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POLICE OMBUDSMAN
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February 18, 2016

Chief Craig Meidl
Spokane Police Division
1100 W. Mallon Avenue
Spokane, Washington 99260

RE: R16-01 – How to contact the police

Dear Chief Meidl,

For record keeping purposes of the Office of the Police Ombudsman ("OPO"), I am formalizing previous recommendations made informally in 2016. Please find a summary below of my recommendation on how to contact the police.

On February 13, 2016, I received two voicemail messages from citizens who thought they were contacting the police. One call was from a woman whose daughter's was injured after being bit by a dog and the woman didn't know what to do. The other call was a woman requesting a welfare check on her daughter who had just come out of a DV situation and recently had surgery. Both citizens thought they were contacting the police department and expected immediate service. I believe 1) there must be a clear distinction between OPO and SPD on the phone tree and 2) there must be a simpler way for citizens to speak with a live person. I have changed our office voicemail and worked with Web and IT to make the distinction between our offices more clear online and on the phone tree.

In order to advise citizens who mistakenly contact my office, I tried to reach the police using the main number the way a citizen would. I visited Spokane Police's website, called the Help Line, the Spokane Police front desk, and Officer Fuller, the media relations officer at the time. When I called the front desk, I had to go through several options and messages; I finally spoke with a live person, only to be left on hold. I hung up after fifteen minutes. I did not call 911, Crime Check, or the Tip Line. I resorted to using the internal numbers I had in order to ensure the citizens' concerns were addressed.

Thankfully, in that instance we were able to assist the two citizens with the services they needed. However, from a customer service perspective, I recommend SPD simplify the process for citizens to contact the police. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Bart Logue
Police Ombudsman
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