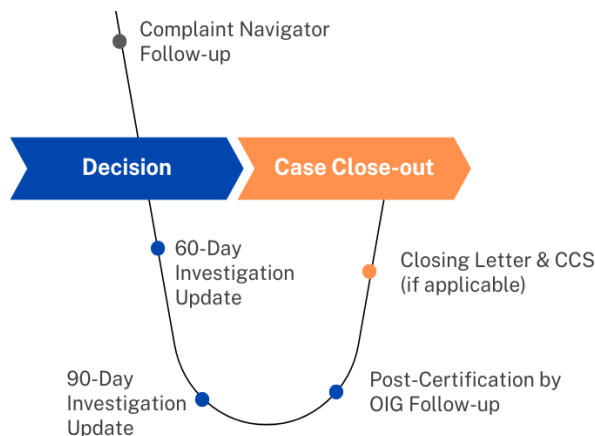
If a screening—which may include a recorded interview with the complainant—reveals a complaint falls outside OPA’s jurisdiction, it is logged and closed in OPA’s system. OPA then forwards it to the correct jurisdiction (e.g., King County Jail, King County Sheriff’s Office, CARES Unit, or another city’s internal affairs department). **Of the 3,417 contacts received in 2023, OPA conducted 534 pre-intake screenings, compared to 300 in 2022.** When complaints undergo an intake investigation, the complainant is sent a case number to track the progress of their case.

In the summer of 2023, OPA polled civilian complainants about their complaint processing experience with OPA. Their feedback pointed to a 3-6 month gap in communications between Complaint Navigator’s initial communication and case close-out. OPA responded by providing three additional follow-ups to fill that gap, including a 60-day investigation update, 90-day investigation update, and follow-up after OIG certification.

**FIGURE 3: COMPLAINT JOURNEY MAP FOR CIVILIAN COMPLAINANTS (BEFORE COMPLAINANT SURVEY)**



**FIGURE 4: ADDITIONAL COMPLAINANT COMMUNICATIONS ADDED FOLLOWING OPA'S COMPLAINANT SURVEY**



## Complainant Demographics

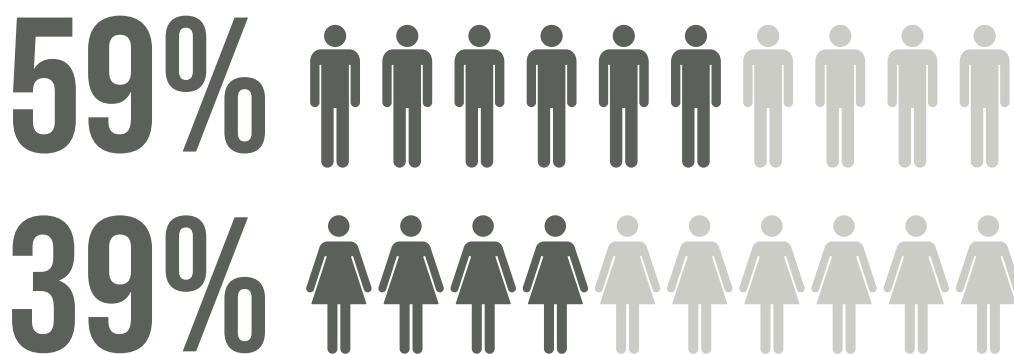
OPA reviews the complainant demographics to monitor police accountability trends and complaint processing to ensure it is thorough, timely, objective, and accessible. Persons filing an in-person or online complaint have the option to disclose their race and gender. Complainants are not asked about their immigration status and will not need to interact with the employee they are filing a complaint against. An SPD employee filing a complaint on a community member's behalf may also include the complainant's demographic information. Moreover, during the intake investigation, OPA investigators ask whether complainants want to disclose their race and gender. Disclosing personal information is always voluntary.

**FIGURE 5: RACE/ETHNICITY OF COMPLAINANTS WHERE DATA WAS DOCUMENTED BY YEAR (2021-2023)**

Race	2021	2022	2023*
White	55% (306)	47% (213)	52% (286)
Black/African American	27% (151)	34% (154)	29% (159)
Asian	5% (28)	6% (28)	8% (44)
Two or More	8% (45)	5% (23)	4% (22)
Hispanic/Latino	4% (22)	5% (23)	3% (17)
Native American	1% (6)	2% (9)	2% (11)
Other	0% (0)	0% (4)	2% (11)

**In 2023, about 60% of complainants declined to disclose race/ethnicity, and 50% refused to disclose gender.** When compared to years prior, this data suggests a decrease in Black/African American complainants, and an increase in White complainants. Fifty (50%) percent of OPA complainants disclosed their gender.

**Among those who disclosed gender, 59% identified as male and 39% as female. Less than 2% identified as transgender or non-binary.**



*\*Represents complaints that underwent intake investigations (see page 14 for more information on this process). Numbers in parenthesis were based on annual intake: 1) 2021 - (558), 2) 2022 (454), and 3) 2023 - (550).*

## Demographics of SPD Employees Named in Complaints

In 2023, there were 463 complaints against sworn employees<sup>5</sup>. 271 SPD employees had at least one complaint in 2023, a 34% reduction from 2022. Sworn employees constituted 89% of the named employees. A total of 192 employees (sworn and civilian) received multiple complaints.

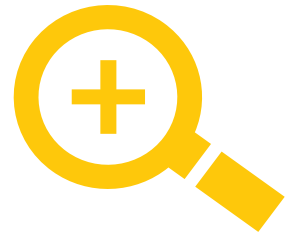
Consistent with years prior, the named employee gender ratio was 82% male and 18% female.



FIGURE 6: RACE/ETHNICITY OF EMPLOYEES WHO RECEIVED COMPLAINTS (2021-2023)

Race	2021	2022	2023
White	64%	62%	61%
Black/African American	8%	9%	9%
Hispanic/Latino	8%	9%	9%
Two or More	7%	8%	8%
Asian	7%	6%	6%
Not Specified	5%	5%	6%
American Indian	1%	1%	1%

<sup>5</sup>This represents 48% of SPD's sworn personnel at the end of 2023. According to SPD's data, the department began 2023 with 1065 sworn employees (974 in-service officers) and ended with 1043 (962 in-service officers).



## Incident Locations

In 2023, most complaints alleged an SPD employee committed misconduct within the West Precinct's parameters, including Downtown, South Lake Union, Queen Anne, and Magnolia.<sup>6</sup> Complaints received "Outside Seattle" cover misconduct allegations occurring outside city limits.



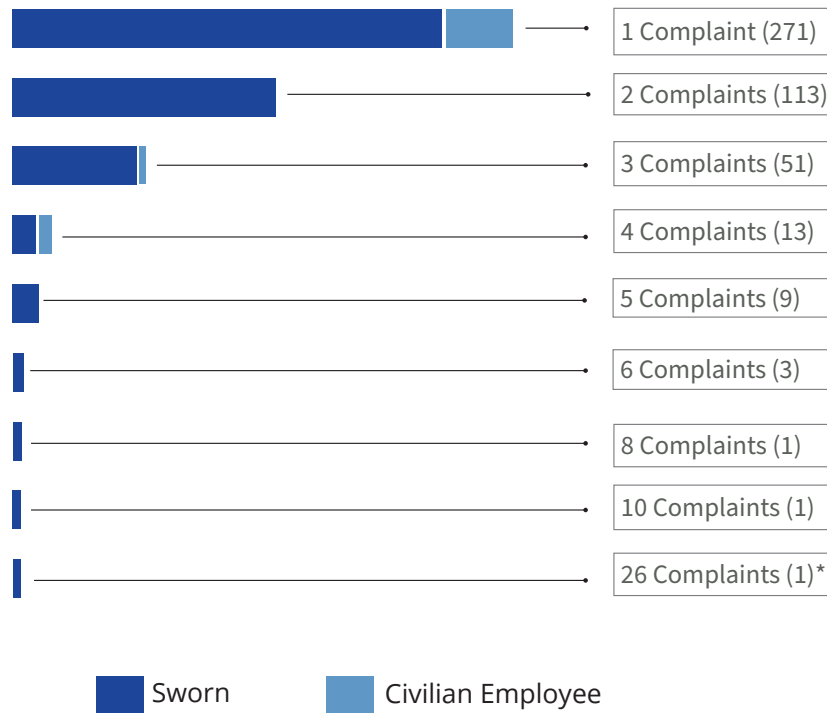
**FIGURE 9: COMPLAINTS BY LOCATION/SPD PRECINCT (2023)**

Precinct	Total
East	100
North	92
Outside Seattle	10
NULL*	123
South	75
Southwest	33
West	117

\*NULL indicates that there was no location associated with the incident.

<sup>6</sup>This trend is consistent with historical data, as the West Precinct traditionally receives the most complaints, except for 2020, when the East Precinct led with protest-related complaints.

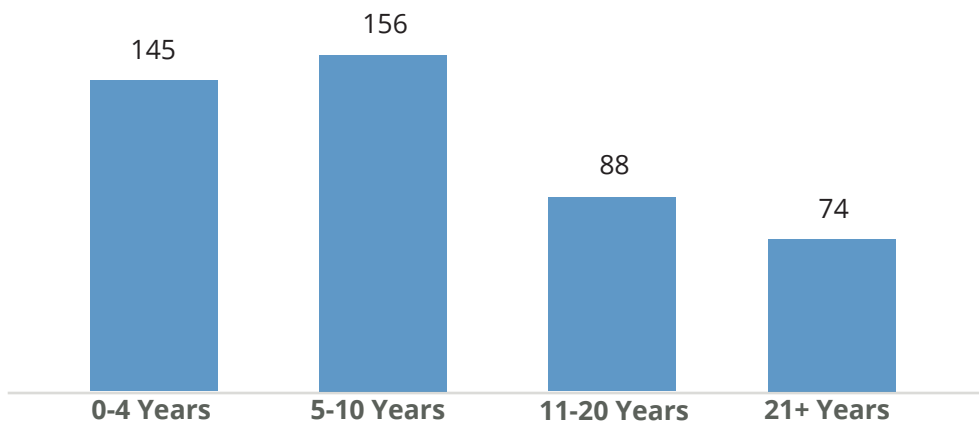
**FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER SPD EMPLOYEE (SWORN & CIVILIAN 2023\*\*)**



\*\*This data includes sworn officers and parking enforcement officers. Sworn means police/peace officers. "Civilian Employee" includes parking enforcement officers and other support staff who are not police officers.  
 \*These complaints named the Chief of Police.

**Generally, employees with more policing experience had fewer complaints.**

**FIGURE 8: SPD EMPLOYEE COMPLAINTS BY YEARS OF SERVICE (2023)**



# INTAKE PROCESS

When OPA opens an intake investigation, investigators gather preliminary evidence, including analyzing documents and videos, and interviewing the complainant when possible.

OPA aims to complete intake investigations within the initial 30 days.

In 2023, **OPA classified 550 cases** for intake.



# COMPLAINT CLASSIFICATION

Following an intake investigation, OPA determines whether the allegations, if proven, would violate laws, SPD's policies or training. If so, OPA leadership classifies the complaint — indicating how it will be processed — electing one of the following:

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## **Contact Log**

A case may be classified as a Contact Log under the following circumstances: (1) the complaint does not involve a potential policy violation by an SPD employee; (2) there is insufficient information to proceed with further inquiry; (3) the complaint is time-barred under the contractual statute of limitations; (4) the complaint has already been reviewed or adjudicated by OPA and/or Office of Inspector General (OIG); or (5) the complaint presents fact patterns that are clearly implausible or incredible, and there are no indicia of other potential misconduct.

## **Supervisor Action**

The complaint generally involves a minor policy violation or performance issue that the employee's supervisor best addresses through training, communication, or coaching. In these instances, OPA sends a memo mandating that the employee's supervisor take specific, relevant action with the employee. The supervisor has 15 days to complete the action and return the case to OPA for review. Upon request by the supervisor, OPA may extend the deadline for completion. OPA will not classify allegations of excessive force, biased policing, and violations of law for Supervisor Action.

## **Investigation**

The complaint alleges a violation of SPD policy or other category of violation that OPA is required by law and policy to investigate. In these instances, OPA conducts a comprehensive investigation (e.g., gathering additional evidence, interviewing involved parties and witnesses, etc.) and issues recommended findings. An OPA investigation may result in formal discipline.

## **Expedited Investigation**

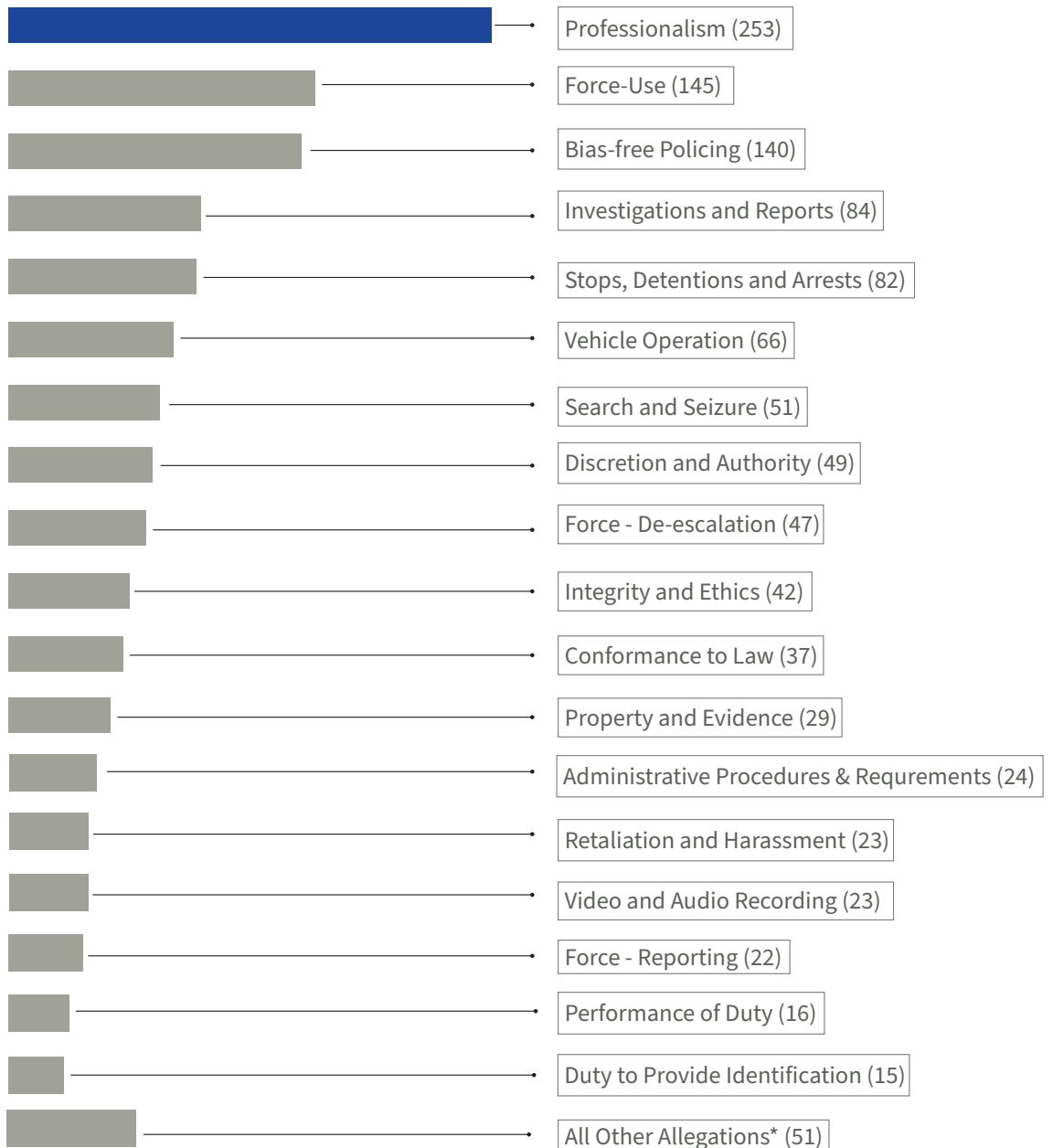
The complaint alleges a violation of SPD policy or other category of violation that OPA is required by law and policy to investigate. However, OPA, with OIG's concurrence, determines that findings can be reached based on the intake investigation without further investigation. In cases classified for Expedited Investigation, OPA will generally not interview named employees but may interview witness employees. Per collective bargaining agreements, if OPA does not interview a named employee, allegations against them cannot be sustained. This classification may be appropriate if: (1) the evidence shows that misconduct did not occur as alleged; (2) minor misconduct occurred, but OPA deems corrective action via a training referral, rather than discipline, to be appropriate; or (3) minor misconduct may have occurred, but there is a systemic issue with SPD's policy or training for which a Management Action Recommendation is appropriate.



## Allegation Data

Nearly all plausible misconduct allegations involving an SPD employee proceed to classification following an intake investigation. At classification, OPA supervisors identify each allegation's corresponding and governing SPD policy. As with 2022, unprofessionalism, unauthorized force, bias-based policing, deficient investigations and reports, and unlawful stops, detentions, and arrests remain the five top allegations.

**FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF ALLEGATIONS BY TYPE (2023)**



**In 2023, OPA classified 1,199 misconduct allegations.**

\*"All other Allegations" includes Information and Communications Systems (12); Training, Qualification and Certification (10); Obedience to Orders (7); Bias - Reporting (4); Bias - Investigation (4); Equipment and Uniform (3); Supervisory Responsibility (3); Self-reporting Obligations (2); Timekeeping and Payroll (2); Secondary Employment (2); No Misconduct Alleged (1) and Social Media (1).



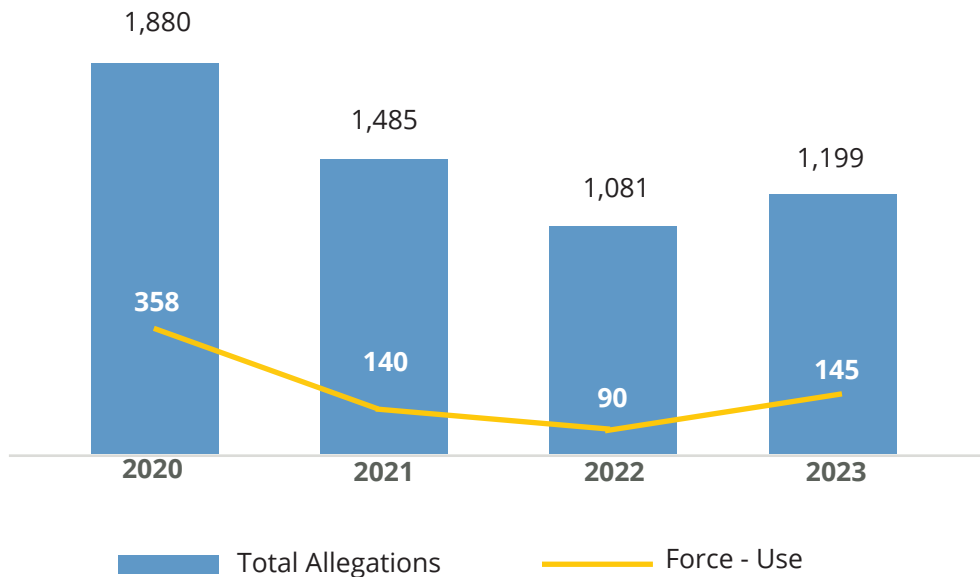




## Allegations

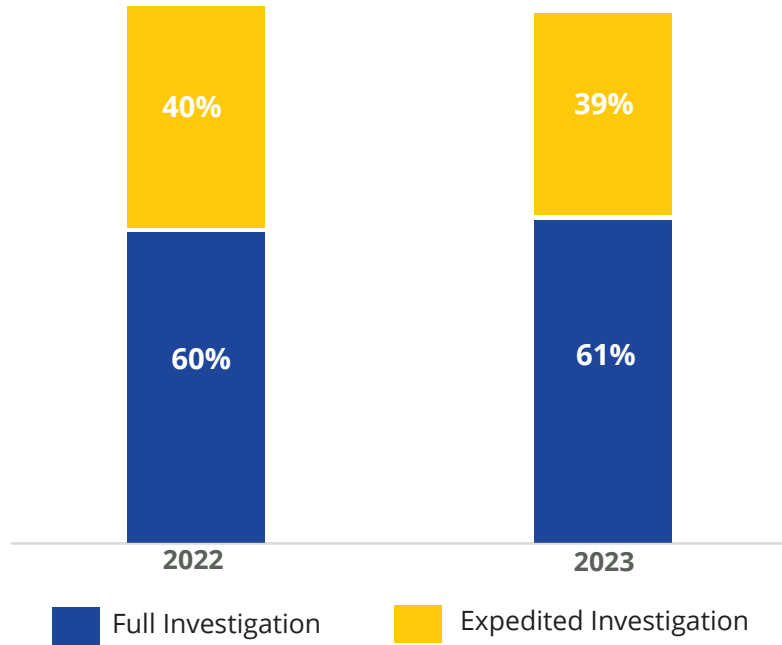
Under SPD's policy, unprofessionalism includes behaviors that undermine public trust and profanity directed as an insult. Bias-free policing allegations generally accuse an officer of mistreatment based on personal discernable characteristics. 'Investigations and Reports' allegations typically claim an SPD employee failed to or inadequately completed required police reports or criminal investigations.

**FIGURE 8: USE OF FORCE ALLEGATIONS BY YEAR (2020-2023)**



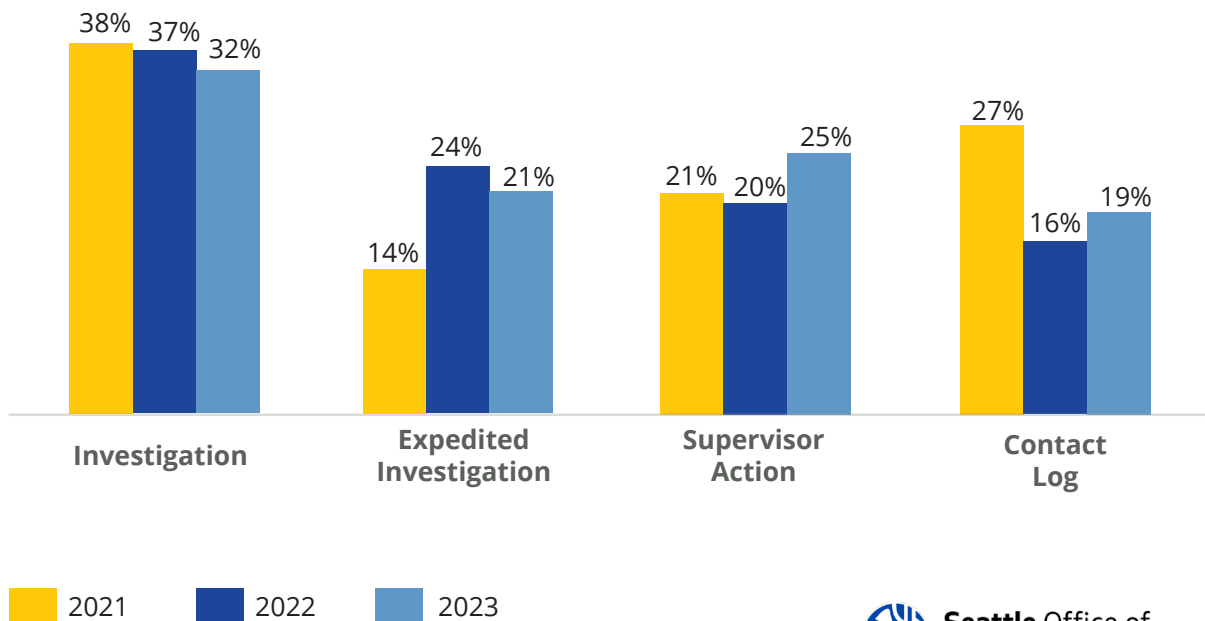
**In 2023, OPA classified 550 cases** – a 17.45% increase from 2022. Of these cases, 370 were filed by community members. The remainder were filed by SPD employees on behalf of community members or alleging another SPD employee's misconduct.

**FIGURE 9: FULL VS. EXPEDITED INVESTIGATIONS BY YEAR (2022-2023)**



**Contact Logs increased by 3% and Supervisor Actions by 5% from 2022.**

**FIGURE 10: CLASSIFICATION TYPE AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL COMPLAINTS (2021-2023)**



# ALTERNATIVES TO INVESTIGATION

When appropriate and eligible, complaints may be processed via an alternative dispute resolution method.

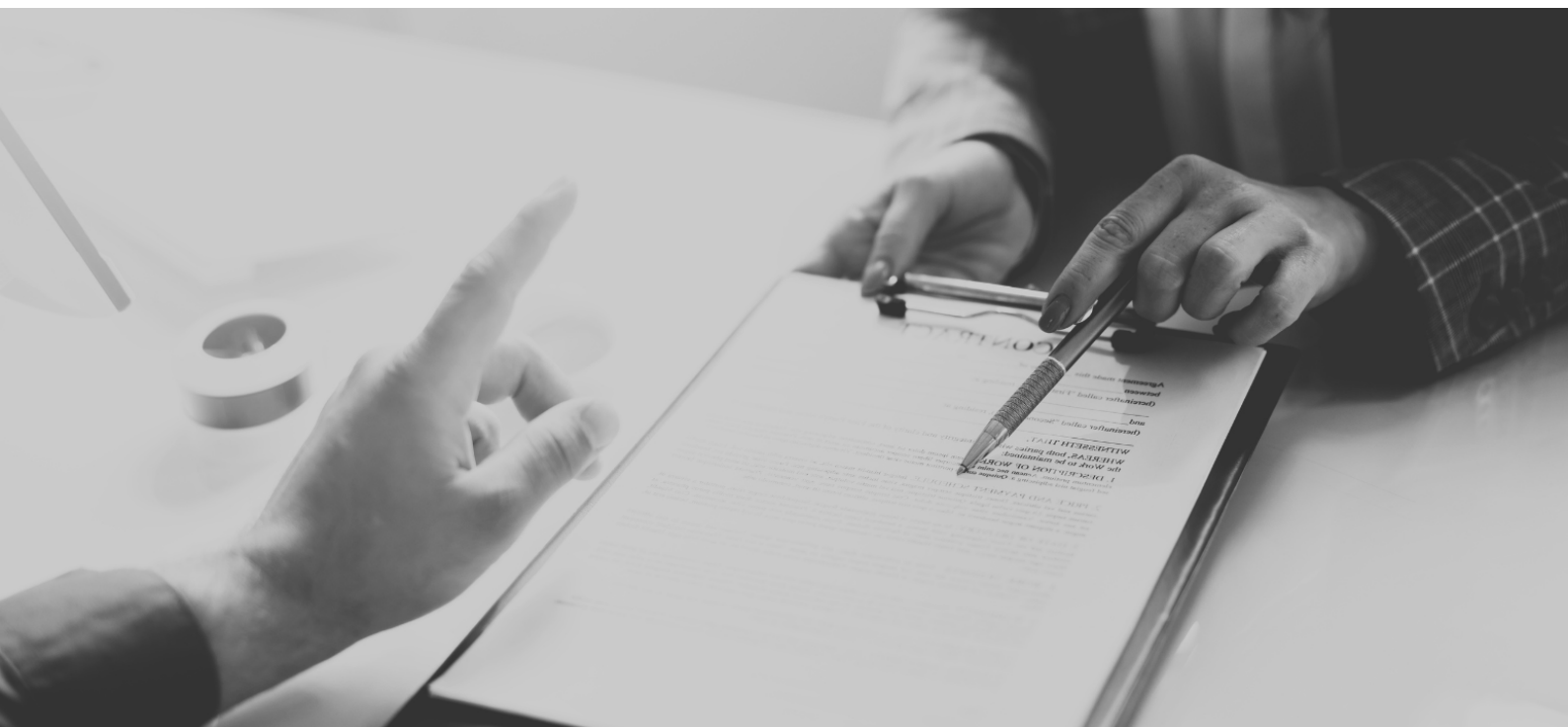
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## Mediation

Mediation is a voluntary alternative dispute resolution process for SPD employees and community members to discuss a conflict with the guidance of a neutral third-party mediator.<sup>7</sup> OPA selects complaints for mediation based on criteria consistent with national best practices and assesses the allegation's type and severity and the likelihood of a successful resolution. SPD employees and complainants offered mediation may accept it or pursue a traditional course of action. Both parties must agree for a mediation to occur.

**In 2023, OPA offered four mediations, one of which was accepted.**

Mediations have decreased since 2019, likely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and community-police relations. Two cases were resolved through mediation in 2022, zero in 2021 and 2020, and seven in 2019. OPA will continue promoting and educating community members and officers about its mediation program to increase buy-in and participation.



<sup>7</sup> For more information, see [seattle.gov/opa/programs/mediation-program](https://seattle.gov/opa/programs/mediation-program)



Rapid Adjudication is an alternative dispute resolution option for complaints involving minor to moderate policy violations. It promotes faster case resolutions, fewer appeals and delays, and allows OPA to conserve resources for more serious cases.

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## Rapid Adjudication

For a complaint to be resolved through Rapid Adjudication, the SPD employee must acknowledge their conduct was inconsistent with SPD policy and accept pre-determined discipline instead of an investigation.<sup>8</sup> OIG must concur with OPA's Rapid Adjudication classifications. The OPA director determines whether the Rapid Adjudication request meets the criteria.

**In 2023, two cases were resolved through Rapid Adjudication.**



**In 2023, OPA screened 198 Bias Reviews**  
(an increase from 155 in 2022).

## Bias Reviews

SPD officers must call a supervisor to the scene in response to allegations of biased-based policing. The supervisor conducts a Bias Review, a preliminary investigation into the allegation. The supervisor must attempt to interview the complaining party and witnesses and review body-worn and in-car videos. If the community member does not request an OPA complaint and the supervisor determines there was no misconduct, the supervisor documents their investigation in a Bias Review template, reviewed by the chain of command, and then sent to OPA for final determination. OPA's director, or designee, carefully examines the template to determine whether an OPA referral is necessary. If not, the Bias Review is closed. OIG audits OPA's Bias Review decisions.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see [seattle.gov/opa/programs/rapid-adjudication](https://seattle.gov/opa/programs/rapid-adjudication)

## Unsubstantiated Misconduct Screenings

The Unsubstantiated Misconduct Screening (UMS) program allows SPD's supervisors to investigate, document and screen misconduct allegations with OPA. As part of the screening process, the OPA director or designee reviews the SPD supervisor's analysis and relevant video to determine whether a formal OPA complaint referral should be made.

The UMS program began in 2018 to increase employee morale and improve OPA operations by filtering unsubstantiated complaints refuted by clear evidence, such as body-worn video. Before this program, OPA conducted Full Investigations into demonstrably false claims, contributing to SPD employee dissatisfaction and decreased confidence in procedural justice. Low morale reportedly increased officer resignations, an ongoing issue for SPD. OPA also spent considerable resources investigating these false claims, diluting its capacity to investigate viable misconduct allegations. While the UMS program has not entirely resolved these concerns, it has increased OPA's efficiency and morale for SPD employees.

In 2023, **OPA reviewed 154 UMS submissions.**



# INVESTIGATION PROCESS

If OPA classifies a complaint for a full investigation, an OPA investigator is assigned for further examination. OPA assigns the investigation to the investigator who conducted the intake investigation when possible. The investigation generally involves gathering additional evidence and interviewing the named employee and witnesses. OPA aims to complete investigations within 120 days of receiving the complaint.

## The Investigation Process:

1. An investigator gathers evidence and conducts interviews (including the complainant, if possible).
2. The investigator reviews related documents and videos.
3. OPA's director or designee reviews the case files and recommends findings.
4. OPA sends the complainant a letter summarizing the director's case findings and outcome.

OPA civilian investigations supervisors review completed investigations before transmitting the case files to OIG for review and certification. OIG determines whether the investigation is certifiably thorough, timely, and objective. OIG may also direct OPA to conduct additional investigation before certifying the case.



Of the 3,417 contacts received in 2023, **OPA conducted 550 intake investigations, compared to 454 in 2022.**

# FINDINGS

For every investigation, OPA's director — or designee — reviews the case files and sends the named employee's chain of command a memorandum capturing OPA's investigative steps and legal analysis concerning each allegation. Generally, a preponderance of the evidence standard applies, meaning the evidence must establish that the named employee, more likely than not, violated SPD's policy or training to sustain the allegation. **If the evidence shows an SPD policy violation, the OPA director may recommend a sustained finding.**

If the evidence shows misconduct did not occur, the director will likely recommend a not sustained finding, accompanied by one of the following explanations

- **Unfounded:** The evidence indicates the alleged policy violation did not occur as reported or did not occur at all.
- **Lawful and Proper:** The evidence indicates the alleged conduct did occur but was justified and consistent with policy.
- **Inconclusive:** The evidence neither supports nor refutes the allegation of misconduct.
- **Training Referral:** There was a potential, but not willful, violation of policy that does not amount to serious misconduct. The employee's chain of command will provide appropriate training and counseling.
- **Management Action:** The evidence indicates the employee may have acted contrary to policy. However, due to a potential deficiency in policy or training, OPA issues SPD a policy recommendation to clarify or revise the policy or training.

**While OPA recommends findings and discipline for sustained findings, the Chief of Police makes the final decision.**



**In 2023, OPA issued 999 findings for 290 investigations.** Sixteen percent (16%) of investigations contained one or more sustained findings, a 3% increase from 2022. The Chief of Police overturned none of the OPA director’s recommended findings. Since 2015, SPD’s chief has overturned less than 2% of OPA’s recommended findings.

**FIGURE 11: FINDINGS ISSUED BY ALLEGATION TYPE (2023)**

Allegation Type	Not Sustained	Sustained	Grand Total
Force - Use	149	2	151
Professionalism	106	28	134
Bias-free Policing	126		126
Stops, Detentions and Arrests	87	10	97
Investigations and Reports	70	15	85
Conformance to Law	40	10	50
Integrity and Ethics	44	2	46
Force - De-Escalation	39	4	43
Discretion and Authority	41	1	42
Retaliation and Harassment	31	1	32
Search and Seizure	27	4	31
Vehicle Operation	21	5	26
Performance of Duty	17	8	25
Force - Reporting	15		15
Video and Audio Recording	9	6	15
Administrative Procedures and Requirements	13		13
Property and Evidence	10	2	12
Information and Communications Systems	4	7	11
Supervisory Responsibility	7	3	10
Force - Investigation	6		6
Timekeeping and Payroll	6		6
Secondary Employment	4		4
Bias - Investigation	3		3
Tickets and Traffic Contact Reports	3		3
Self-reporting Obligations		3	3
Obedience to Orders	3		3
Crisis Intervention	2		2
Duty to Provide Identification	2		2
Courtesy and Demeanor	1		1
Equipment and Uniform	1		1
Professionalism - 5.001	1		1



# DISCIPLINE

If the OPA director recommends a sustained finding for one or more allegation(s), the following steps are taken:

1. OPA shares the recommended findings with the named employee's chain of command and a discipline meeting is held between OPA and the chain of command. At the discipline meeting, the parties may disagree on the recommended findings or discipline, but the Chief of Police makes the final decision.
2. The named employee and their union are then notified in a document called the proposed Disciplinary Action Report (DAR), issued by the SPD HR director. This document includes the proposed finding and the discipline committee's recommended disciplinary range.
3. If the discipline involves an oral or written reprimand, and where the discipline committee does not recommend more than a reprimand, the reprimand is issued, and the discipline is then served on the employee by their chain of command.
4. The named employee may request a *Loudermill* hearing, a meeting with the Chief of Police, when the recommended discipline exceeds an oral reprimand.
5. Final disciplinary action is taken.

**In 2023, 60 SPD employees received at least one sustained finding: 4 civilians and 56 sworn employees.** Moreover, 21 employees had sustained findings in two or more OPA investigations, compared to three in 2022.

One SPD employee, an officer, **was terminated.**

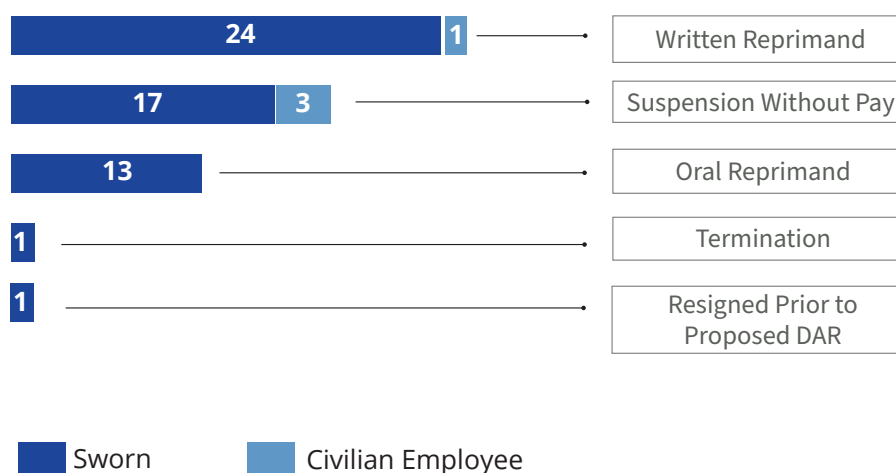


## Discipline Types

For each sustained finding, the chief has the following options:<sup>9</sup>

- **No Discipline:** No formal discipline is imposed. The employee receives a closing letter.
- **Oral Reprimand:** A reprimand is administered by the employee's chain of command to explain how their conduct violated a policy. As with all discipline, the goal is to correct the behavior and ensure it does not reoccur.
- **Written Reprimand:** Written reprimands are generally imposed for higher levels of misconduct or when aggravating factors make an oral reprimand inappropriate. This is the final corrective step before a higher level of discipline.
- **Suspension:** The employee is required to forgo work and pay. Suspensions are generally imposed when the misconduct is severe enough that an oral or written reprimand would be too lenient to ensure the behavior will be corrected. Suspensions are given in 9-hour increments up to 270 hours.
- **Termination:** An employee is dismissed from their employment.
- **Other:** Includes demotions, reassignments, or other disciplinary actions not otherwise noted.

FIGURE 12: TYPES OF DISCIPLINE IMPOSED (2023)



<sup>9</sup> Some employees resign or retire before discipline is imposed.



## Appeals

SPD employees who are disciplined due to an OPA investigation may have the right to appeal, except for oral reprimands. Employee appellate rights are governed by collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) and City of Seattle personnel rules. Represented employees may appeal disciplinary decisions of suspension, demotion, or termination to the Public Safety Civil Service Commission (PSCSC) or arbitration as provided in their CBA.

### Employees may appeal:

1. Terminations
2. Suspensions
3. Written Reprimands
4. Demotions

The Seattle City Attorney's Office handles appeals and provides bi-annual status reports to OPA and the Office of Inspector General (OIG). OPA's website contains information regarding appeals filed since 2016. Arbitrator selection and scheduling are lengthy processes, as evidenced by the backlog of open appeals.

The Public Safety Civil Service Commission (PSCSC) is a three-member appointed body that hears appeals and issues decisions within 90 days of a public hearing. Conversely, arbitration hearings are closed to the public, and decisions are issued within 30 days of a hearing. Ninety-two percent (92%) of appeals filed between 2017-2023 were filed through arbitration. **Officers and the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG) filed six appeals in 2023 — three officers appealed suspensions, and three appealed written reprimands.**<sup>10</sup>

**Two appeals were closed in 2023:** the PSCSC dismissed one appeal, and the other affirmed OPA's findings and recommended discipline through arbitration. Both appeals involved named employees who were terminated.

An employee's discipline starts when the Chief of Police imposes it. The chief does not have to wait until the appeal is decided.



<sup>10</sup> For more information about appeals see [seattle.gov/opa/case-data/disciplinary-appeals](https://seattle.gov/opa/case-data/disciplinary-appeals).



## Chief of Police Complaints

In 2022, Seattle's City Council passed an ordinance setting requirements for investigating complaints naming the Chief of Police. OPA cases involving the Chief of Police follow a different process. OPA conducts an intake investigation for those cases and then recommends a classification to OIG. OIG makes complaint processing decisions for Chief of Police cases.

In 2023, **26 complaints** alleged misconduct  
by the Chief of Police.



You can [click here](#) to review the ordinance.



# ENGAGEMENT

## Community Engagement

The Office of Police Accountability's (OPA) community engagement specialists had a busy 2023, presenting, attending, and tabling at 69 separate events — primarily aimed at increasing awareness about Seattle's police accountability system within marginalized communities.



Black Coffee Northwest Youth Center



33rd Annual Judge Charles V. Johnson Youth and Law Forum



The Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle's 22nd Annual Breakfast



South Park Community Center



Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month Celebration



2023 Back2School Bash Rainier Beach Community Center

## Community Feedback

In the summer of 2023, OPA contracted with Seattle-based EMC Research to explore community awareness of OPA and its services, aiming to better understand how to reach and serve the community. The full report can be viewed on OPA's website at: [www.seattle.gov/opa/news-and-reports/reports](http://www.seattle.gov/opa/news-and-reports/reports).

“Police exist to serve and protect the public, without bias, using the least amount of force necessary. **Accountability means that there are meaningful consequences when they fail at any of those things, including disciplinary action of the officers involved - and their leadership, along with actionable plans to prevent similar conduct in the future.**” - **Anonymous Community Member**



## OPA Youth Art Contest

Throughout March 2024, OPA accepted art submissions from Seattle youth ages 18 and under. Young artists were invited to showcase their creativity and talent by artistically expressing “meaningful police oversight.” The winner, Maya L., age 13, is a talented artist from Seattle, whose submission is featured on the cover of OPA's 2023 Annual Report.



*Pictured from left to right: Deputy Director, Bonnie Glenn; Director, Gino Betts Jr.; Maya L. and her parents.*



*Honorable mention goes to art contest runner up, Ido N., Age 10.*

## SPD Employee Engagement

Leadership changes and staff transitions led to fewer OPA and SPD engagements compared to years prior. Nevertheless, OPA engaged with SPD employees in several capacities, including roll call visits, presentations for sergeants and recruits, and participating in SPD's "Before the Badge" program. These presentations explained OPA's function and operations and outlined expectations for recruits and community service officers. In 2023, Director Betts visited each SPD precinct to outline his vision for OPA and answer questions.



*Pictured above: OPA Director Gino Betts Jr. visiting SPD's Southwest Precinct.*

In July, OPA relaunched its monthly newsletter (formerly the "Case and Policy Update") to increase transparency and communication with community members and SPD employees.

**Newsletter subscribers increased 15% in 2023,  
ending the year with 2,483 subscribers.**

OPA's newsletter is a great way for SPD employees and community members to stay up-to-date on the latest Seattle police accountability news. Each month, subscribers receive the following content in their inbox:

- 1. In Community:** sharing highlights from our community engagement team plus upcoming events.
- 2. Closed Case Summaries** of the previous month's closed complaints including a summary of the the investigation, the OPA director's analysis and findings, and any recommended and imposed discipline.
- 3. News and Information** about police accountability work happening in Seattle and across the nation plus updates about SPD policies and state laws.

To subscribe to OPA's newsletter, [click here](#) or email [opa@seattle.gov](mailto:opa@seattle.gov).



# REVIEWING SPD POLICIES

## Management Action Recommendations (MARs)

During an investigation, the Office of Police Accountability (OPA) may identify systemic concerns with SPD policies or training and issue a Management Action Recommendation (MAR). MARs aim to clarify or revise policies, encourage best practices, preempt misconduct, and limit overturned findings caused by deficient policies, procedures, or training.

Although SPD is not required to implement OPA's recommendations, historically, this collaboration has been successful, with 67% of MARs from 2019-2022 either partially or fully implemented.

A MAR is complete when OPA receives a formal response letter from SPD. After reviewing SPD's response, OPA determines whether the recommendation was "fully implemented," "partially implemented," or "declined action."<sup>11</sup> OPA posts all MARs and SPD responses on its website, regularly updating statuses.<sup>12</sup> When MARs result in SPD training changes, OPA may monitor its full implementation.

**In 2023, OPA issued five MARs covering various issues**, including vehicle tactics for task force members, the processing of money evidence, inadvertent Taser deployments, unhand-cuffing screenings, and the use of force on restrained persons. SPD completed three, with 60% partially or fully implemented.

 **Appendix A lists all 2023 Management Action Recommendations.**

OPA also collaborates with SPD command staff and the SPD's command staff and Audit, policy, and Research Section (APRS) in other ways, including:

- Assisting with annual policy reviews as mandated by the consent decree<sup>13</sup>
- Recommending policy changes based on trends or patterns found in investigations

Ultimately, OPA's input ensures that clear and robust policies guide and empower SPD employees to work efficiently and effectively while preserving police accountability.

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<sup>11</sup> A "fully implemented" status means SPD implemented all proposed recommendations. "Partially implemented" means SPD implemented one or more recommendations and provided a rationale for non-implemented recommendations. "Declined action" means SPD did not act on the recommendations but indicated why.

<sup>12</sup> See MAR statuses at [seattle.gov/opa/policy/policy-recommendations](https://seattle.gov/opa/policy/policy-recommendations).

<sup>13</sup> The 2012 Consent Decree between the City of Seattle and the Department of Justice (DOJ) requires SPD to submit policies, procedures, training curricula, and manuals to the Monitor and DOJ for review and comment before publication and implementation. With the Monitor's assistance, SPD must review each policy, procedure, training curriculum, and training manual within 180 days of implementation and annually thereafter.





## Monitoring Serious Incidents

The SPD Manual requires officers' use of force to be documented and investigated. SPD's Force Investigation Team (FIT) investigates significant force applications. OPA observes FIT investigations involving Type III uses of force, including officer-involved shootings.<sup>14</sup> When those incidents occur, OPA responds to the incident location and observes the administrative investigation and discussion. The administrative investigation examines whether an officer's conduct followed SPD policy and training. OPA may identify possible policy violations and initiate a complaint at any point.<sup>15</sup> FIT callouts demand significant time and resources.

**In 2023, OPA responded to 10 FIT callouts**, compared to nine in 2022 and 11 in 2021.<sup>16</sup>

OPA aims to attend all FIT callouts to increase procedural justice by fortifying civilian oversight, accountability, and transparency for force investigations.

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## Legislative Review

During the 2023 state legislative session, OPA collaborated with the Seattle Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR) to provide feedback on various bills concerning police accountability, traffic safety, vehicle pursuits, and qualified immunity.



<sup>14</sup> A Type III use of force causes, or is reasonably expected to cause, great bodily harm, substantial bodily harm, loss of consciousness, or death. See [bit.ly/3LgWjD](https://bit.ly/3LgWjD).<sup>15</sup> Callouts are generally attended by a civilian supervisor and sworn investigators. OPA representatives stay at the incident location, the hospital, or the FIT office until the initial investigation and interviews are completed.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about OPA's role during a Type III investigation, see SPD Policy Manual sections 8.400 POL-5(5) and 8.400-TSK-21 at [bit.ly/42dE4Fm](https://bit.ly/42dE4Fm).



## APPENDIX A

# MANAGEMENT ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Topic	OPA Recommendation	SPD Action	Status
<b>Vehicle Tactics and Joint Taskforce Agreements</b>	Identify qualifying courses that meet the training requirements outlined in Chief Diaz's 2022 email. Consider a process to inventory which officers are qualified to perform maneuvers based on existing training(s). Consider whether officers have qualifying training when selecting officers for task force assignments. Ensure task force members understand they are subject to SPD policies regardless of their participation in a task force.	[SPD developed] training, which is being reviewed by the Inspector General's Office and [will begin in] Q1 of 2024. This training is mandatory for sworn personnel and equips them with the necessary skills to perform appropriate maneuvers. SPD is re-evaluating existing MOUs along with whether responsibilities align with training.	Fully Implemented
<b>Money Evidence</b>	Review policies, procedures, and training for employees collecting and submitting money evidence and evaluate alignment with best practices. Assess whether tools like automated money counters would help money evidence pro-cessing by limiting counting errors and [aiding] in counterfeit detection and consider acquiring additional counters. Ad-dress interdepartmental communication gaps in the money evidence process and revisit SPD Policy 7.080 to determine whether an outside agency member (typically encountered when on a task force) meets policy requirements when counting.	SPD reviewed the policy and believed a member of an outside agency [and] the use of body-worn cameras on officers counting met the policy requirements associated with money counting. They determined additional money-counting machines require funds they currently lack.	Partially Implemented
<b>Taser Use</b>	Address potential mishaps stemming from Taser X2's design by reinforcing the need to test the ARC button before each shift per SPD policy 8.300 Pol 2.13 and stabilize it with their non-dominant hand before deployment per the de-vice's manual to reduce accidental discharges by building muscle memory and encouraging familiarity with the device. Also, consider more frequent than annual Taser training.	SPD is replacing the Taser X2 with the Taser 10, which lacks an ARC button... [Although,] there is a delay due to training officers in the Taser 10, it does not allow for this particular mishap. All Taser deployments are also reviewed by the Force Review Board, which refers any officers with substandard deployments to additional training.	Partially Implemented
<b>Use of Force on Restrained Persons</b>	A recent SPD policy change addressed the deficiency that existed when the incident occurred. Asks SPD to consider acquiring, or jointly acquiring with hospitals, mobile restraint systems like the supplemental prisoner adjustable re-straint (SPAR).	The recent policy change addresses the prior gap. SPD also determined the use of a SPAR is not viable because it re-quires the presence of additional officers to get the community member in and out of the equipment as well as the high cost associated with acquiring the equipment.	Declined Action
<b>Un-handcuffing Screenings</b>	Revise SPD Policy Manual 6/220-POL-2(8) to instruct screening sergeants to tell subjects why they were detained and handcuffed, confirm their understanding, verify that the subject's detention was consistent with SPD policy, inquire as to whether the subject experienced pain or injury, document, and photograph observable injuries.	SPD is addressing the issue in training rather than as a policy revision. They plan to discuss "why they do what they do and what steps [to take] to achieve the desired outcomes."	Declined Action

