



2024

ANNUAL REPORT



**OFFICE OF THE
POLICE OMBUDS**
INDEPENDENT CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT

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MEET THE OPO



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OUR MISSION

The Office of Police Ombuds exists to promote public confidence in the professionalism and accountability of the members of the Spokane Police Department by providing independent review of police actions, thoughtful policy recommendations, and ongoing community outreach.

MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDS

Throughout 2024, the Office of the Police Ombudsman (OPO) experienced a significant increase in public engagement, receiving 3,091 contacts—a 70% increase from the previous year and nearly double pre-pandemic levels. The OPO generated 44 complaints, marking a 22% rise from 2023, while total complaints to the police department increased by 31%, reaching 101. Additionally, the OPO issued seven commendations and eight letters of appreciation, maintaining our recognition of exemplary service.

In our commitment to oversight, the OPO reviewed 79 cases, certifying 78 while declining certification in one instance. Collaboration between the OPO and Internal Affairs (IA) on cases before reaching the need for decertification has continued to improve. Oversight of IA interviews also expanded significantly, reaching 101 compared to just 45 in 2022.

STRENGTHENING OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

According to National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE), the effectiveness of civilian oversight relies on fundamental principles:



independence, clearly defined authority, adequate resources, and public transparency. The City of Spokane has taken steps to reinforce these principles. The new City Administration has demonstrated an unprecedented commitment to police accountability, engaging in regular discussions with the OPO and prioritizing proper funding. The City Council has also explored measures to protect the OPO budget from political influence, ensuring long-term stability. Meanwhile, the Administration, Police Department, and Police Guild have expressed a willingness to address key concerns in the upcoming Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiations.

The Spokane Police Department (SPD) underwent significant leadership transitions in 2024, with Chief Meidl retiring and a couple of interim chiefs serving before Chief Hall's appointment in August 2024. Each leadership shift has contributed to greater openness to oversight, leading to tangible progress. Notably, in early 2025, SPD formally adopted all previous OPO-recommended changes to Administrative Review Panels, ensuring these improvements were embedded in policy rather than remaining unimplemented commitments. In late 2024, the OPO raised concerns about SPD review boards reinforcing force usage rather than emphasizing de-escalation. The department responded by restructuring board membership and philosophy, ensuring alignment with modern policing standards. Additionally, the OPO facilitated discussions between SPD leadership and the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC) to reinforce de-escalation training practices.

As a Commissioner for the WSCJTC, I have participated in multiple decertification panels for officers accused of substantial misconduct. Washington State leads the nation with its emphasis on community member involvement as well as mandatory and discretionary mandates for decertification. I also had the opportunity to present on these reforms at the 2024 NACOLE Annual Conference and was invited to participate in a workgroup at the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab.

REPORTING, TRANSPARENCY, & THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

In 2024, the OPO issued five closing reports, resulting in 21 policy and training recommendations. However, the CBA continues to restrict the OPO from offering independent opinions on matters of public concern. These limitations hinder transparency and, in at least one case, contributed to the spread of misinformation regarding an officer's termination. Future negotiations must address these restrictions to ensure the OPO can fulfill its mission effectively. Despite ongoing challenges, the Police Guild has engaged in meaningful discussions with the OPO, contributing to higher-quality reports and fostering increased transparency. Guild representatives have also maintained regular attendance at OPOC meetings, participating in public discussions and demonstrating a commitment to constructive engagement.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025

Moving forward, the OPO remains committed to strengthening public trust, advocating for policy improvements, and ensuring oversight remains independent and effective. Collaboration with Chief Hall and City leadership will be crucial in advancing accountability, transparency, and public safety in Spokane. The progress made in 2024 lays a strong foundation for continued reform, and I look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

OPO ACTIVITIES

2024	2023	Change	Highlight of Activities
3091	1820	70%	Citizen contacts
153	76	101%	Participation or attendance in community meetings and events
14	17	-18%	Letters of officer appreciation / commendation
44	36	22%	OPO generated complaints
61	61	0%	Referrals to other agencies / departments
0	1	-100%	Cases offered to SPD for mediation
1	3	-67%	Cases declined to certify
78	88	-11%	Cases certified
143	93	54%	Interviews of citizens with ongoing or potential complaints
101	94	7%	Oversight of IA interviews
186	158	18%	Special cases reviewed
583	415	40%	Meetings with SPD
19	13	46%	SPD review boards



Citizen Interviews

+54%



Citizen Contacts

+70%



Community Events

+101%



OUTREACH

COMMUNITY MEETINGS & EVENTS

- OPOC meetings
- Public Safety & Community Health Committee meetings
- Leadership Spokane Board of Directors
- Public Safety Community meetings
- Mayor's quarterly meetings
- Swearing in ceremony for new officers at the Spokane Police Academy
- Outreach Connections
- Leadership Lights the Way Gala
- National Night Out
- Spokane Police Annual Employee Awards Ceremony
- Fundraiser for Camp Stix
- NAACP fundraiser

OVERSIGHT RELATED

- NACOLE board meetings
- NACOLE winter board meetings
- WSCJTC meetings and decertification panels

OTHER

- Police Chief selection committee
- Basic Law Enforcement Academy mock scenes
- SPD Annual Awards Ceremony



TRAINING

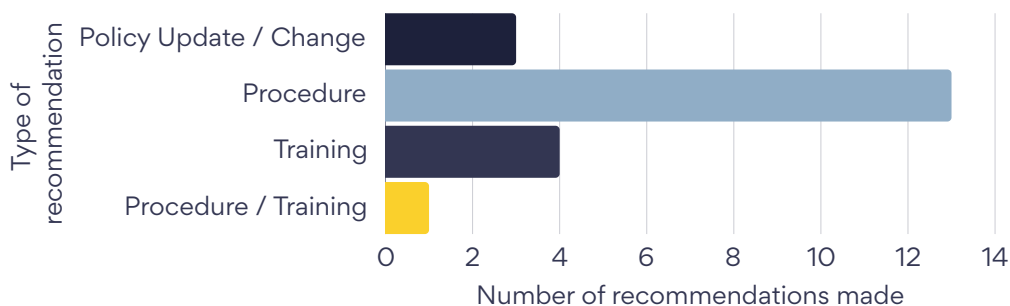
- SPD In-Service training
- SPD Active Shooter In-Service
- SPD supervisor's training
- Ride alongs
- Axon Standards training
- NACOLE webinars
- Executive leadership coach certification training
- CJIS training
- Washington State Bar Association webinars
- Know Be 4 security awareness training
- Office of Independent Investigation webinar
- Labor and Law Arbitration conference
- Daigle Law Group Technology Summit
- Public Records Act University training
- NACOLE annual conference
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) annual conference
- Use of Force Summit
- Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab's Public Safety and Police Accountability Executive Workshop
- Chicago Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) Citizen's Academy
- United States Ombudsman Association Annual Conference



REPORTING

The OPO issued 12 monthly reports, one annual report, and five closing reports in 2024 with 21 recommendations. The reports covered a pursuit, use of a canine, uses of force, and an IA investigation case. The common themes in the reports were force analysis, supervisory review, training on pursuits, and review board analysis. The recommendations involved issues of:

- body worn camera buffering
- canine policy
- communication prior to force being used
- de-escalation
- officer discretion in charging decisions
- duty to intervene
- exceptional techniques
- IA investigation procedures
- report writing
- supervisory review
- pursuits schemas
- review boards
- use of force

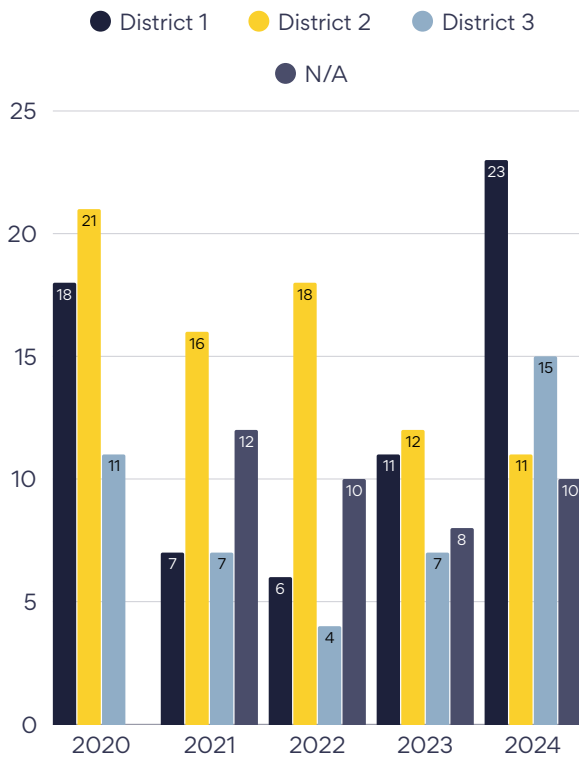


Of note, the OPO's report on C23-070 received regional and national media attention that reported the accused officer was terminated for having a political sticker on their department issued vehicle. Due to reporting restrictions, the OPO did not discuss the final disciplinary determination where the officer was terminated for being untruthful during the IA investigation process. The OPO's ability to discuss the final disciplinary determination is still not clear in the police contract.

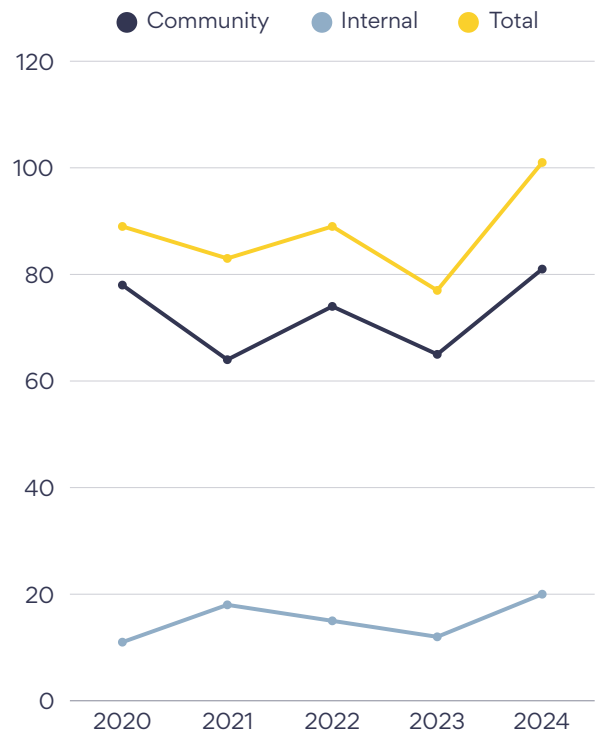
For more information on reports, visit <https://my.spokanecity.org/opo/documents>.

COMMENDATIONS, COMPLAINTS, & REFERRALS

The OPO submitted 7 commendations and 8 letters of appreciation to SPD. The OPO also forwarded 44 complaints to IA for investigation. District 1 generated the most complaints from the community. There were 228 total allegations made in 101 complaints combined between the SPD and OPO. The community made 81 complaints and 20 were internally generated.



Five year complaints by City Council district



Five year complaint trends

44

total OPO
complaints

81

total
community
complaints

20

internal
complaints

31%

increase in all
complaints

COMMENDATIONS

The OPO submitted seven commendations and eight letters of appreciation for ride alongs that members of the OPO and Commission attended. An OPOC Commissioner also submitted a commendation. The community submitted seven commendations to the OPO for either exceptional service by an officer or a positive interaction with an officer.

25%

of commendations were for positive interactions with officers

75%

of commendations were for exceptional service

REFERRALS

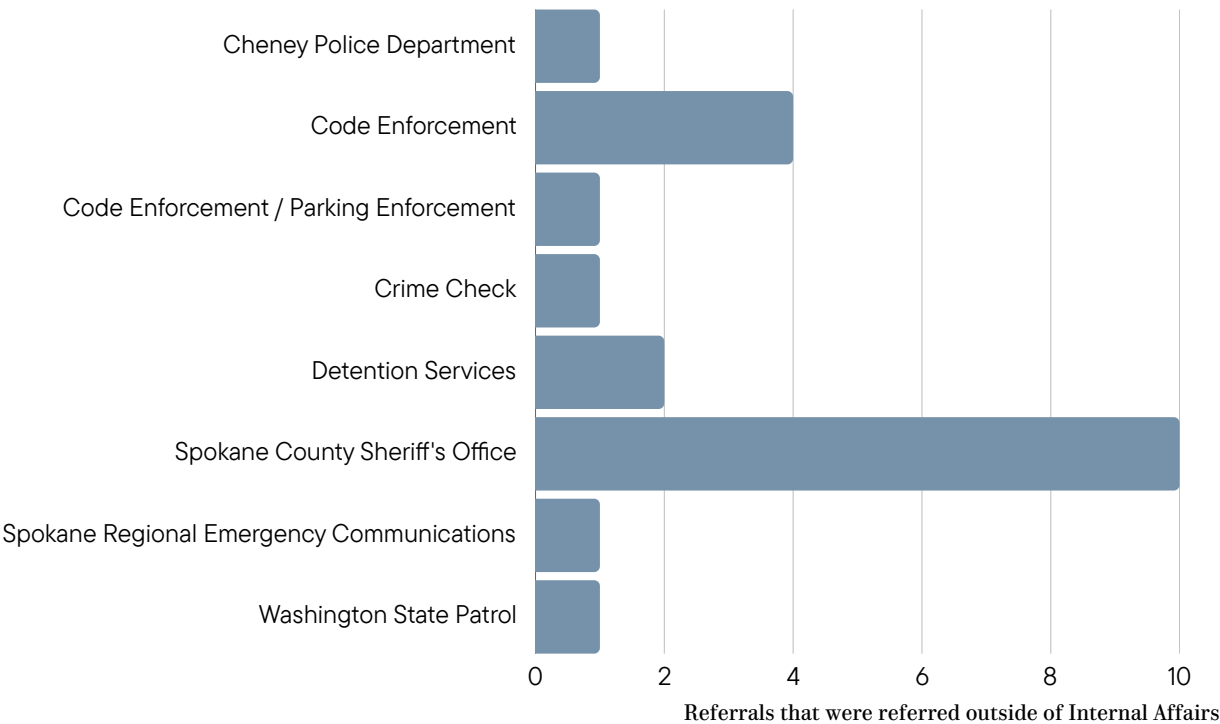
66%

of total referrals were internal

48%

of external referrals were made to the Spokane County Sheriff's Office

The OPO submitted 61 total referrals with 40 internal referrals made. All internal referrals are sent to IA who then forwards them to the appropriate internal unit or department. Referrals were the same as 2023; however, there was a 25% increase in internal referrals. Most external referrals made were to the Spokane County Sheriff's Office.



COMPLAINTS ANALYSIS

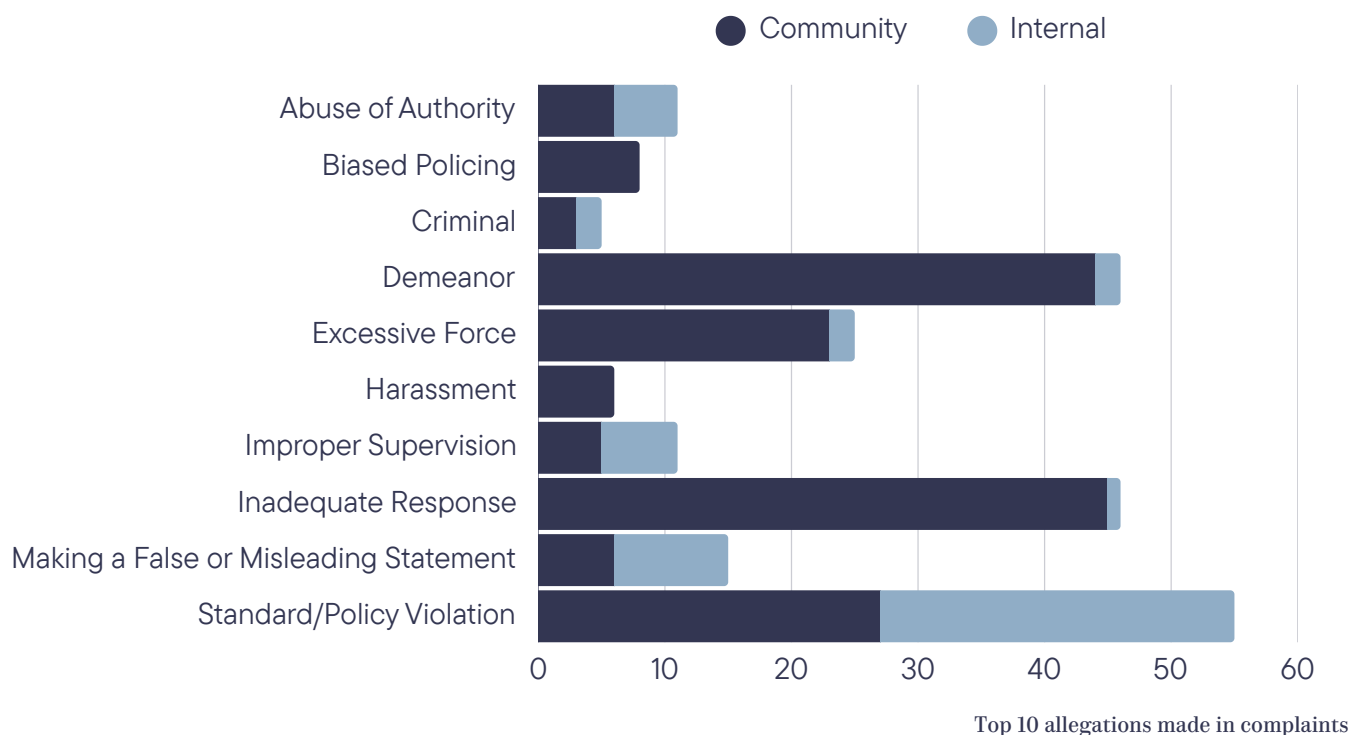
The most common type of allegation overall was Standard/Policy Violation. This was also the most common internally generated allegation. The most common types of allegations received from the community were Demeanor and Inadequate Response.

For full details on OPO complaints, visit:

<https://my.spokanecity.org/opo/complaints/>.

Standard / Policy Violation

was the most common allegation overall

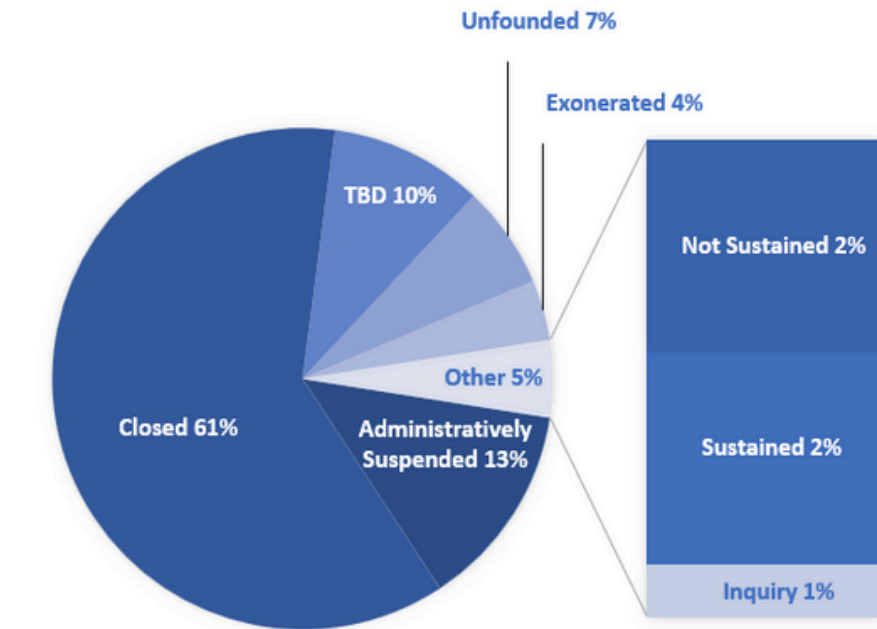


Examples of Standard/Policy Violation include but are not limited to:

- when requested, officers will provide name and personnel number
- report preparation
- body worn camera violation
- improper tactics
- confidentiality of personnel files
- refraining from developing or maintaining personal relationships with victims, witnesses, or suspects
- failure to report
- engaging in on-duty sexual relations
- release of information
- failure to take reasonable action
- dereliction of duty
- computer misuse
- delayed report writing
- misuse of cooperating individuals

OUTCOMES OF ALLEGATIONS

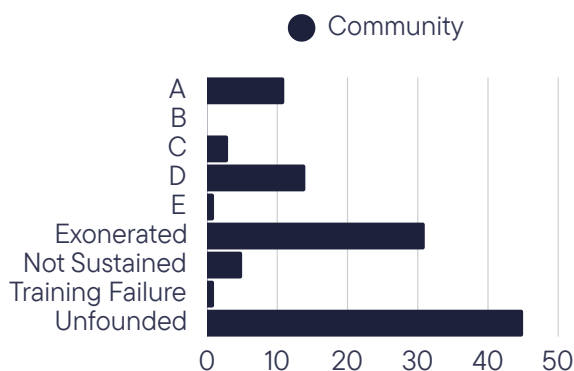
Community complaints



Community complaint outcomes

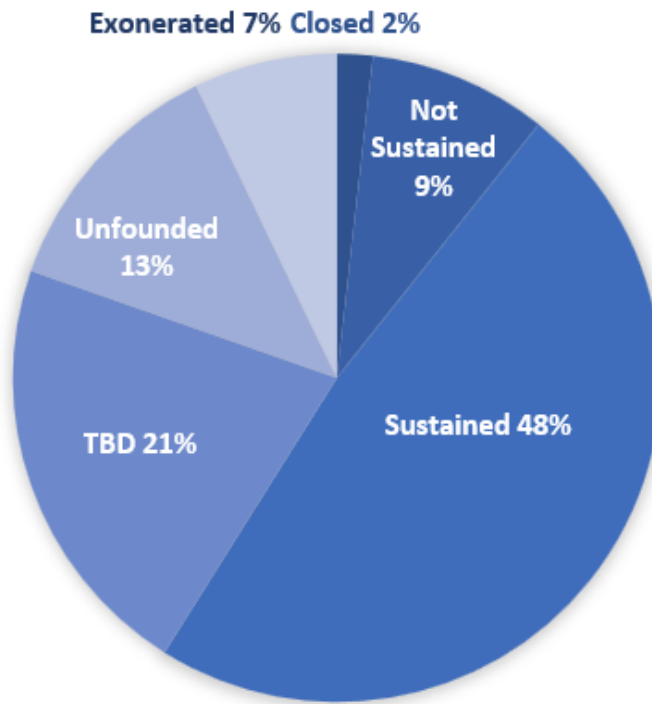
In 2023, the use of the Closed category increased as part of IA and the OPO's expeditious review of complaints that do not rise to the level of a chain of command complaint. In 2024, the Closed category was expanded from two subsections: (A) an allegation of misconduct that is disproven upon initial review and (B) the complaining party refuses to cooperate to six subsections with findings. The additional subsections include:

- (C) The complaining party becomes unavailable and further contact is necessary to proceed.
- (D) A minor allegation sent to the employee's supervisor for informal follow-up
- (E) All reasonable investigative leads were exhausted and no evidence of wrongdoing was uncovered.
- (F) The accused officer leaves employment and/or the officer resigned in anticipation of discipline, and if carried forward, would more likely than not have led to discharge where SPD shall conduct and complete the investigation and provide the information to the WSCJTC.



Of the closed community complaints, the most common outcomes were: 45 allegations were unfounded, 31 allegations were exonerated, and 14 allegations were found to be a minor allegation sent to a supervisor for follow-up. If a complaint has wrongdoing or a policy violation outside of a minor nature referred to a supervisor, they are never closed.

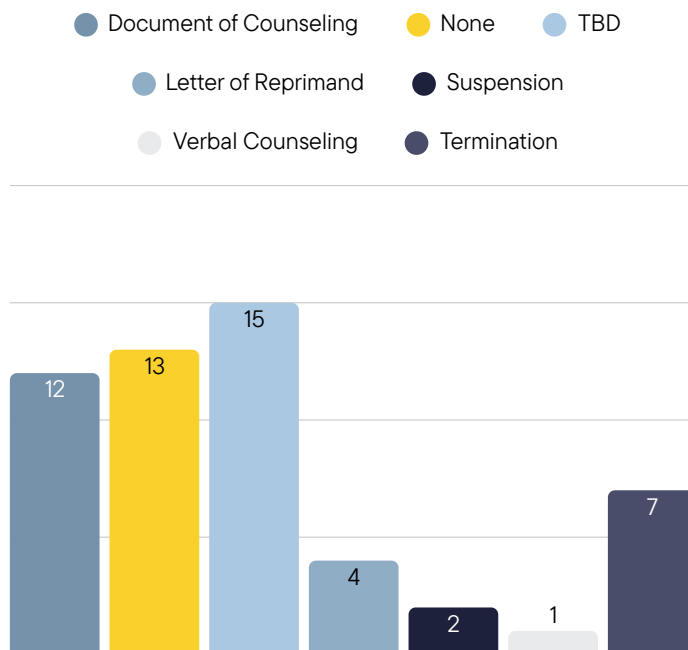
Internal complaints



Internal complaint outcomes

The most common outcome for internal complaints was Sustained at 49% of all internally made allegations. This is consistent with the number of allegations that were sustained in 2023. 22% of allegations are still TBD, 2% were closed, and 27% received a chain of command review.

Allegations leading to discipline



Disciplinary findings of allegations by the chain of command

2 officers terminated

1 officer received 1 complaint with 5 allegations and received termination as the sanction but retired prior to issuance.

1 officer received 1 complaint with 2 allegations and was terminated.

STATISTICS OF INTEREST

	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change from Previous Year
Non-Deadly Uses of Force	66	80	85	98	+15%
Critical Incidents	2	5	2	6	High
Pursuits	13	11	12	16	+33%
Preventable Collisions	31	29	35	40	+14%
Officer Response to Calls for Service	94,300	99,751	107,567	99,401	-8%

The data in this section is provided by SPD. The OPO has tracked this data to provide the public with general information on some statistics that may be of interest.

* The statistics of interest increased across all data points tracked, except for calls for service.

* Pursuits have also gradually increased in the last four years. Pursuits are viewed as a low frequency/high liability area that officers receive little training on. SPD has begun to look for ways to increase training.

* 2024 saw the most number of officer involved shootings since 2017. Five subjects were White males with one mixed race White-Hispanic male. Five of the six subjects are deceased.

* Non-deadly uses of force have continued to increase every year. SPD has begun reviewing cases more critically and has emphasized creating time, distance, and cover in training.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

CLIFF & STEVENS

January 31, 2024

Race: White

Status: Deceased

Critical Incident #1

Officers responded to a report of an armed suicidal male who threatened the complainant in a suicide note. Officers arrived on scene, located the suspect who was still armed, and gave him several commands to drop the weapon. The suspect raised his handgun in the direction of the officers who reacted by firing their weapons.

Critical Incident #2

SPD received multiple calls that a woman had been shot. Officers responded and facilitated another male's escape but believed the female's life was in danger. Officers entered the home to rescue the female, encountered the suspect, and exchanged gunfire.

1123 E. WELLESLEY AVE

February 12, 2024

Race: White

Status: Deceased

HOWARD/ RIVERSIDE

February 12, 2024

Race: White-Hispanic

Status: Deceased

Critical Incident #3

SPD received multiple calls about a suicidal male with a knife threatening to stab passersby in the downtown area. The male also spoke about forcing law enforcement to shoot him. The suspect was seen holding a knife to a man's throat and displayed the knife inside a restaurant. Officers used TASERS but they were ineffective. Two SPD officers then fired their weapons.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS (CONT.)

1820 W. DEAN

March 31, 2024

Race: White

Status: Deceased

Critical Incident #4

Officers responded to assist the Spokane Fire Department with a structure fire. Officers learned this was a possible arson case and the person of interest was unaccounted for. Officers interviewed occupants of the home when the suspect became uncooperative, refused to be detained, walked away, and discharged a concealed firearm. Officers responded by returning fire.

Critical Incident #5

SPD received a 911 call of a shooting. The victim was attempting to tow the suspect's vehicle as part of a repossession. The suspect tried to stop the tow by threatening the tow truck driver and then stabbing and shooting a tire of the tow truck before fleeing. Officers identified the suspect and developed probable cause for arrest. Officers later located the suspect running on foot in Shadle Park in the direction of a high school baseball game. Officers pursued the suspect, three officers fired their firearms.

2000 W. LONGFELLOW AVE

April 18, 2024

Race: White

Status: Survived

840 W. CORA

December 29, 2024

Race: White

Status: Deceased

Critical Incident #6

Officers responded to a report of a male firing a rifle from his apartment. Officers identified the suspect and four officers fired their weapons, striking, and killing the suspect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The OPO wrote five closing reports and issued 21 recommendations. Closing reports are based on complaints, uses of force, collisions, and pursuits. To view full recommendations and SPD's responses, please visit: <https://my.spokanecity.org/opo/recommendations/2024/>.

POLICE CHIEF'S RESPONSES

Implemented	9/21	No Response	6/21
In Progress	2/21	Not Implemented	1/21
Partially Implemented	1/21	Under Review	2/21

Number	Recommendations	SPD Responses
R24-01	SPD should move the duty to intervene out of the use of force policy to remove confusion on its application and make it a standalone policy.	Implemented
R24-02	The OPO recommends IA investigators include the IA Checklist in every case and require other members of IA to fill out a conflict-of-interest form if they participate in any interviews.	Implemented
R24-03	The OPO recommends IA update its Standard Operating Procedures and Conflict of Interest Form to include whether an assigned investigator has knowledge or material information that would cause a conflict of interest.	Implemented
R24-04	There appears to be a discrepancy between the ARP's interpretation of what it means to keep personnel investigations confidential due to what item 8 in the R&R form says. IA should update the form to remove the conflicting statements so that the form complies with SPD Policy 1020.8.1's confidentiality requirements.	Implemented

Number	Recommendations	SPD Responses
R24-05	SPD should adopt a critical decision-making model or something similar regarding pursuits. The use of decision-making model can assist officers and supervisors in deciding whether to initiate a pursuit, gathering and evaluating information during the pursuit, and deciding when to discontinue. SPD should also develop specialized training for other personnel (e.g., supervisors, communications personnel, incident commanders) who may play a role in a pursuit review.	Implemented
R24-06	In-service training on the vehicle pursuit policy should occur at least once per year and could include both in-service and roll call components.	Implemented
R24-07	SPD should consider purchasing, sharing, or leasing a driver simulator that can incorporate scenario-based and decision-making training to provide practical refresher training.	Not Implemented
R24-08	SPD should use this incident to provide departmentwide scenario-based training in pursuits, specifically reminding officers to maintain hyperawareness of their surroundings and in radio discipline during pursuits.	Implemented
R24-09	SPD should ensure all supervisors who authorize pursuits write a report detailing their justification for the pursuit pursuant to SPD Policy 314.2.2.	Implemented
R24-10	SPD should update its canine policy to require all reasonable efforts to avoid unnecessary and unnecessarily injurious bites. When the location of the subject in hiding has been determined, handlers should not direct a direct apprehension if alternative tactics are available, safe, and feasible.	In Progress
R24-11	Supervisors should conduct separate tactical analysis for each function in which a canine is deployed. The factors that justify the use of a canine to search for an individual may differ from the factors in apprehending an individual. This would ensure that officers are exercising reasonable care and using the least amount of force necessary in apprehending subjects.	No Response
R24-12	Uninvolved supervisors should respond to every incident of force involving a canine to conduct an administrative investigation. A standardized list of questions should be used including: the factors requiring the canine use, determination of force options available, de-escalation tactics employed, and interviewing the subject.	No Response
R24-13	SPD should turn on audio during buffer mode of body worn camera recordings.	No Response

Number	Recommendations	SPD Responses
R24-14	SPD should train officers to determine whether to charge an individual purely based on whether the elements of the law are met. The victim's wishes should not be a determining factor.	In Progress
R24-15	SPD should include aggravation of pre-existing injuries as a type of reviewable force to have such as much documentation of the incident in the event the subject decides to pursue litigation.	No Response
R24-16	Review board members should receive specific guidance on force analysis and review board expectations. Greater emphasis should be placed on alternatives to force and de-escalation. The review boards should also provide an analysis of the supervisory review; and provide recommendations when supervisory reviews fall short.	Under Review
R24-17	The OPO recommends SPD safeguard the reputation of the Use of Force Review Board by only placing individuals who have a working knowledge of SPD policies and procedures on boards. Additionally, members of the review board should be individuals who are willing to critically analyze the different factors listed in SPD Policy 302.4.	Under Review
R24-18	The OPO recommends supervisors should clearly indicate in their reviews when a use of force is outside of policy should be considered exceptional. Exceptional techniques should be carefully reviewed to determine their necessity and appropriateness. Special care should be given to alternative and appropriate force options that were available at the time, if any.	Implemented
R24-19	SPD should amend its policy to evaluate the types of communication strategies that are more likely emphasize that the subject hears the order, understands it, and has enough time to respond prior to force being used.	No Response
R24-20	SPD should consider a comprehensive de-escalation training program that is evidence-based with measurable outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the tactics and training taught.	Partially Implemented
R24-21	Questions regarding uses of force should be investigated rather than reviewed. This is especially true in uses of force where an officer and the subject have conflicting recollections of the incident that create disputed facts that go to the heart of whether force was justified.	No Response

Glossary

1. COMMENDATIONS

When an individual contacts the OPO and wishes to submit a compliment for an interaction or an incident involving an SPD officer.

2. COMMUNITY COMPLAINT

A complaint submitted by a community member.

3. CRITICAL INCIDENT

An in-custody death or officer involved shooting.

4. INTERNAL COMPLAINT

A complaint generated within the police department officer involved shooting.

5. LETTER OF APPRECIATION

Letters submitted by the OPO or the OPOC to members of the SPD.

6. NON-DEADLY USE OF FORCE

Physical force is any act reasonably likely to cause physical pain or injury or any act exerted upon a person's body to compel, control, constrain, or restrain the person's movement and rises to the level of a reviewable force and requires a Use of Force Report in BlueTeam under SPD Policy 301.12. (SPD Policy Manual 301.2(M))

7. OFFICER RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR SERVICE

When an officer is dispatched to a request for assistance.

8. PREVENTABLE COLLISIONS

Collisions that the chain of command determined could have been avoided.

9. REFERRALS

Concerns received by the OPO that fall outside the scope of the complaint process and are sent to the police department for follow up. Internal referrals are sent to the appropriate city department or police unit that can address the concern. External referrals are sent to agencies outside of the city.

10. SPD REVIEW BOARDS

An administrative process after a disciplinary review aimed at improving police procedures, policies, and training. This includes the Use of Force Review Board; Collision and Pursuit Review Board; Administrative Review Board; and Deadly Force Review Board.

Glossary (cont.)

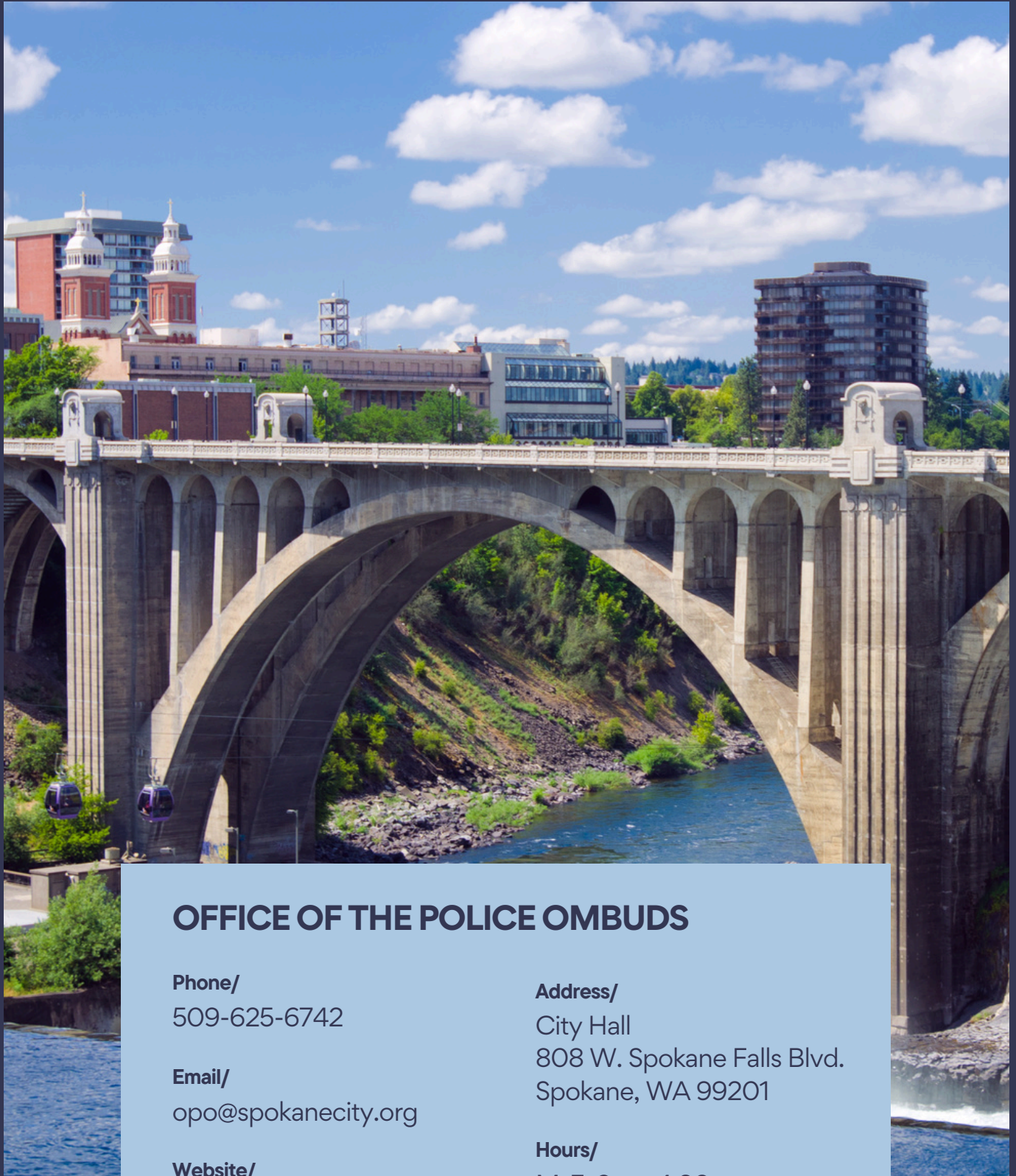
11. SPECIAL CASES REVIEWED

Cases of community concern that are not sent to the OPO for certification. This includes canine deployment, uses of force, collisions, pursuits, and cases sent to the Administrative Review Board and Deadly Force Review Board.

12. VEHICULAR PURSUITS

An attempt by an officer in a vehicle equipped with emergency lights and a siren to stop a moving vehicle where the operator of the moving vehicle appears to be aware that the officer is signaling he operator to stop the vehicle and the operator of the moving vehicle appears to be willfully resisting or ignoring the officer's attempt to stop the vehicle by increasing speed, making evasive maneuvers, or operating the vehicle in a reckless manner that endangers the safety of the community or the officer. A vehicle pursuit is not a follow. (SPD Policy Manual 314.1.1(E))

CONTACT US



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