

Burbank Police Department

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT POLICE MONITOR: 2024 Review

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Introduction

This is the latest independent audit report regarding the activities of the Burbank Police Department (BPD). It was prepared by OIR Group, which has a longstanding relationship with the City and which has tracked the steady evolution of BPD's systems for internal review over the course of more than a decade.

As Independent Police Auditors, our role is straightforward: while we do not conduct our own investigations, our scope of work provides us with comprehensive access to a representative sample of completed cases handled internally by BPD. Our review focuses on three critical areas of law enforcement: allegations of officer misconduct, incidents in which physical force was used, and vehicle pursuits.

This model of oversight reinforces the Department's primary responsibility for conducting investigations and ensuring accountability. An agency's own ability to scrutinize itself with rigor, objectivity, and fairness is essential to its operational health and legitimacy. These high standards are difficult to impose externally, and harder to enforce. Accordingly, BPD's own commitment to these processes is of paramount importance.

Although we do not review every case, our annual audit process serves a significant purpose as a check on, and complement to, BPD's internal review. The case files that we do evaluate – and the otherwise confidential evidence that comprises them – offer an open window into BPD's approach to review and provide a transparency that continues to be rare in local law enforcement throughout California. Our annual public reporting amplifies that transparency and adds further accountability to BPD's systems.

Moreover, we are also able to add an outside perspective that allows us to identify potential limitations and to offer recommendations for adjustment and reform. The body of this Report reflects those contributions in what we hope will be a useful way.

As in the past, our scope of work as framed by the City incorporates a review of the completed investigations according to the following parameters:

- All bias-based policing complaints;
- All administrative investigations conducted by the Internal Affairs Bureau in which the subject employee holds the rank of sergeant or higher;
- 1/3 of all administrative investigations conducted by the Internal Affairs Bureau, as randomly selected by OIR Group;
- 1/3 of all citizens' complaints randomly selected by OIR Group (this may include review of both sworn and civilian personnel);
- 1/4 of all use of force reviews randomly selected by OIR Group;
- All vehicle pursuits.

Per the above criteria, we reviewed a total of 21 misconduct investigations. As in the past, we noted several strengths in the Department's process for handling these matters. Body-worn camera recordings continue to have a significant impact on the efficiency and conclusiveness of investigations, and the case memos are quite thorough and methodical in addressing allegations, gathering evidence, and reaching sound dispositions.

We saw examples of uniquely rigorous investigative efforts and again were struck by the Department's willingness to provide complainants with a detailed analysis of the investigation's evidence – well beyond the limited information required by state law for notification. These elements left a favorable impression. However, we discuss a few challenges as well, some of which may be attributable to new personnel in the Internal Affairs unit.

One related to "intake" interviews and a tendency to explain or debate with a member of the public, the complainant, rather than simply hear the person's narrative. And though we found the case outcomes to be reasonable and backed by evidence, there were instances in which officer demeanor detracted from the overall handling of a disputed incident and was not given the attention warranted. We consider complaint cases to be opportunities for improvement as well as "bottom line" accountability and encourage the Department to pursue holistic adjustments to officer performance even when policy violations are not necessarily implicated.

This year's group of force review packages included 22 distinct incidents that included a range of force options. In each case, the force applied was determined to be within policy. BPD's review process – one we have consistently endorsed and even shared with other jurisdictions as a model worth considering – continues to evolve and adjust. Several of these improvements stem directly from our prior recommendations, and we discuss them in detail in this year's report.

Our analysis of this year's use of force cases led to a new series of recommendations focused on enhancing an already strong framework; topics include de-escalation practices, supervisor interviews of subjects, and the evaluation of canine bite incidents. These suggestions are intended to build upon the existing strengths, rather than signal the need for major change. Past experience suggests that BPD recognizes the importance of refining and improving its strong model for review of physical force by its personnel.

Our annual audits of the Department's vehicle pursuits continue to provide valuable insight into the distinctive challenges posed by this enforcement technique. Since early 2016, BPD has wrestled to navigate the balance between public safety, risk management and effective crime prevention when it comes to this area of policing.

This year's audit reviews five incidents that were formally classified as pursuits and reviewed under the Department's established internal review process. In addition to these cases, we examined several new categories that the Department has introduced over the last several years to provide officers with greater latitude in the field. These ongoing adjustments reflect a commendable attempt to respond to realities in the field. At the same time, expanding the framework – while well-intentioned – occasionally led to ambiguity and uncertainty in case classification and response. We encourage the Department to further refine the relevant policies and training in this important risk area.

In recent years, we have also had the latitude to conduct an additional assessment on a "special topic" – some aspect of BPD operations that we can evaluate to share information with the public and to reinforce or enhance the Department's current path with our own recommendations. Over the past several reports, we reviewed the Department's body-worn camera program

when the technology was new to the agency in 2021. We assessed BPD's approach to calls for service involving a person experiencing a mental health crisis. And, in our report last year, we reviewed the Department's compliance with state requirements for gathering demographic data in the context of arrests and traffic stops. In each instance, we supplemented our favorable general impressions with suggestions for further improvement.

Our experience was similar in this audit cycle. This year, we evaluated the Department's field training program – the process by which academy preparation is translated into field performance for new officers in the patrol setting. This is a crucial part of ensuring readiness, to the point where the state imposes requirements on all police agencies to ensure that certain standards are met. As we explain below, we found that BPD met or exceeded those baseline expectations, and that the training program is structured and managed with real thoughtfulness. While we offer some suggestions for further refinement, we were impressed with the glimpse we got into BPD's approach.

Among other things, 2024 was the final full year of Chief Mike Albanese's tenure as the leader of the Department. The Chief's long and distinguished career began well before the independent oversight of law enforcement was a familiar concept. But in fourteen years of engaging with him in Burbank, we always found him to be not only gracious and professional but genuinely interested in engaging with an outside perspective. We disagreed on a few of the finer points, but it was always a constructive discussion. And we know he was responsible for much of the infrastructure at BPD that we've commended in these audits and recommended to other agencies. We certainly wish him the best in his retirement and look forward to working with his successor.

Review of Misconduct Investigations

The Department's handling of allegations of misconduct has, over the years, evolved into a strength of its internal review processes. The case files we assess are notable for their thoroughness and completeness, and the individual investigation memos are consistently methodical, well-presented, and convincing in their analyses.

Based on our selection criteria, we looked at a total of 21 cases this year. Most were generated externally based on public complaints. Four of them resulted in a finding that involved personnel had in fact violated policy. We found the Department's decisions to be reasonable and grounded in careful gathering and assessment of available evidence.

One of the biggest improvements we have seen is in timeliness: BPD prioritizes the efficient completion of pending cases, and the examples we looked at were reflective of that emphasis. This was not always true. Early in our work, investigative timelines were longer, and some cases were not finalized within the one-year statute of limitations for discipline. The lag not only meant that accountability was precluded as a technical matter, but also that other operational benefits of a prompt resolution – including appropriate corrective action – were being detrimentally delayed. As a result of our focus on that issue, the Department committed to new protocols that included a quarterly "status report" (shared with our office) and helped ensure that open cases were accounted for and on track for timely completion.

That step and increased managerial scrutiny certainly helped, but the adoption of body-worn cameras in 2021 has streamlined the investigative process considerably. Many of the complaints that we reviewed were resolved

conclusively based on the recorded evidence alone.¹ This meant that, in many cases, interviews with witness or subject officers were not essential to determining the events in question, and it was routine for investigations and their accompanying memos to be completed within several weeks.²

Though Burbank was later than other agencies in adopting the cameras, its misconduct investigations are more advanced than many in utilizing and presenting recorded evidence. Key moments are summarized in the written case narrative – with time stamps for reference to the videos themselves, and still shots from the recordings are often included as illustrations. In one case involving claims of impropriety in the service of a search warrant, the investigator made meticulous use of body-worn camera recordings to track relevant activities of involved officers at different stages of the process, thereby creating a thorough record of what occurred.

We observed that, even in cases where body-worn camera footage appeared to offer clear and potentially conclusive evidence, investigators still conducted thorough investigations, reflecting a commitment to due diligence and procedural integrity. In one case, an arrestee was struck and allegedly injured by a closing elevator door as he was being escorted by officers in his apartment building; he alleged this was part of the excessive force he had been subjected to. Along with viewing the body-worn camera evidence, the investigator went to the building, found the elevator, and effectively re-created the incident by allowing the door to close on his own shoulder. He was unhurt and noted instead that the door had recoiled on contact.

¹ Another significant effect of the recordings is a substantial reduction in the number of "not sustained" outcomes to individual allegations. That specific finding is issued when the evidence is inconclusive, with the result being no discipline but also a somewhat unsatisfying uncertainty. It was much more common in the days when the conflicting testimony of participants was the only available basis for decision-making.

² We still consider interviews of subject officers to be an important part of the process in many cases. There are times, for example, when BWC recordings are not totally dispositive for some reason. And the officer should be (and is) routinely interviewed when the recordings are indicative of misconduct; doing so is consistent with the officer's right to put his or her own "best foot forward" in describing or explaining their actions when facing potential discipline. We found the Department's decision-making in this regard to be appropriate.

As in previous years, we were encouraged by the resourcefulness demonstrated by investigators. In one case, a complaint was submitted via email by a woman who objected to an arrest that had occurred six years earlier, prior to the implementation of body-worn cameras. Although the complaint narrative itself was difficult to follow and direct contact with the complainant proved unsuccessful, investigators made a diligent and well-documented effort to reach her and investigate the incident. The investigator reviewed available records and photographs from the time of the incident; these showed that the injuries the woman sustained, resulting from the application of leg restraints, were minimal, and that she had not reported any pain at the time. Based on the evidence, the complaint was deemed unfounded.

This case exemplifies the Department's commitment to conducting meaningful reviews, even in the absence of contemporary video evidence or direct complainant participation. It also reflects the value of maintaining detailed records and the professionalism of investigators in pursuing clarity and accountability.

Of the four cases that resulted in findings of misconduct, two were from the jail.³ One related to an incident in which an arrested person was found with a flashlight and a knife *after* an overnight stay in a cell. In re-tracing that person's time in custody, it was determined that a (civilian) jailer had failed to complete a "cell cleanliness log" – a procedural violation that may or may not have explained the contraband but nonetheless warranted intervention.

The larger questions about the items' presence remained unanswered. However, the Department responded with procedural changes (including new BWC recording requirements for certain jail activities) that will ideally assist in closing whatever loopholes led to this issue.

In another case, a newly released woman left the facility before staff had recovered an expensive monitoring device she had been provided with

³ The third related to a discourtesy issue in the field, in which a traffic stop had deteriorated into mutual verbal antagonism. The fourth involved a civilian staff member who left an unattended firearm at her workstation during a shift.

because of self-reported health concerns. Both a witness and the subject jailer acknowledged the mistake – but cited the new pressures to quickly release eligible arrestees after a man died in custody.

The two cases are obviously a tiny fraction of the year's overall performance history. But they are also a reminder of the risks inherent in operating a jail facility within the police station. We discuss these cases and other jail-related concerns in our Use of Force section, below.

Allegations of Biased Policing

Given the significance and sensitivity of biased policing allegations, particularly due to their potential to undermine public trust and raise concerns about profiling and discrimination, our original agreement with the City established that any such case would be *automatically* included in our audit sample. These matters warrant close attention because of their profound implications for the legitimacy of the justice system and the community's confidence in fair and impartial policing.

Accordingly, Burbank provides any case involving bias for our review – even when the allegation of bias is only a peripheral part of the overall dissatisfaction that a complainant is sharing. This year, however, only two investigations met this criterion – down from five in last year's Report and the smallest number in recent memory.

Neither of the allegations was substantiated. This outcome is not unexpected; across the country, these types of allegations are inherently difficult to prove because it depends on the subjective intent of the officers involved, an element that is rarely acknowledged, even if present. But BPD has worked in the past to move beyond simple denials and instead evaluate the full context

of each case in search of objective evidence.⁴ While this approach was less prominent in 2024's two investigations than in past years, the incidents themselves were relatively straightforward.

In one of this year's cases, an officer asserted that race did not factor in the decision-making process, citing the limited visibility at the time of the stop: the complainant was wearing a hoodie and a mask when stopped, and the encounter occurred in low-light conditions. Our review of the body-worn camera recording supported this assertion, and we concurred with the ultimate finding that the allegation was unfounded.⁵

The other case turned on the complainant's perception that the officer's use of the word "entitled" was somehow racially coded. But the complainant was unable to make a convincing connection between that term (which he believed was in part related to his expensive car) and a protected class of any kind. And again, while the body-worn camera showed a fractious encounter between the officer and the complainant, it did not appear to involve race or ethnicity.

Pursuing these issues conscientiously should remain a priority for the Department. Although the small number of complaints, and the specific circumstances of these two incidents, lent themselves to a relatively direct approach here, we have encouraged in the past to consider statistical analysis, officer history, and other objective criteria to strengthen its assessment of bias claims where warranted. We hope BPD will maintain a commitment to the thorough, resourceful consideration of allegations involving this critical concern.

⁴ For example, in a past case where a young black pedestrian with a backpack was stopped for questioning in the early morning hours, he was unpersuaded by officers' explanation that there had been a number of reported thefts in the area. But the investigator pulled together documentation that showed support for the claim.

⁵ The Department also reported this case to the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) per California Senate Bill 2 (SB2), which requires that allegations of serious misconduct, including racial bias, be reported for further investigation and review.

Effective Engagement with Complainants

We reviewed several cases that highlighted the importance of tone, communication, and the broader experience of individuals interacting with law enforcement. While the factual determinations in these cases were generally sound, the investigative process at times missed opportunities to fully acknowledge or engage with the complainants' perspectives.

We reviewed one case in which the complainant, who had been stopped with his girlfriend for expired registration and was ultimately arrested for possession of contraband after a search of the vehicle, alleged several procedural flaws and instances of discourtesy. This investigation gave us pause for different reasons.

First was the interview of the complainant by the investigator. This lasted for more than half an hour and was marked by the investigator's patience and willingness to revisit key points to ensure clarity. But we also noted numerous instances in which the investigator, who had reviewed the body-worn camera recordings of the incident in advance, offered explanations or counterpoints to the complainant's assertions. While the information provided was accurate and, in some instances, persuasive to the complainant, the overall effect at times shifted from informative to adversarial. As the conversation progressed, the dynamic appeared to lose some of its constructive tone.

We recognize that there is a delicate balance to maintain: clarifications about basic points of law or obvious misunderstandings have their place and can potentially defuse a complaint for the mutual benefit of both sides. But, as we have noted in the past, detailed explanations too easily come across as defensive or dismissive, or as an indication that the complainant's concerns have been pre-determined as lacking legitimacy. For that reason, we reiterate our recommendation that intake interviews focus primarily on developing a complete understanding of the complainant's allegations and perspectives, while reserving analysis or explanatory commentary by the investigator for a later stage in the process.

Recommendation 1

BPD should reinforce the principle that intake interviews with complainants are primarily intended to acquire a full understanding of their allegations and concerns – and not as a forum for rebuttal or defense of officer actions.

We also thought there was legitimacy to several of the specific issues articulated by the complainant. The complainant understandably took offense to the question, "Who do you roll with?" which presumed a gang affiliation that was not substantiated. His girlfriend seemingly being mistaken for a prostitute was also a provocation that added to his feelings of being pre-judged and treated contemptuously.

The final determination that no policy violations had occurred was reasonable based on the available evidence. However, we also found aspects of the complainant's perspective to be understandable, and these were seemingly disregarded by the determinedly narrow focus of the investigation.

For example, the analysis focused on the fact that the officer had not *directly* called the woman a prostitute, and that certain aspects of her behavior raised legitimate suspicion. While these points were factually accurate, they did not fully address the broader concerns raised by the complainant.

Interestingly, the complainant also took the time to express disapproval of the lead officer's treatment of his *trainee* and cited specific examples of impatience or disrespect. There was support for these contentions in the recordings of the encounter. While certainly not egregious, the training officer's curt and exasperated approach seemed hard to reconcile with effective mentoring.⁶ We noted that this element of the complaint was not mentioned in the otherwise detailed close-out letter that the complainant ultimately received.

⁶ Nor did it align with our general impressions of the Department's field training program, which we discuss in detail below.

A similar dynamic occurred in a different case, in which a man complained about the officer's disrespectful treatment in the context of issuing him a citation for speeding. Though he continued to take exception to the ticket itself, his primary objection was to the officer's alleged rudeness and his numerous assumptions about the man's usual driving behavior.

In our view, the body-worn camera recording made the complainant's perspective quite understandable: the officer's tone was dismissive and scolding at best ("You don't care about anybody else that lives in this City?") and at times even had a bullying quality ("You're gonna get a ticket for your speed and an unsafe turn...Unless you'd rather me impound your car for thirty days...or take you to jail for reckless driving.") But the investigator's analysis seemed to miss that point in favor of a technical defense of the officer's different comments. In our view, the discourtesy allegation could plausibly have been sustained; at the very least, we would have hoped that the Department would question the effectiveness of the officer's approach and its impression on the complainant – and provide a non-disciplinary intervention accordingly.

At its best, the complaint investigation process does a few things. It should certainly pursue the facts so that proper determinations can be made as to policy violations, and that occurred here. But it should also, where possible, leave the complainant with a real sense of being heard and understood – even if that means acknowledging low-level shortcomings that may not technically be matters of policy. And it should also be a forum for evaluating officer performance in holistic ways – including communication styles and effective treatment of the public. These latter goals were not necessarily achieved in these cases.⁷

Recommendation 2

BPD should address employees' suboptimal performance issues that emerge in the context of complaint cases, even when the identified issues don't rise to the level of formal policy violations.

⁷ In fairness to BPD, we also note that it (rightly) sustained a discourtesy allegation that arose in the context of a dispute over a traffic citation in another case.

Review of Force Cases

The Department reported a total of 74 separate force incidents in 2024, a slight increase from comparable statistics in 2023, but commensurate with previous years' counts. Of this overall total, a majority were limited to use of "empty hand" force options, such as the "takedown" of a resistant subject or use of control holds for purposes of moving, handcuffing, or otherwise controlling subjects. Seven of the cases involved multiple force options being utilized in the encounter; each was separately evaluated by the Department for compliance with policy and other expectations.

We sampled 22 of these incidents and reviewed the totality of the case file, including all body-worn and in-car camera footage. Ten involved uses of physical force such as control holds, takedowns, or team takedowns – usually a lower level of force that typically constitutes a majority of the agency's annual deployments. Four involved the use of strikes. The others covered a range of force options, including Taser deployments, use of the police canine, and use of a chemical agent, oleoresin capsicum (OC), delivered by the Pepperball launcher and via a canister.⁸ There were no uses of kinetic energy projectiles or uses of deadly force.⁹ One case resulted in injuries to the officer. Five cases resulted in injuries to the subject (including three canine bites). Two cases involved a complaint of pain by subjects that were medically cleared without injury.

⁸ OC is a less-lethal force option to incapacitate individuals through intense eye irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing.

⁹ "Kinetic energy projectiles" are less-lethal weapons used by police that are designed to hit a person with enough force to stop them but not cause serious bodily injury. "Deadly force" refers to any use of force by law enforcement that is likely to cause death or serious physical injury. This includes actions such as discharging a firearm, applying a carotid neck hold, or striking the head, neck, or throat with a hard object.

While a number of tactical issues were identified and debriefed, none of the uses of force in our sample were found to be out of policy.¹⁰

Improvements to Procedural Review

Developed and refined over the course of several years, BPD's current internal force review process has become a "gold standard": it is thorough, rigorous and revolves around a commitment to assess each encounter in a holistic way. It treats each force incident as an occasion for accountability but also as an opportunity to improve future performance. Communication, tactics, equipment, supervision, and post-incident protocols are all subject to evaluation – and often lead to constructive issue-spotting.

BPD's internal process, which consists of several layers of command review culminating in a Critical Incident Review Board (CIRB), was modeled in part after the Los Angeles Police Department's robust internal review model, developed during the LAPD's time under a Federal Consent Decree. In Burbank, it was refined over the years by the two former Chiefs with recommendations from our team. We recommend other agencies adopt BPD's process based on our positive experience. In fact, in late 2024, we went so far as to invite personnel from two of OIR Group's other client agencies to a meeting with Burbank supervisors and command staff to learn about the particulars of the approach.

We continue to be impressed with the Department's willingness to further refine and improve the process and noted several new procedural strengths in the last year. For example, the initial sergeant-level assessments – the first phase of review after any use of force – demonstrated improved thoroughness by routinely incorporating surveillance footage, witness canvasses, and

¹⁰ In 2024, the Department sent one force incident to Internal Affairs for further investigation, but the Department's review of this case was not completed by the date of publication for this report. Additionally, the Department had one accidental discharge of a firearm, but that case was also not complete by the date of publication.

interviews of the individuals upon force was used. In cases where arrestee or witness interviews were not conducted, reviewers consistently documented the reasons why no interview was conducted (we discuss this further, below). The introduction of standardized sections into the second phase, the Watch Commander memorandum, has enhanced the evaluation by identifying key accountability elements from the outset. Specifically, the memo now regularly assesses de-escalation and the actions of on-scene supervisors, two important components that were sometimes not explicitly reviewed in past years.

The concept of "de-escalation" applies to any steps that officers take to reduce the likelihood that physical force will be necessary. These could range from effective verbal communication that defuses tension to tactical principles like distance and cover that can slow down the need to react to sudden movements. While law enforcement has recognized and trained these concepts for generations, increased public scrutiny and recent legislative requirements have brought new prominence to them – and raised expectations that officers will prioritize efforts to avoid force where possible.

We appreciate the new and more overt emphasis that BPD has introduced into its review process. It frames expectations for supervisors and, by extension, reinforces the notion at the patrol level that de-escalation should be a standard component of strategy in the field.

We found the attendant analysis in the cases we looked at to be quite worthwhile. In one, for example, the watch commander review noted that an officer's failure to acknowledge and respond to the subject's question about the reason for the police contact was likely to have exacerbated that person's resistance to cooperation. On the other hand, officers in another case were appropriately commended for their efforts at communicating with a subject barricaded inside a vehicle: in an effort to convince him that there was indeed a warrant for his arrest, they played relevant radio traffic and showed him a screenshot of a database that featured the information.

We did question the analysis in one of the cases we looked at, in which the "de-escalation" was described as the officer's decision to seize the subject in a preemptive bear hug and take him to the ground – in recognition of the fact that the subject's combativeness was likely to result in more significant fight.

We don't dispute the legitimacy of the force here, and we recognize that de-escalation is not always possible or applicable to the circumstances of a given encounter. But the characterization of any force as a form of de-escalation is one that we hope the Department will reconsider, to avoid blurring lines in the assessment of an incident's different elements.

Recommendation 3

BPD should refine its agency-wide understanding of "de-escalation" techniques to maintain emphasis on tactics and strategies that lessen the likelihood of physical force being necessary.

We also take this opportunity to affirm BPD for adding a specific line item regarding supervisory performance to its template. In ways that are obviously dependent on the circumstances of a given incident, supervision can be a significant influence on the tactics and decision-making that precede the use of force (and in some cases supervisors actually direct the use of force) and is therefore worthy of individualized attention.¹¹ The template contributes to that. And we also encourage the executive-level assessment of the initial post-incident reviews, including evidence-gathering at the scene and efforts to secure a statement from the arrestee.

To some extent, body-worn camera recordings have lessened the impact of the arrestee's narrative version of events; there are situations in which the video evidence essentially "speaks for itself." But the interviews can nonetheless be important in establishing the arrestee's state of mind and perception of officer actions.¹²

With that in mind, we encourage the Department to stay focused on ensuring that the supervisory interview process is objective, appropriately robust, and well-documented. We noted a couple of issues in this regard. For one, the

¹¹ One of the dynamics we noted in the past, for example, was a prevalence of supervisors becoming directly physically involved in the encounter – sometimes at the expense of effective management.

¹² And, of course, there are plenty of instances in which camera angles, dislodging of the body worn cameras during the encounter (or failure to timely activate, as we had on occasion in these cases) can leave gaps in the video record.

case "packages" we received did not routinely include recordings of arrestee or witness interviews (or attempted interviews), which was the practice in the past. (We asked for – and received – a sampling to follow up on a subset of cases.) These interviews should still continue to be evaluated as part of the Critical Incident Review Board (CIRB) assessment (which we discuss immediately below). The Department should also continue to reinforce and train the principles of effective interviewing; some of the subsets that we reviewed had a perfunctory quality that did not lead to optimal results.¹³

Recommendation 4

BPD should encourage supervisors to prioritize the objective acquisition of detailed statements of individuals upon whom force was used and other witnesses where possible.

Recommendation 5

BPD should continue to include recorded interviews with arrestees and civilian witnesses as part of its routine CIRB process.

The culmination of the BPD process remains the CIRB, which brings together high-ranking members of the agency and subject-matter experts for a roundtable discussion of each case. These sessions occur within two months of incidents, allowing for timely feedback and correction when necessary. And each case file that we assessed contained an email documenting the date, participants, and topic(s) covered when corrective action was necessary, ensuring uniformity in accountability documentation.

The Department's commitment to ongoing improvement was further evidenced by regular roll call briefings and incident-specific debriefs based on insights

¹³ In one case, the supervisor said "Hi," to the arrestee, who responded with a profanity and said, "Don't talk to me." The supervisor barely broke stride before saying, "Okay," and leaving in the opposite direction without any attempt to explain his purpose or gain the arrestee's cooperation. In another, the supervisor woke the arrestee from what was apparently a deep sleep in his cell and got predictably groggy answers to a handful of questions. This was in contrast to a third interview, in which a supervisor accommodated a series of digressions and non sequiturs by the individual and eventually evoked an informative, detailed description overall.

taken from the individual encounters in the field. We also noted debriefs in cases involving specialized units even when no procedural issues were identified: for example, every use of the police canine was carefully debriefed by the entire unit for lessons learned.

Our review identified only one issue that was not documented in the review process: in one case involving a foot pursuit, officers failed to broadcast essential information during the pursuit and had to be prompted by dispatch after extended communication gaps. In that case, the CIRB did note other tactical concerns and directed that the team debrief the entire incident.

Hands-On / Physical Use of Force

Defensive tactics and hands-on control techniques are among the most frequently deployed strategies in the patrol environment: in 2024, nearly 70% of the uses of force involved some form of hands-on control technique or “body weapon,” such as control holds, takedowns, or strikes. These tactics are frequently used during arrests and field encounters, where officers are tasked with managing uncooperative or combative individuals without escalating to higher levels of force. Proper execution of these techniques helps mitigate injuries to both officers and subjects. Moreover, skilled use of defensive tactics supports legally defensible outcomes, especially under the scrutiny of body-worn camera review and administrative investigations.

As we have reported in the past, however, some incidents in our sample revealed what we perceived to be hesitation and inconsistency in application of hands-on control techniques. Officers appeared reluctant to execute control holds and takedowns decisively; some relied on momentum and body weight rather than trained defensive tactics methods such as leg sweeps.¹⁴ This resulted in suboptimal outcomes, including falls into hazardous areas like roadways, and, in two cases in our sample, escalation to close-contact Taser deployment (which we discuss in more detail later). The Department’s review

¹⁴ Conversely, in one case we observed officers successfully use a leg sweep to bring a subject to the ground.

commented on these applications, and, in one case, directed an entire shift to debrief on tactical positioning and officer safety.

The shift debrief is a positive step forward, but these outcomes underscore the need for continued direction to defensive tactics (re)training to reinforce confidence in assertive and controlled physical engagement. Frequent, hands-on instruction ensures officers retain muscle memory and apply control holds, takedowns, and ground control effectively in dynamic situations.

We also acknowledge that, while comprehensive defensive tactics training equips officers with essential tools for safely managing confrontations, it is not a fail-safe in every encounter. Human behavior is unpredictable, and situational variables can render even the most practiced techniques insufficient. We observed this in one case where officers attempted to apprehend a felony subject, but quickly lost control when the subject, who later admitted to being a trained street fighter, punched the officers in the head and slammed one of them to the ground. While officers ultimately gained control and were able to handcuff the subject, one sustained significant injury. In its review of that case, the Department noted that the first officer should have attempted de-escalation prior to going hands-on, and that he should have waited for additional backup. But, again, it did not direct the officers to any defensive tactics training to regain confidence and skills after this fight.

Despite the need and desire for more defensive tactics training, many law enforcement agencies – including Burbank -- face acute time and budgetary constraints that limit their ability to deliver training beyond the State-mandated training blocks. To address these challenges, the Department might consider adopting a “micro training” approach, such as peer-led, defensive-tactics “refresher” sessions at briefings, and scenario-based tabletop exercises that emphasize tactical decision-making. We encourage the Department to explore these options to provide officers with the training they need to be effective in the field in spite of the practical obstacles.

Recommendation 6

BPD should explore “micro training” in defensive tactics to provide more regular review of hand-on / empty hands techniques.

Updates in Use of Police Canine

The Department reported nine canine deployments, and we reviewed three. One of these cases involved a canine deployment in response to a forced entry with intent of burglarizing a commercial building. Officers located a subject hiding in the rear of a large commercial property. After issuing commands to surrender with no response, the canine officer issued warnings that the canine would be deployed. Shortly after, the canine was deployed and located the subject; the canine bit the subject and, when the subject surrendered, the canine officer immediately called the canine off the bite. The subject was arrested with no further incident.

In their after-action debrief of this call, the Department learned that there was confusion over deployment standards in the canine policy (Policy 428): the policy authorizes canine use in situations involving “violent or serious offenses,” but it was not clear if this category included forced entry burglary. In response, it issued a Department Directive clarifying that forced entry burglary falls within the classification of “serious offenses,” allowing for canine deployment when the suspect has forced entry into a building with intent to burglarize, is believed to be hiding within a structure, and may present a danger to officers or the public.

We reviewed a second case where a canine was deployed to apprehend one of several fleeing subjects wanted for felony (armed) burglary. Officers tracked one subject into a backyard hedge; after several commands and warnings went unheeded, the canine officer deployed the canine. The subject came out from the hedges and was handcuffed, and the canine released the bite.

The deployment was successful, and the dog performed in keeping with the handler's commands – two variables that are standard questions within the evaluation process. However, review of the video footage showed that the canine held the bite for seconds beyond the subject's initial surrender, and

until he was securely taken into custody. This was potentially concerning, insofar as minimizing the nature and extent of bite events is a priority.

But the related police report rationalized the decision to leave the canine on the bite based on the nature of the crime, officer safety and known outstanding armed suspects. The rationalization was carefully considered by several levels of the chain of command, who ultimately found the length of the bite to be reasonable.

With evolving case law regarding the length and timing of canine bites, and recent legislative focus on the risk/reward calculus of canine deployment,¹⁵ reviewing proportionality and disengagement expectations in this careful way remains essential to mitigate liability and ensure adherence to new and emerging legal standards.¹⁶ Ultimately, we, too, concurred with the reasonableness of the bite's duration.

We wish the analysis in our other bite case, involving the apprehension of a female subject at an in-progress residential burglary, had been as thoughtful. We did not question the legitimacy of the initial deployment; the woman was not responsive to multiple warnings, and had resorted to arming herself with a golf club. But as officers quickly followed the dog into the residence and seized the woman while the dog remained engaged on a bite, they were able to outnumber her, drag her into an open space, and get her in a prone position facing down. But the dog remained on the bite for several more seconds until she was actually in handcuffs.

While acknowledging that she arguably continued to “resist”¹⁷ during these moments, our impression was that the dog had ceased to become necessary at a certain point when the woman was surrounded and being physically

¹⁵ In recent years, bills have been repeatedly introduced in the California legislature to prohibit the use of police canines to effectuate arrests.

¹⁶ See, for example, *Rosenbaum v. City of San Jose* (2024): in that case, the court ruled that officers may face liability for excessive force when they allow a police dog to keep biting a suspect who has clearly surrendered and is under control. It reaffirmed that this conduct violates the Fourth Amendment.

¹⁷ A subject who is being bitten by a police canine will most likely struggle in response to the ongoing pain which an officer might interpret as resisting arrest.

overpowered. But the subsequent documentation did not reflect any questioning of the efficacy and duration of the bite, or any thought that minimizing contact with the dog seemed like a goal worth attending to. A "can vs. should" analysis here at least seemed worthy of consideration.

Recommendation 7

BPD should continue to ensure that current training of its police service dogs is reflective of evolving legal standards and should ensure that a rigorous review of bite incidents continues to be part of its CIRB process.

Jail Searches

Several cases in our samples underscored the necessity of thorough and well-documented jail searches, particularly when intake processes are modified or bypassed due to combative behavior or physical restraints.

In one case in our force sample from early 2024, officers attempted a search of a combative subject at intake. Even after using control holds to subdue the subject, the search was compromised due to the subject's resistance, prompting a supervisor to direct staff to "search the best you can."¹⁸

We then reviewed a case that occurred in mid-2024 also involving the jail search protocol. In that Internal Affairs case, a subject who had bypassed the standard booking process because leg restraints had been placed on him was later moved to a dorm cell. He was later found to possess a knife and flashlight over 24 hours after booking, despite prior searches and visible inspection of pockets.

In its review of that case, the Department held personnel individually accountable and also directed a comprehensive analysis of jail search protocols. The Department identified vulnerabilities in search protocols, gaps in technology deployment (e.g., underutilized metal detectors), and challenges

¹⁸ This directive, while unusual, seemed like a reasonable attempt to balance priorities in dealing with a highly resistant subject.

in ensuring contraband is reliably detected and documented. The Department instituted an automated system for jail checks (versus previously used paper logs) and issued directives regarding the use of metal detectors.

Together, these cases supported the Department's renewed emphasis on training for high-risk bookings, use of all available search technologies, and routine verification of cell and subject checks, especially when intake procedures deviate from standard practice. We will continue to review this topic.

Taser Safeguards

In prior reports, we have documented concerns related to specific aspects of surrounding Taser deployments. Examples included incidents where the device was used in drive-stun mode for pain compliance rather than achieving neuromuscular incapacitation (NMI), which is the use for which the weapon was designed.¹⁹ We also focused on deployments involving fleeing subjects, which we considered to be potentially in conflict with Department policy.

In response, we recommend that the Department more carefully evaluate Taser deployments to ensure consistency with both policy and manufacturer guidelines. Since that time, we have observed meaningful improvement in deployment decision-making, as well as more deliberate post-incident evaluation.

¹⁹ Drive-stun mode is when the Taser device is placed directly onto the subject's body and deployed without the Taser probes being ejected. This mode is not advised by either the manufacturer or by research studies because it does not result in neuromuscular incapacitation (NMI). See PERF & COPS, 2011 Electronic Control Weapon Guidelines (March 2011), pages 14, 19. Interestingly, the manufacturer's latest Taser model -- the Taser T10 -- no longer has the drive stun mode capability.

For BPD officers, policy restricts the use of drive-stun to specialized circumstances; we recommended that the Department revisit these use cases and consider prohibiting the use of drive-stun all together. See BPD's policy 309.5.1.

The three Taser cases we reviewed this year showed a more careful consideration of the necessity of the deployment, as well as the tactics leading to deployment. While the deployments themselves were found to be “in policy,” the Department identified areas of improvement and appropriately debriefed the incidents.

For example, in one case, officers used the Taser to control a domestic violence subject who actively struggled as officers attempted to handcuff him. When the initial deployment did not achieve NMI due to insufficient probe spread, the officer transitioned to close-contact mode, applying the device to the subject’s leg to close the electrical loop.²⁰ This allowed officers to control the subject. The Department’s review considered the close distance and discussed officer safety, and a team debrief was conducted for all involved. In another case, an officer deployed the Taser to control a trespassing subject who actively fought officers and reached for his waistband. As with the case above, the proximity of the deployment failed to achieve NMI, and the officer transitioned to close-contact mode. Here again, the Department debriefed the incident with an eye toward officer safety and the tactical considerations of the close quarters.

However, our review of that case also identified one area where additional analysis was warranted: we noted a missed opportunity to assess the duration of the Taser deployment. When reviewing the Taser Deployment Log, the digital record automatically captured for each deployment, we saw that the device had rejected a trigger pull “due to agency hard shutdown setting.” This indicates that the officer had likely attempted to initiate another cycle, but that the device rejected it due to the hard shutdown protocol: a safety feature that

²⁰ Taser devices rely on probe spread to complete an electrical circuit across a subject’s body and achieve neuromuscular incapacitation. When probes strike too closely together (typically less than 12 inches apart), the circuit may not span enough muscle mass to interrupt voluntary movement. In such cases, officers may transition to close contact mode to close the electrical loop manually. This use is allowed per Department policy.

automatically stops the electrical cycle after five seconds, regardless of whether the trigger is still being pulled.²¹

This component of the incident seems noteworthy for two reasons. The first is the functional significance of the device's hard shutdown setting: it is a built-in safeguard that supports controlled decision-making and subject safety. By interrupting continuous activation, the setting reduces the potential for excessive or prolonged exposure, affording officers the opportunity to reassess and apply only what is reasonable under the circumstances. We continue to be impressed with the Department's commitment to technological innovations that support effective officer performance.

Secondly, we note that the existence of the safeguard should not be a complete substitute for officer awareness and proper tactics. Ultimately, it remains the responsibility of each officer to self-regulate deployment and articulate clear justification for any subsequent activation. In addition, supervisory debriefs and incident reviews should consistently examine whether continued Taser use was warranted and aligned with standards of proportionality and necessity.

We recommend that the Department routinely review the Deployment Logs as part of their review process. Logs that reflect anomalies, such as trigger rejections, short probe spreads, or multiple activations should prompt supervisory commentary on justification, tactical reasoning, and any necessary retraining, or in the appropriate cases, accountability.

Recommendation 8

BPD should routinely review Taser Deployment Logs and direct supervisors to address anomalies (such as trigger rejections or multiple activations) through documented explanation or other needed intervention.

²¹ This safeguard is designed to prevent prolonged exposure to electrical current and align device operation with the Department's policy.

Review of Vehicle Pursuits

Police vehicle pursuits remain a critical issue in public safety discussions, particularly regarding law enforcement accountability and risk management. Across the country, agencies continue to evaluate the balance between rigorous enforcement and the inherent dangers of high-speed chases. Oversight efforts, both internal and external, have increasingly sought ways to mitigate risks to officers, suspects and uninvolved civilian pedestrians and motorists.

One very specific way that the issue can be addressed is through policy, and specifically through the setting of thresholds for when pursuits are authorized and when they should be terminated. Many jurisdictions, including San Diego and Oakland, have taken a restrictive approach by limiting pursuits to incidents involving serious crimes. The other end of the spectrum would be a standard adopted by some agencies that allows officers to pursue for any "failure to yield" to an attempted traffic stop, regardless of the initial basis for the enforcement action.

Since 2013, and after identifying what it believed to be excessive engagement in high-risk vehicle pursuits, the Department has consciously used a restrictive threshold to limit pursuit incidents. This has been reflected fairly consistently in the agency's low annual totals. However, as we have discussed in prior Reports, specific refinements to policy and internal discussions about the pros and cons of different approaches have continued in an effort to provide greater clarity and accommodate the importance of officer discretion in real-time decision-making.

Our review this year offered us a window into the status of these ongoing efforts.

In this section, we discuss both formal pursuits and events that were classified as Tracking Mode or Assessment Period – perhaps inaccurately. Our findings suggest that the Department would benefit from a recalibration of its pursuit philosophy overall. A clearly articulated framework, grounded in operational realities and aligned across policy, training, and supervision, can help restore

clarity, reinforce accountability, and ensure that vehicle engagements are conducted safely, lawfully, and in accordance with the expectations of leadership, the City, and the public.

Formal Pursuits and the Balance Test

The Department reported five formal vehicle pursuits in 2024, two of which stemmed from the same incident involving multiple fleeing suspects. This is a modest number, and one that is both consistent with recent totals and reflective of the agency's stringent requirements for authorization.

As in the past, the Department evaluated these events thoroughly. Each incident received significant internal scrutiny and review, resulting in thorough debriefing and re-training for individuals, units, and across the Department. Two were found to have been out of policy and addressed accordingly with corrective action and re-training.

To assess these incidents, the Department applied its “Balance Test,” a structured method for evaluating the risk-to-benefit ratio of pursuit engagement. While past applications of the test have yielded inconsistent outcomes, this year’s analyses appeared to apply the framework more consistently and effectively.

For example, in one pursuit case, the initial call for service was for a residential burglary. While that call did not initially appear to meet the pursuit criteria, the Board noted that the call indicated the four subjects who fled might be armed, raising the level of risk to the public. The Board noted that the officers broadcast early and effectively, giving the Watch Commander the necessary information to first authorize, and then monitor, the pursuit. The officers called for assistance of their Air Unit and officers from a neighboring agency. While the officers’ speeds were high in a residential zone, traffic was light and the officer drove with due regard for public safety. These factors were all weighed against each other – an application of the Balance Test -- and the Department found this pursuit to be “in policy.”

Conversely, the Department used the Balance Test to find two of the pursuits to be out of policy when the risks outweighed the rewards. In these cases, they determined that the officers' actions, which included unsafe driving behaviors, failure to activate emergency equipment, and limited communication, outweighed the benefits of apprehending the subjects. . In one of these, the Board noted that, even though the pursuit met the initial criteria to pursue – a felony – officers drove at unsafe speeds and without due regard for the safety of the public. Then, technical issues delayed the communication between the Air Unit and ground units in pursuit, resulting in the ground units continuing a high-speed, high-risk pursuit when they should have transitioned into Tracking Mode. These risks did not meet the Balance Test criteria, and the Department found the pursuit to be out of policy.

Tracking Mode and Assessment Period

In our 2022 review, we recommended caution regarding the implementation of two new operational designations -- Tracking Mode and Assessment Period -- intended to provide lower-risk alternatives to formal vehicle pursuits.

These alternatives defined in Policy 314: Vehicle Pursuits. "Tracking Mode" is when an incident meets the criteria for a pursuit, but conditions have become unsafe to continue. In these cases, the officer can request the support of an Air Unit. The officer can still follow the suspect vehicle, either "Code-3" (with lights and sirens) or without. However, the officer must do so "at reduced speed" and "out of the suspect line of sight."

The policy also allowed for an "assessment period," where officers are allowed time to assess the violator/suspect actions (i.e., is the violator looking back at the officer, is there a safe place for the violator/suspect to pull over). But, as the policy notes, "An assessment period is not intended to be a pretext for officers to initiate a pursuit without alerting supervision."

While these categories were designed to offer field flexibility and reduce risk, prior reports noted that their introduction could lead to pursuit-like actions occurring outside the Department's formal pursuit framework. Specifically, we

raised concerns that officers might engage in high-risk driving behaviors without meeting the policy criteria for initiating a pursuit – and without engaging the supervision and other safeguards that are built into formal pursuit requirements.

By 2023, our reviews found that both officers and supervisors occasionally misunderstood the operational boundaries of these designations. In some cases, the distinction between Tracking Mode, Assessment, and formal pursuits appeared blurred, potentially undermining the Department's restrictive pursuit threshold.

In response, the Department refined its policy language, provided targeted training, and implemented a Tracking Mode / Assessment Period Driving Log (Recommendation 16, 2022). The Log was intended to document these specific events, support supervisory awareness, and provide data to evaluate the use and effectiveness of these alternatives. In 2024, the Log recorded 43 such incidents: 34 resulted in disengagement, four in apprehension, and five had other outcomes.²² The events in this Log, however, were not regularly reviewed unless they involved an incident that required supervisory evaluation per Department protocol, such as use of force.

As part of this year's review, we randomly selected eight cases from the Log for closer evaluation. The goal was to assess adherence to policy and identify any patterns in operational practice. In these cases, we observed driving behaviors that resembled those typically associated with formal pursuits, such as extended length / duration, intermittent use of lights and sirens, and violations of the vehicle code such as speeding. In short, they were pursuits in practice, if not in name.

²² According to the Department, the three outcome categories are defined as follow:

- Let go – the officers canceled following the vehicle based on their assessment or when the level of offense did not warrant the necessary resources, such as the Air Unit, and/or when other investigative options were available.
- Apprehended – most often as a result of Tracking Mode, where the helicopter followed and directed patrol units to the vehicle when it parked.
- Other – handed off to another agency, or vehicle was tracked and located/recovered, but was not occupied (or nobody was apprehended).

To its credit, the Department reclassified one case in real time after a supervisor determined that the driving behavior met the criteria for a formal pursuit. Officers had believed they were in Tracking Mode while pursuing a suspected stolen vehicle but engaged in high-speed driving inconsistent with policy. Once officers began to broadcast their actions, a supervisor cancelled the pursuit, the incident was reclassified, and the Department conducted a full debrief and formal review, ultimately finding the pursuit to be out of policy. This response reflects best practice: real-time correction, supervisory intervention, and post-incident accountability (and reinforces how important communication is to effective outcomes).

But the Department acknowledged that this was not the case with the other events logged as Tracking Mode, which showed comparable patterns. In most, the initiating offense did not meet the Department's criteria for a formal pursuit and officers did not declare a pursuit or initiate consistent Code-3 (lights and sirens). Instead, they broadcast that they were in Tracking Mode while continuing to follow the subject vehicle at close range, often violating the vehicle code and only intermittently using emergency equipment. The Department acknowledged that this was not consistent with the intended use of Tracking Mode, and presented increased risks while officers waited for an Air Unit to go overhead.

Generally, we did not see officers reduce speed or maintain distance from the subject vehicle once the Air Unit was overhead, as was intended by Tracking Mode. We did, however, observe effective containment and apprehension when officers were directed to the termination of an event by the Air Unit.

Assessment Period cases presented different but equally challenging issues. These incidents involved lower-level offenses that did not meet pursuit criteria, yet officers engaged in higher-risk driving behaviors for extended periods, such as running red lights, freeway transitions, and sporadic use of emergency equipment. The Department acknowledged that Assessment, as implemented, allowed officers too much discretion in the field. It is now considering eliminating the designation entirely, a plan that we support.

Recommendation 9

BPD should consider eliminating the concept of Assessment Period from Policy 314.

In both cases, officers' actions are often not regularly evaluated or corrected (this was even the case when an Assessment Period led to a formal pursuit, as we noted above). To strengthen oversight, the Department plans to assign the Audits and Inspections Unit to conduct regular reviews of the Log to identify incidents that may warrant reclassification or further evaluation.

As these cases exemplified, the distinction between formal pursuits and "pursuit-like" activities is not strictly academic. It is foundational to risk management, policy compliance, and safety.

Communication and Code-3 Driving

Overall, we noted areas for potential improvement in pursuits or pursuit-like activity, such as communication and Code-3 driving, and recommend continued training to address these concerns.

Communication and broadcasting are essential components of pursuit operations; they serve not only to coordinate field units, but also to facilitate supervisory oversight, enabling real-time evaluation of pursuit justification and policy compliance. Communication from the initiating officer regarding location, suspect behavior, traffic conditions, and other critical factors, allows responding units and supervisors to make informed tactical decisions. In some cases within this period, officers did not provide sufficient radio updates, hampering supervisory control. For example, in one case, the primary officer failed to broadcast that he was in an active pursuit, limiting his supervisor's ability to cancel the pursuit when it became clear that the pursuit did not meet the criteria for authorization.

Similarly, our case reviews identified three instances where officers inconsistently used emergency equipment while in pursuit (referred to as

driving “Code-3”), as well as cases of officers passing on the right²³ or failing to clear intersections safely. These failures were appropriately identified by the Department in the two cases classified as formal pursuits, and officers were retrained. In a third, however, the officer ran a red light before initiating a formal pursuit and going Code-3, presenting a risk as he drove through the intersection, and this behavior was not addressed.²⁴

Effective communication and Code-3 driving remain central to safe and accountable pursuits. Officers should be trained and encouraged to clearly broadcast their intent and driving behavior, particularly when transitioning from observation to engagement. Supervisors rely on timely and accurate information to assess risk, authorize or terminate pursuits, and ensure compliance with Department policy.

Strengthening training in these key areas will improve outcomes. But we also recognize that more frequent “real world” training, such as the Emergency Vehicle Operation Course (EVOC) Training, can be cost and time prohibitive.²⁵ As such, we recommend frequent and repeated classroom-based vehicle pursuit training during daily briefings; these trainings should include scenario-based table top exercises that replicate the decision-making needed during pursuits, such as testing “go/no-go” decisions against policy and radio communication simulations to reinforce driving skills and communication and coordination with supervisors, dispatch and the Air Unit.

The Department conducted this type of exercise when it debriefed the out of policy pursuit detailed above with involved personnel: it used video footage of

²³ Officers are instructed to pass on the left when responding with lights and sirens, as civilian drivers are legally required to yield by pulling to the right side of the roadway.

²⁴ In that case, the officer ran a red light without lights and sirens while he was still in “Assessment Period,” before escalating the event to a formal pursuit. This “pre-pursuit” driving was not evaluated by the Department. We discussed this and other challenges with Assessment in detail above.

²⁵ EVOC is a specialized training program designed to teach first responders how to operate emergency vehicles safely and effectively under both routine and high-stress conditions. It is usually conducted, in part, on a training course behind the wheel of a patrol vehicle.

the incident alongside a detailed slide presentation to discuss missteps and areas of improvement. This debrief was commendable and should be used as a template for future similar Department-wide training.

Recommendation 10

BPD should conduct frequent and repeated scenario-based vehicle pursuit training during daily briefings as practicable to reinforce best practices.

Recalibration of the “Pursuit Philosophy”

Confusion at the officer level and inconsistent application of the policy continue to be features of the Department's performance in this area. Factors that we identified in past reports remain an issue. Officers, particularly those newer to the field, often lack practical exposure to pursuit dynamics and appear uncertain about when and how to formally declare a pursuit. Simultaneously, the introduction of alternative classifications such as "Tracking Mode" and "Assessment Period," while intended to enhance operational discretion, has introduced ambiguity that complicates decision-making in the field.

On their face, these descriptions show the complexities involved in trying to "navigate the gray," and find the right balance between risk management and effective enforcement, or between officer discretion and bright line limits. And our recent discussions with BPD leadership have also given us insight into what may be the prevailing mindset at the patrol level: a perception that Department management dislikes pursuits and that avoiding them – or the formal acknowledgment of them – is therefore a priority. This view may have been shaped by past administrative outcomes related to pursuits, limited positive reinforcement for well-managed pursuits, and a more prominent cultural emphasis on risk avoidance.

As a result, BPD has inadvertently created conditions in which officers may hesitate to engage or may misclassify events in a way that sidelines the structured oversight and safeguards that should be applicable. Certainly, caution is appropriate given the risks associated with pursuits. We respect the thoughtfulness with which BPD established a high threshold while continuing to remain open to the benefits of – or needs for – ongoing refinement. But in some ways, the Department is back to square one: an officer population that is inexperienced, wary, uncertain, and incentivized to characterize their driving activity in ways that may not match the substantive reality of it.

It is important to recognize that vehicle pursuits, when conducted within policy and under supervisory oversight, remain a necessary tool in certain limited enforcement contexts. Avoiding the formal declaration of a pursuit does not eliminate risk; if anything, it is likely enhanced by limiting safeguards such as Code-3 notification, supervisory monitoring, and structured debriefing. The Department has acknowledged this challenge and is already in the process of revising its pursuit policy yet again. We recommend that the Department use this opportunity to evaluate its overall “Pursuit Philosophy” first, before making policy revisions. In its 2019 Vehicle Pursuit guidelines, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) stated:

The first step an agency should take [...] is to clearly outline the overall pursuit philosophy that will be adopted. This overarching philosophy should outline when officers are authorized to pursue and should take into account a variety of factors, to include relevant jurisdictional law; the environment in which the agency operates, such as an urban or rural locale; and community expectations. This philosophy will largely dictate the procedures and tactics to be used during a pursuit.

As pursuit policy continues to evolve, there is a clear need to define and communicate the Department’s pursuit philosophy. Doing so will help the Department develop its new policy, clarify when and why pursuits are appropriate, and align training and supervisory expectations with those goals.

Doing so may help reduce ambiguity, reinforce operational consistency, and support a culture of informed decision-making and accountability.²⁶

Recommendation 11

Before drafting an updated pursuit policy, BPD should clearly define its “pursuit philosophy,” and use this exercise to develop policy, training, and supervisory expectations that align with this philosophy.

²⁶ In developing this policy, it would be helpful for BPD to solicit input from City leadership and the City’s Police Commission as representatives of the Burbank community.

Special Project: BPD's Field Training Program

As this year's "special project," we chose to evaluate Burbank's Field Training Program to determine if it operates within the framework of California's standards and best practices nationwide. A field training program is a structured, on-the-job learning experience where new officers are mentored by experienced personnel to develop practical skills, apply departmental procedures, and demonstrate readiness for independent duty.

While this is an aspect of policing that is understandably overlooked by the average member of the public, it is a critical element of effective operations. The program that helps new officers make the transition from the classrooms of the academy to the "real world" of patrol is a hugely influential factor in preparedness and strong performance. Accordingly, a rigorous approach to field training goes beyond checking boxes and instead contributes in substantive ways to officer development. Strengths are reinforced, weaknesses are identified and addressed, and – on rare occasions – new officers who are unable to meet expectations are separated from the agency.

In California, having a structured field training program is not just optional – it is required by law for agencies that employ peace officers. The implementation of these programs can vary by agency but must adhere to the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) minimum standards. Key POST mandates include:

- A minimum of 10 weeks of field training
- Use of a POST-approved Field Training Program Guide covering specific topic areas and competency requirements (e.g., officer safety, use of force, report writing, community relations, etc.).
- Daily observation reports or training journal entries that document trainee performance each shift, reviewed with the trainee
- Weekly summary or supervisory reviews of trainee progress by the program supervisor

- Qualified FTOs: trainers must be experienced (minimum of one year in patrol), complete a certified FTO course, and not have disqualifying misconduct (explicitly, California law bars officers with certain sustained bias or force complaints from being FTOs)
- FTO Coordinator: a designated supervisor (sergeant or above) to oversee the program and review documentation
- End-of-program verification: an attestation by the FTO and department head that the trainee has demonstrated all required competencies before being released from training
- Feedback mechanisms: POST also now requires that trainees evaluate their FTOs and the program at the end of training, and that FTOs receive annual performance reviews of their training duties, to ensure accountability and quality of training.

A sound field training program meets the structural requirements imposed by POST and delineated above. But it also (and obviously) depends on the quality and commitment of the officers who provide the training. They assist in familiarizing trainees with the many practical skills (radio communication, geography, searches, command presence, officer safety) the job entails. And, ideally, they also provide a worthy example in how to engage with the public respectfully and exercise discretion judiciously.

Our review found that BPD's program has several exemplary features. To begin with, it is beyond compliance with the state requirements listed above. As we detail in this section of our report, BPD's six month program exceeds the 10-week minimum, and BPD uses the POST-sanctioned Daily Observation Report (DOR) format with numeric ratings. BPD also has a dedicated FTO program coordinator and completes all required sign-offs and documentation before a trainee is cleared for solo work. Trainees in BPD fill out end-of-phase critiques providing feedback on each FTO, which aligns with POST's mandate for trainee evaluations of FTOs. (While the relative power imbalance here is a likely impediment to candor, some level of accountability for the training officers themselves makes sense to us as an important feature.) And, the department updates its FTO Policy Manual on a five-year cycle (most recently

in 2024) to incorporate new state standards and contemporary policing practices.²⁷

In short, our review found that BPD meets or exceeds all core POST program standards.

Further, our review found that while Burbank's program reflects many of the traditional practices of field training, often referred to as the "San Jose Model", it also incorporates aspects of the newer "Reno Model," which focuses on problem-solving and critical thinking over metrics.²⁸ While BPD's program is fundamentally a San Jose model variant (phased, rated DORs, etc.) with a longer timeframe, the program has incorporated several aspects of the Reno Model as well; for example, the evaluation form includes both numeric scores and narrative feedback, combining structure with reflection. Together, this creates a well-rounded program for trainees.

To evaluate BPD's approach, we met with FTO program leadership and reviewed source materials to compare how BPD's program aligns with these model best practices.

²⁷ The 2024 update, for example, added content on procedural justice, updated policies on handling persons with mental illness, and included new written exams on penal codes to ensure recruits have retained academy legal knowledge.

²⁸ The San Jose model, so named because it was developed in San Jose, California, in the 1970s, is characterized by daily numeric evaluations across numerous performance categories. It is by far the most widely used model nationwide and is even integrated into accreditation standards like CALEA. Around 2000, the "Reno Model" was developed with support from prominent national policing organizations and is meant to address some of the perceived limitations with the San Jose approach. It uses adult learning principles and problem-based learning instead of daily numeric ratings, and it emphasizes coaching and reflection. Trainees complete problem-solving exercises for each phase and the model incorporates community-oriented policing skills and critical thinking scenarios.

Burbank's FTO Program: An Overview

The FTO program is managed by patrol and training leadership. A lieutenant serves as the FTO Program Coordinator and oversees the training progress, with a sergeant handling day-to-day supervision. This leadership convenes monthly FTO meetings where all FTOs discuss each trainee's progress, share teaching strategies, and address any issues or complaints that have arisen. These meetings also cover advanced training topics for FTOs – for example, recent sessions have included investigative techniques and crime scene management refreshers to ensure FTOs are equipped to teach those skills. BPD also benefits from having former FTOs in supervisory roles on various shifts, which helps reinforce training standards: field supervisors who were ex-FTOs understand the training objectives and can mentor new officers consistent with the program's expectations.

FTO Selection and Training

Best practice emphasizes that FTOs should be among the department's best – not just good street cops, but good *teachers* and role models. Agencies should look for FTO candidates with strong leadership, patience and teaching ability, and a passion for mentorship. Furthermore, recent research underscores how critical FTO selection is: a study funded in part by the National Policing Institute found that the long-term behavior of new officers (like frequency of use-of-force incidents or citizen complaints) was statistically linked to who their FTO was, meaning that a less professional FTO can imprint bad habits that last years.²⁹

BPD reported a rigorous selection process for Field Training Officers to ensure only high-performing, capable officers train new recruits. An officer who

²⁹ Getty, Ryan & Worrall, John & Morris, Robert. (2014). How Far From the Tree Does the Apple Fall? Field Training Officers, Their Trainees, and Allegations of Misconduct. *Crime & Delinquency*. 62. See also the National Policing Institute's FTO page at <https://www.policinginstitute.org/onpolicing/police-field-training-programs/>

volunteers to become an FTO must typically have at least 2 years of law enforcement experience (with a minimum of 1 year served at BPD). Candidates submit a memorandum of interest and undergo an oral interview panel assessment. The average experience level for BPD's FTOs is in fact 3–5 years on the force, meaning trainers have a solid foundation of patrol experience before taking on trainees. BPD also reviews the candidate's performance record and disciplinary history as part of selection, aligning with best practices that FTOs should model excellent conduct (e.g., no significant use-of-force issues or complaints).

Once selected, new FTOs must complete a 40-hour POST-certified Field Training Officer course, which covers adult teaching techniques, ethics, evaluation methods, and legal/liability issues in training. They are then officially certified as FTOs.

As noted above, California POST regulations mandate periodic updates; BPD adheres to this by requiring FTOs to attend update training at least every two years to stay current on training methods and policy changes; this exceeds the state requirement of 24 hours every 3 years, demonstrating Burbank's commitment to keeping FTOs sharp. In 2024, BPD updated its FTO curriculum to reflect evolving law enforcement standards: new material was added on community policing, mental health crises, and de-escalation tactics. FTOs were briefed on improved ways to evaluate performance, including clearer standardized criteria for scoring trainee behavior and knowledge (the FTO manual now has expanded explanations of how to grade performance in each category).

Additionally, BPD employs a tiered FTO role structure tied to experience and incentive: some FTOs are designated full-time trainers (with a pay premium and dedicated training duties), others serve as auxiliary FTOs who train as needed in addition to regular assignments, and a few are "FTO trainees" themselves (experienced officers in a probationary period as new FTOs). This tiered approach, including a small pay differential, motivates officers to become FTOs and recognizes the added responsibility. BPD's approach aligns with practices in other agencies that offer stipends or career credit for serving as an FTO.

Trainee Onboarding and Progression

New BPD officers (“trainees”) enter the FTO program immediately after graduating from a police academy. BPD hires recruits and sends them to academies, such as the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Academy or Rio Hondo Police Academy, for training.³⁰ After graduation, these recruits undergo approximately two weeks of post-academy classroom orientation at BPD covering Burbank-specific policies, municipal codes, report writing standards, and key procedures (for example, Burbank’s specific approach to search and seizure, high-risk car stops).

Trainees also spend another two to three weeks in practical skills refreshers, including defensive tactics and physical fitness with a Defensive Tactics sergeant. By the time a trainee begins patrol with their first FTO, they have been grounded in Burbank’s expectations and had an opportunity to rehearse critical skills, which helps bridge the gap between academy training and real policing in the city.

This initial orientation itself is the type of “adult-learning” reflective of the Reno Model, acknowledging that recruits benefit from classroom and hands-on refreshers before field immersion.

To strengthen this onboarding phase even more, the Department might also incorporate a structured community engagement or service component. Integrating this element into the preliminary phase would provide trainees with meaningful exposure to the communities that they will serve. And, this addition would align with the principles of the Reno Model, which emphasizes community-oriented policing and relationship-building as core competencies for new officers. Moreover, this component would provide new hires unfamiliar with Burbank’s neighborhoods an opportunity to meet residents rather than encountering them for the first time in a criminal enforcement context.

³⁰ Officers who previously served in other departments but transfer to BPD, commonly referred to as “laterals,” follow a similar field training program, but tailored to their level of experience and skill. Some can move through the FTO program at a more accelerated rate, while others benefit from the full FTO program like new-hires.

The engagement component could include activities such as participating in neighborhood meetings or community events or partnering with local organizations for service-based initiatives. For example, in Columbus, Ohio, trainees engage in a “field immersion” project, where recruits partner with local community organizations for hands-on service projects and ride-alongs *outside* of traditional police duties, such as working at a food bank, helping a neighborhood clean-up, or shadowing a social services outreach program. And, in New Jersey, the Camden County Police Department made community engagement a core part of its training program: it incorporates community outreach, attendance at local events, and youth engagement initiatives for officers in training. Trainees spend portions of their field training attending block parties, visiting schools, or working with mentorship programs, under the guidance of their FTOs, to learn effective ways to interact with residents.

We recommend that the Department consider adding this feature to its program and evaluating its impact through trainee feedback and supervisor observations.

Recommendation 12

BPD should add a structured community engagement or service component to its training program and evaluate its impact through trainee feedback and supervisor observations.

Program Structure and Phases

Once the initial orientation is complete, trainees enter a structured, six-month on-the-job training program divided into three phases. Each phase lasts approximately two months, and trainees rotate to a new FTO for each phase. This rotation exposes the trainee to different coaching styles and scenarios, ensuring a well-rounded experience.

During Phase 1, the trainees ride with their first FTO and is introduced to daily patrol procedures. Early in this phase, the FTO often takes the lead on calls for service while the trainee observes; as days progress, the trainee increasingly handles radio communications, suspect contacts, report writing, and other tasks under close supervision. Regular quizzes and knowledge checks are administered in this phase (FTOs give tests on penal codes, common radio codes, and likely scenarios) to reinforce academy learning. By the end of Phase 1 (~8 weeks), the trainee should be able to perform basic patrol duties with moderate FTO assistance.

In Phase 2, the trainee is expected to take a more proactive role. They work with a different FTO to gain exposure to a new coaching style and potentially a different patrol area or shift. The trainee now handles most calls with the FTO evaluating and only stepping in when necessary for safety or critical corrections. By the end of Phase 2, a trainee should be approaching a level of competency where they can handle routine calls with minimal guidance.

Phase 3 is the final evaluation phase. With yet another FTO mentor, the trainee is treated nearly as a peer officer: they are expected to self-initiate activity (traffic stops, community contacts), manage scenes, and complete detailed reports without the FTO dictating actions. The last weeks of Phase 3 are referred to as the “ghost phase,” wherein the FTO wears plainclothes and acts as an observer. The trainee answers calls alone (though the FTO is present in the car or nearby for safety), and the public typically doesn’t realize that training is technically ongoing during these interactions. This setup tests whether the trainee can function as a solo officer, and builds the trainee’s confidence.

Daily Observation Reports

Throughout all phases, daily performance is rigorously documented and reviewed. After each shift, the FTO fills out a Daily Observation Report (DOR) in BPD’s electronic FTO tracking system (LEFTA). The DOR captures the trainee’s activities and rates their performance across standardized categories (such as officer safety, radio communication, suspect handling, decision-making, report writing, etc.).

Trainees must review and sign their DOR each day in the system and are given the opportunity to add their own comments or rebuttals to any points – this acknowledgment is an important feedback loop, as it ensures the trainee is aware of deficiencies and can learn from them.

To illustrate the daily tasks and performance of FTOs and trainees, we requested real examples drawn from Daily Observation Reports (DORs) used in BPD's FTO program. BPD provided the DOR, as well as body-worn camera footage of the incident being evaluated. These vignettes demonstrate the range of scenarios new officers face – from routine tasks done well to critical mistakes – and show how FTOs document feedback and track performance over time.

- Missed Call and Situational Awareness: *An example of a “less than satisfactory” day early in Phase 1.*

Early in field training, programs should focus on developing situational awareness, communication skills, and problem-solving under supervision. Trainees must learn to monitor radio traffic, broadcast their actions clearly, and retain critical information.

On one shift early in Phase 1, an FTO noted multiple oversights by his trainee. The DOR for that day captured a clear pattern: the trainee's situational awareness, communication, and information retention needed improvement.

We reviewed one specific incident from that day: a traffic stop for a missing front plate. In the DOR, the FTO wrote that the trainee was not aware of the location and did not properly broadcast their stop (this occurred prior to the start of the body-worn camera clip). On the video clip, we observed the FTO coach the trainee on properly identifying the driver, who did not have a valid driver's license, was not coming back in the system, and stated that he did not have any identification documents. The FTO told the trainee that he had to affirmatively identify the driver, provided several ideas on how to do so, and instructed the trainee to “figure it out.” After establishing rapport through conversation, the driver told the trainee that he did, in fact, have an ID, and officers were able to confirm his identity. Officers allowed

the passenger -- who had a valid driver's license -- to drive the vehicle. This marked the end of the traffic stop.

This example showed proactive coaching and illustrated the FTO's role as a safety net and teacher – the FTO offered space for the trainee to problem solve in real time, while standing by to offer ideas. And, overall, the DOR for that day showed how a daily report memorializes mistakes in detail, allowing the department to track if such issues persist or improve with coaching.

- Focus on Officer Safety: *An example of room for improvement in recognizing officer safety concerns in Phase 2.*

Field training programs must prioritize officer safety as a foundational competency. FTOs play a critical role in reinforcing situational awareness and correcting unsafe practices in real time. We reviewed an example of this real-time coaching: fifteen days into Phase 2, a BPD trainee demonstrated both a need for improvement and a willingness to learn during a call involving a subject reportedly engaged in lewd conduct.

According to the DOR and body-worn camera footage, the trainee approached the subject and requested identification without first assessing the safety of the scene. The subject was surrounded by unidentified objects, wore baggy clothing, and had items tucked into his socks, all within arm's reach. The trainee conducted a cursory pat-down without placing the subject in a position of disadvantage.

Recognizing the safety concerns, the FTO intervened and advised the trainee to reposition the subject and perform a more thorough search. The trainee complied, adjusting his approach.

The FTO noted that the trainee needed to improve his overall attention to officer safety, including maintaining tactical advantage and conducting comprehensive searches. However, the report also highlighted the trainee's strong interest in protocol, his thoughtful questions, and his positive attitude toward learning. The trainee's openness to feedback and desire to grow were seen as promising indicators of future success.

- Problem-Solving in Non-Critical Conditions: *An example of accuracy and decision-making in non-critical conditions in Phase 3.*

Field training programs should emphasize decision-making and procedural accuracy in routine, non-critical calls. Trainees must demonstrate initiative, attention to detail, and familiarity with documentation. We reviewed one clear example of this: ten days into Phase 3, a trainee demonstrated strong problem-solving and decision-making skills during two routine calls, as documented in the DOR and supported by body-worn camera footage.

In the first incident, the trainee observed an unoccupied vehicle that appeared to have been involved in a traffic collision. Using the Mobile Data Terminal, the trainee identified the vehicle as stolen, contacted the registered owner by phone, and completed a CHP-180 form to document the recovery. Although the body-worn camera did not capture the full resolution of the call, the FTO noted that the trainee closed out the incident appropriately and independently.

Later that shift, the trainee responded to a petty theft call at a retail store. He reviewed surveillance footage, captured screenshots of the suspect, collected detailed information from the reporting party, and provided a report number to the store's loss prevention team. When prompted by the FTO, the trainee obtained an itemized receipt to complete the documentation. The body-worn camera clip ended shortly thereafter, but the FTO's report noted that the trainee and FTO canvassed the area and located a suspect matching the description.

The FTO commended the trainee's attention to process and detail, noting that his methodical approach made both calls easy to manage and effective. The FTO also advised that improving speed and efficiency would further enhance the trainee's patrol readiness. This highlighted the trainee's ability to apply investigative tools, follow procedure, and respond thoughtfully to routine calls. It also reflects the FTO's role in reinforcing best practices and coaching the trainee toward greater efficiency.

- Compassion and command presence: *An example of the varied responses needed when responding to different calls for service late in Phase 3.*

Field training programs should prepare trainees to adapt their demeanor and tactics based on the nature of the call. Late in Phase 3, a trainee demonstrated this adaptability across two distinct calls for service, as documented in DORs from days 12 and 16.

On day 12, the trainee responded to a sexual battery call. The FTO commended the trainee's tactful and thorough approach. Body-worn camera footage showed the trainee engaging the survivor with compassion and professionalism, advising her that he might ask personal questions and offering breaks if needed. He asked detailed, respectful questions and apologized when asking more probative questions, maintaining confidence while navigating a sensitive interview. This interaction reflected the trainee's ability to apply trauma-informed practices and build trust with a vulnerable community member.³¹

Four days later, on day 16, the trainee responded to a suspicious vehicle call. Here, he displayed a markedly different approach: assertive and tactically safe. The body-worn camera showed the trainee approaching the driver with command presence, coordinating with his FTO who approached the passenger side. When the FTO observed drug paraphernalia in the driver's hand, he alerted the trainee, who then ordered the driver out of the vehicle. When the driver refused, the trainee opened the door and calmly escorted him out. The driver became agitated, and the trainee de-escalated by speaking in the driver's native language and modulating his tone, raising his voice briefly to gain control, then lowering it once compliance was achieved.

During the consent search of the vehicle, the trainee located a large number of keys and the FTO found bolt cutters. The trainee consulted the FTO, who advised that these items were suspicious. The trainee then determined that Miranda advisement was appropriate and proceeded with

³¹ If anything, at times the trainee's careful approach seemed *better* suited to the needs of the woman being interviewed than that of his training officer. We noted a couple of instances in which the FTO interjected (presumably in an effort to help advance the process), and in a way that seemed relatively jarring to the woman. It made the trainee's sensitive handling of the encounter all the more impressive.

questioning, which the driver refused. Later, the FTO guided the trainee through the impound process, which the trainee completed successfully.

These two clips illustrated the trainee's ability to shift between compassion and authority, depending on the call. It also highlighted the strong rapport between the trainee and FTO, marked by open communication, real-time guidance, and collaborative problem-solving. The trainee's confidence in asking questions and the FTO's responsive mentorship exemplify the kind of dynamic that supports growth.

This DOR also noted that FTOs and trainees practiced "role playing" Field Sobriety Tests on each other, and that the FTOs provided feedback for administering the tests as well as proper report-writing for these incidents. Here, we see implementation of the Reno Model, which emphasizes scenario-based role play as a training tactic. The FTO also noted that he quizzed the trainee on the five most commonly used Burbank Municipal Codes and the practical application of these codes while on patrol.

- Balancing Independence with Fundamentals: *An example of demonstrating initiative while reinforcing core skills.*

As trainees approach the end of field training, they should demonstrate initiative, sound judgment, and the ability to operate independently – all while maintaining the core skills they acquired during Phases 1 and 2, such as thorough and accurate report-writing. On Day 25 of Phase 3, the FTO documented commendable performances by his trainee, which showed strong investigative instincts and initiative.

But the shift also highlighted areas for improvement in documentation. During the shift the trainee made several reporting errors that required correction: the FTO emphasized the importance of reporting accuracy, especially as the trainee neared the end of Phase 3.

We reviewed body-worn camera footage for one of these: the trainee completing the booking process. While the trainee was methodical and precise in the process, according to the DOR, the trainee submitted a form with inaccurate information, which was caught by the Watch Commander and corrected by the FTO. This example illustrated the balance between

growing independence and the continued need for attention to detail. The FTO's feedback and coaching ensured that the trainee remained focused on core skills while becoming more independent.

- Managing Stress and Maintaining Protocol: *An example of keeping a calm demeanor and focusing on proper procedures, especially when responding to high-stress calls for service.*

Field training programs should prepare trainees to manage stress effectively while maintaining procedures. Trainees must demonstrate calm decision-making, safe driving practices during emergency responses, and adherence to investigative protocols. We observed these in a DOR that occurred toward the end of Phase 3: a trainee demonstrated composure across multiple high-stress calls.

During a Code-3 response to an injury traffic collision, the trainee maintained control while driving with lights and sirens, choosing the most direct route and avoiding overdriving. Upon arrival, he calmly contacted each of the victims and conducted a methodical investigation. The FTO noted that the trainee completed all necessary documentation independently and that he used the incident as an opportunity to review the mission and responsibilities of the Traffic Bureau.

Later in the same shift, the trainee responded to two additional high-stress calls, including one involving a person experiencing a mental health crisis and self-harming. In each case, the FTO reported that the trainee demonstrated sound judgment, emotional steadiness, and appropriate tactical response (we did not review the body-worn camera footage for these calls).

The FTO commended the trainee's ability to remain focused and professional under pressure, which reflects BPD's emphasis on preparing trainees to navigate emotionally charged situations with clarity, confidence, and procedural accuracy.

These example cases collectively show how the FTO program documents a trajectory from mistakes to mastery. Early on, DORs might read like detailed lists of errors (missed radio calls, poor geographic awareness, etc.), but as

training progresses, the tone shifts to documenting solid, acceptable police work and occasional commendations for excellent performance.

Because each DOR is preserved in the LEFTA system, BPD's training coordinators and command staff can track each trainee's development. For example, if an officer had recurring issues with situational awareness in multiple DORs, the program leaders would flag that and perhaps adjust training. Conversely, improvements would be evident if later DORs no longer mention those problems.

Ultimately, this review underscored that field training is a daily educational process. Every patrol shift becomes a classroom. The FTOs not only supervise but also document the learning that occurs to gauge how well new officers are being prepared for solo service.

End-of-Phase Reports

At the end of each phase, a more formal End-of-Phase Report is prepared. This report summarizes the trainee's performance over that phase, documents any remedial training completed, and recommends whether the trainee should advance to the next phase. The End-of-Phase report is reviewed and signed by the FTO Supervisor, the FTO Program Lieutenant, and the Patrol Division Captain. This chain-of-command review enforces oversight: it ensures multiple levels of leadership agree the trainee has met the required competencies to progress.

If a trainee is not ready to advance, the program can "re-phase" them – meaning they repeat the phase with a new or extended training plan. BPD policy allows one re-phase opportunity for a trainee to improve in deficient areas. In some cases, targeted remedial training will be assigned during the re-phase; for instance, if a trainee struggled with conducting searches properly, they might be sent for a day of intensive remedial training on search techniques (e.g. practicing searches on arrestees at the jail under supervision).

We looked at several recent examples of End of Phase reports that were provided by BPD at our request. The reports follow a template that guides the

FTO toward capturing both the most and least acceptable aspects of trainee performance during the phase. One "Phase 1" report listed multiple examples in each category, with specific supporting details. ("In the last two weeks, he only used his map once...and was arriving to locations in a timely manner." And, less favorably, "...there were at least three instances when he allowed the detainee to dictate the interaction...and in one instance allowed a detainee to enter a vehicle."). The mixture of genuine praise and fair criticism reflected the thoughtfulness of the preparer's evaluation, and a true understanding of the trainee's strengths and weaknesses.³²

While other sample reports were less detailed, each was convincingly individualized. While many of the same issues came up in multiple reports (geography, handling of radio traffic, report writing, officer safety), it was interesting to note that the trainees often differed from each other as to whether a given topic fell into the positive or negative side of the ledger.

As the phases progressed, the end of phase reports often became more concise – an evolution that seemed commensurate with the expected development of the officers as they advanced through the program and gained experience. Importantly, the reports also listed out the interventions that were used to address noted shortcomings. And a part of the template is for listing and description of any "remedial training" necessary.

Those who do succeed in all three phases are released from the FTO program and continue to work independently for the remainder of their 12-month probation. During that post-FTO probationary period, training staff continues to monitor the new officers' progress informally – field supervisors keep an eye on their reports and tactics, and any slip in performance can be addressed with additional coaching. By the one-year mark, the officer's overall performance is assessed again before they are considered fully past probation.³³

³² Where relevant, the reports also tended to put individual issues into a larger context of typical challenges for new officers, and part of a normal arc that trainees travel along. This experienced perspective helps FTO's draw useful distinctions between real concerns and "rookie mistakes."

³³ In this first year of service while on probation, new hires may be released for any performance related concerns.

One suggestion for further strengthening the evaluation program would be the addition of formal problem-solving exercises or written self-assessments from trainees at the end of phase period. For example, BPD could ask trainees in Phase 3 to write a brief reflection on a significant incident they handled. This would address the critique that traditional programs may not promote enough reflective learning. BPD might also consider assigning each trainee a community project or mini-study (like analyzing a specific crime problem in their area) during training to foster broader thinking.

Recommendation 13

BPD should consider incorporating formal problem-solving exercises or written self-assessments from trainees to promote reflective learning and assign trainees a community-based project to foster broader thinking.

Falling Out: Extending Phases or Separation

Nationwide, agencies report that roughly 10% of trainees “fall out” (do not advance) by the end of a given phase and require re-phasing or remediation. If after remediation a trainee still cannot meet performance standards, or if serious issues arise, the trainee may be separated from the department. BPD has historically seen an overall attrition rate of about 24% in the field training program. Much of this attrition is due to trainees self-selecting out of the career (resigning when it becomes clear the job or the scrutiny of training isn’t for them) rather than outright terminations, according to program data.

On the remedial side, BPD does well: they have a structured plan for remediation (additional training, re-phasing) which is a best practice to salvage those who have potential but need more time. Not all departments formally allow re-phasing; BPD’s willingness to extend training for those showing progress aligns with a modern view that sometimes a rigid time limit is not right for every individual.

BPD provided two examples of trainees who, unfortunately, did not meet the Department's standards and were separated from the program. This is surely disappointing to the involved officer, as well as to the agency that has invested time, money and attention and that depends so heavily on staffing to accomplish its responsibilities. At the same time, it reflects well on the program in one important sense: maintaining standards of competent performance in the field is seemingly recognized as so important that it overrides the incentives to look past a marginal employee's limitations.

We had the opportunity to assess the "close-out" packages which explained in detail the unsuccessful arc of the trainee's time in the program, and the basis for the determination that further remediation would likely not be sufficient to overcome identified challenges. We found them to be impressive in their thoughtfulness, thoroughness, and specificity; it seemed clear that the trainees had been given every opportunity to succeed, and that the decision to end their tenure with the agency was made correctly.³⁴

The first trainee had been in the program for five months. Not only had the officer not progressed in fixing the various shortcomings in his performance, but he had also seemingly regressed in some areas. Training officers found his engagement level to be curiously low and were puzzled by his seeming reluctance to talk through performance challenges. Efforts at remediation were documented (and often added up to several hours on a given topic).

The other trainee was in the program for three months; this trainee was found to continuously underperform in every critical aspect of policing in the field, even after extensive, documented, extra training outside of the formal program by two FTOs. For example, even after twenty extra hours of report-writing training, the trainee made no progress in this skill, taking hours to complete a basic report with repeated errors that required correction. Beyond this, however, the FTOs suspected that the trainee may have integrity issues, and his high scores on paper tests did not align with his knowledge in the field. And FTOs noted challenges with his professionalism when engaging with members of the public.

³⁴ The officers are given the opportunity to voluntarily resign from the agency, which is presumably helpful for future employment prospects (though other law enforcement agencies would nonetheless be on notice of concerns).

These two cases, while unfortunate, underscore a critical strength of the program: a clear commitment to maintaining professional standards, even when doing so is difficult. In a profession where public trust and operational effectiveness hinge on the quality of individual officers, the ability to recognize and act on persistent deficiencies is essential.

Wellness and Resilience for FTOs and Trainees

One emerging best practice area is ensuring the wellbeing of both trainees and their FTOs. Field training is stressful for both parties: trainees are under intense scrutiny, and FTOs have the weight of constant evaluation and dual responsibility of patrol and teaching.

The IACP has promoted resilience strategies for FTOs, encouraging departments to help FTOs avoid burnout and cynicism by providing support resources, training in stress management, and reasonable rotations (not overusing the same FTO continuously).³⁵ Some agencies cap how many back-to-back training cycles an FTO can do before a break to prevent fatigue. BPD does consider FTO workload – with 12 FTOs for about 10 trainees at a time, they can spread out assignments.

For trainees, best practices include taking mental health into account: for example, if a trainee has a particularly traumatic call (a gruesome scene or a child death), a good program will ensure a debrief with a peer support or counselor if needed, not just an evaluation on the daily observation reports. Currently, BPD does not have a formal mechanism for trainees to meet together for debriefing or peer support, outside of their daily one-on-one feedback from FTOs. Program leadership identified this as a gap – while FTOs meet monthly to discuss trainees, the trainees do not have similar

³⁵ See strategies at https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/Resilience_Strategies_FTOs.pdf

regular meet-ups to collectively discuss their experiences or stressors. Establishing a periodic trainee debrief or mentoring session could help new officers process the challenges of field training (a recommendation the department is now considering). This kind of support can bolster resilience and mental health for trainees who are under significant pressure to perform during their probation.

Recommendation 14

BPD should develop a structured program for trainees to meet regularly to debrief and for peer support.

On the positive side, BPD's culture of involving multiple FTOs means no single mentor has undue influence or burden the entire time, which can mitigate overattachment or bias. Going forward, as a best practice, BPD might implement a short "check-in" meeting with each trainee class by a psychologist or peer support team, separate from evaluation, to discuss stress and coping. Additionally, ensuring FTOs themselves have support (perhaps periodic meetings among FTOs not just to discuss trainees tactically, but also to vent frustrations or share support strategies for themselves) can improve the program.

Recommendation 15

BPD should implement a short "check-in" meeting with each trainee class by a psychologist or peer support team, separate from evaluation, to discuss stress and coping.

Recommendation 16

BPD should develop periodic wellness sessions for FTOs to vent frustrations or share support strategies for themselves.

BPD Accomplishments

Each year, our office asks the Department to provide highlights from the prior calendar year so that we can inform and educate the public and the City Council. While these are not subjects of our routine review process, we nonetheless include this summary annually because it offers useful context about operational initiatives and performance indicators that matter to the community.

According to the Department, emergency response remained a core emphasis, with an average emergency response time of two minutes and thirty-eight seconds. The Department offered this metric as a current performance indicator of its commitment to rapid response when emergencies arise. The Department also reports that it launched a Community Service Officer (CSO) program, assigning trained non-sworn personnel to tasks such as basic report-taking, traffic control and parking enforcement, and community outreach. The stated rationale is to preserve sworn capacity for priority calls and investigative work while maintaining service levels for lower-risk assignments.

Internally, the agency introduced a new wellness program intended to support both sworn and professional staff. The initiative emphasizes physical fitness, nutrition, and broader well-being, with the expressed aim of sustaining a resilient workforce and strengthening decision-making and service delivery.

The Department further expanded the Mental Health Evaluation Team (MHET) by adding a clinician-officer pairing on Fridays and Saturdays, raising the team's days of service from four to six per week to better align coverage with periods of higher call volume and community need. As context, our office has previously conducted an audit of BPD's response to mental-health-related calls, including the operations of MHET, and found performance in this area to

be strong. The added coverage builds on a positive foundation and demonstrates the Department's continued commitment to timely, specialized responses for individuals in crisis.

The Department reported achieving a new four-year accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). This accreditation is earned by meeting externally developed standards of excellence in policy, procedures, operations, and service, and reflects an ongoing commitment to professionalism, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Finally, the Department highlighted continued investment in technology, including expansion of Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) tools and integration with the FUSUS real-time crime center platform to enhance situational awareness and investigative capacity in the field.

We appreciate the Department's willingness to share these developments.

Conclusion

Our 2025 review of the Department affirms the Department's continued commitment to accountability, transparency, and professional development. The Department has made meaningful strides in refining its internal review systems, particularly in the areas of misconduct investigations and use of force oversight. These efforts reflect a culture of responsiveness and a continued willingness to evolve in alignment with best practices.

Looking ahead, BPD should continue to refine its pursuit policies to ensure clarity and consistency across operations. This includes articulating a more defined "pursuit philosophy" and reinforcing it through targeted training and supervisory guidance. Enhancing scenario-based training, especially in defensive tactics, vehicle pursuits, and de-escalation, will further equip officers to respond effectively in dynamic situations.

We also encourage the Department to integrate structured community engagement into its field training program. By embedding relationship-building into the early stages of officer development, BPD can foster trust and mutual understanding with the public it serves. In parallel, wellness initiatives for both trainees and their FTOs should be expanded to promote resilience and mental health throughout the organization.

We also want to acknowledge and express our appreciation for the time and effort BPD staff dedicated to supporting this review process. Their timely responses and provision of thorough data were instrumental in enabling our work. As the Department transitions to new command leadership, we look forward to continuing our collaborative relationship and supporting BPD's ongoing efforts.

Recommendations

- 1: BPD should reinforce the principle that intake interviews with complainants are primarily intended to acquire a full understanding of their allegations and concerns – and not as a forum for rebuttal or defense of officer actions.
- 2: BPD should address employees' suboptimal performance issues that emerge in the context of complaint cases, even when the identified issues don't rise to the level of formal policy violations.
- 3: BPD should refine its agency-wide understanding of "de-escalation" techniques to maintain emphasis on tactics and strategies that lessen the likelihood of physical force being necessary.
- 4: BPD should encourage supervisors to prioritize the objective acquisition of detailed statements of individuals upon whom force was used and other witnesses where possible.
- 5: BPD should continue to include recorded interviews with arrestees and civilian witnesses as part of its routine CIRB process.
- 6: BPD should explore "micro training" in defensive tactics to provide more regular review of hand-on / empty hands techniques.
- 7: BPD should continue to ensure that current training of its police service dogs is reflective of evolving legal standards and should ensure that a rigorous review of bite incidents continues to be part of its CIRB process.
- 8: BPD should routinely review Taser Deployment Logs and direct supervisors to address anomalies (such as trigger rejections or multiple activations) through documented explanation or other needed intervention.

- 9: BPD should consider eliminating the concept of Assessment Period from Policy 314.
- 10: BPD should conduct frequent and repeated scenario-based vehicle pursuit training during daily briefings as practicable to reinforce best practices.
- 11: Before drafting an updated pursuit policy, BPD should clearly define its “pursuit philosophy,” and use this exercise to develop policy, training, and supervisory expectations that align with this philosophy.
- 12: BPD should add a structured community engagement or service component to its training program and evaluate its impact through trainee feedback and supervisor observations.
- 13: BPD should consider incorporating formal problem-solving exercises or written self-assessments from trainees to promote reflective learning and assign trainees a community-based project to foster broader thinking.
- 14: BPD should develop a structured program for trainees to meet regularly to debrief and for peer support.
- 15: BPD should implement a short “check-in” meeting with each trainee class by a psychologist or peer support team, separate from evaluation, to discuss stress and coping.
- 16: BPD should develop periodic wellness sessions for FTOs to vent frustrations or share support strategies for themselves.