



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

Annual Study of OPA Sworn and Civilian Staffing

2023/2024

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The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is charged with annually examining the impact of OPA civilianization efforts on OPA processes and outcomes for complaint investigations. Due to staffing issues related to Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) restrictions that continued through this period, there was insufficient data to allow for an adequate analysis of civilian and sworn investigations, as discussed below.

Background

The Office of Police Accountability (OPA) conducts investigations into allegations of misconduct by Seattle Police Department (SPD) employees made by community members and SPD employees. The system is crucial for enhancing trust between community and SPD by encouraging transparency and accountability. OPA employs both sworn SPD officers and non-SPD civilians as investigators.

In 2023, OIG published a [report](#) assessing OPA use of both sworn and civilian staff for investigating police misconduct to highlight opportunities for systemic improvement. This report examined whether the sworn status of investigators had an impact on investigations. To conduct this analysis, OIG Certifications of OPA sworn staff investigations were compared with OIG Certifications of OPA civilian staff investigations using data from June 2022 to June 2023.

Limitations

The 2023 report highlighted limitations that prevented OIG from providing recommendations and conducting future research on the mix of OPA sworn and civilian staff. The limitations included the number of civilian investigators employed by OPA and Seattle Police Officer Guild (SPOG) restrictions on the role and number of civilian investigators. Both limitations limited sample size availability for analysis.

Data availability. For the 2022/2023 report, OIG compiled complaints classified for full investigation spanning from June 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023. Because of limitations on the types of cases civilians may investigate, complaints were grouped based on similarities in the type of complaint, OPA allegation categories, SPD policies under review, and the complexity of each case. Each group included at least one case assigned to a civilian investigator. The final data sample consisted of 12 investigations conducted by 2 civilian investigators and 27 investigations conducted by 10 sworn investigators.

For this review period, unlike in 2022/2023 where there were two civilian investigators, there was only one. While there is data to develop a preliminary analysis, any evaluation would compare the work of one civilian investigator against a group of sworn investigators. Ensuring a group-to-group assessment instead of an individual-to-group assessment is critical to a meaningful evaluation.

Types of investigations. The role of civilian investigators is determined, and currently limited, by the CBA. Cases that could reasonably lead to an officer's termination must be assigned to a sworn investigator.¹ Between July 2023 and June 2024, OIG certified 311 total investigations, 180 full investigations and 131 expedited investigations,

1 Any case that reasonably could lead to termination will have a sworn investigators assigned to the case. SPOG CBA, Appendix D. Expired in 12/31/2020.

conducted by 15 total sworn investigators and one civilian investigator. Fourteen sworn investigators conducted 160 investigations and one civilian investigator conducted twenty investigations. For expedited investigations, 13 sworn investigators conducted 119 investigations and one civilian investigator conducted 12 investigations.

Number of Investigations Between July 2023 and June 2024			
		Investigators	
		Sworn	Civilian
Investigations	Expedited	119	12
	Full	160	20

OIG internal database.

The CBA limitations create an imbalanced caseload between civilian and sworn staff, limiting the number of comparable cases for analysis.

Current Status

Composition of OPA. On May 14, 2024, the City of Seattle approved a new CBA with SPOG, effective through December 31, 2023. The contract adds two more civilian investigators, allowing a total of four.² OPA hired a second civilian investigator on April 10, 2024. The new contract provision and the additional civilian investigator will increase the available information to allow for a more robust and meaningful analysis in the future.

Next Steps

OIG will continue monitoring attrition rates of OPA sworn and civilian investigators, data availability, and changes to the limitations of civilian investigators in future analyses. OIG will also continue conducting literature reviews of best practices for civilianization of internal affairs investigations.

² At any time after the date of signing, the City may supplement the existing investigator positions with up to two (2) additional investigators, for a total of up to four (4) civilian investigators. SPOG CBA. Appendix D. Effective through December 31, 2023.