



The League of Women Voters of Portland

310 SW 4th Avenue, Suite 520
Portland, OR 97204

(503) 228-1675
lwvpdx@aracnet.com

Independent Police Review 2007 Annual Report City Council Testimony October 8, 2008

The League would like to thank the IPR staff for completing another annual report and for its commitment to publish future reports in a timely manner. As Professor Luna Firebaugh explained in her performance review of the IPR, one of the fundamental principles underlying civilian review boards is the people's right to know the people's business. Comprehensive reports are an excellent tool for accomplishing that goal.

There are several issues from the report that we would like to highlight today.

- According to the report, 60 percent of the cases referred to Internal Affairs were classified as Service Complaints, a 21 percent increase over 2006 (p.16). These are considered minor rule infractions and complainants do not have a right of appeal. Given the increasing numbers, an option for a complainant-requested review or reconsideration should be explored.
- Use of force complaints (p. 29) have decreased over the last several years along with complaints overall (p. 8). The report discusses the work of the Joint Task Force on Use of Force and its potential contribution to improvements in police behavior. Consideration also should be given to the fact that out of a total of 594 citizen allegations of excessive force in the past six years, only one was sustained. It is possible that citizens feel it is futile to file a complaint. Similarly, given the limitations of the complainant survey, we do not know if the decreasing number of complaints overall can be attributed to better policing or to a lack of trust in the IPR.
- The report points out the shortcomings of the complainant survey with its low response rate and lack of follow up. It is essential that we understand how the system is working from the perspective of those who use it. When resources permit, the League recommends contracting with an outside expert to develop a survey instrument that would result in a more accurate assessment of the system.
- There are several excellent suggestions in the report of items needing Citizen Review Committee auditing or study. Considering the substantial workload these volunteers already carry, the League continues to believe council should consider increasing the committee size.
- In a few cases, the highlighted comments in the report are not consistent with a more detailed examination of the data. Following are two examples:

“To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.”

- The Executive Summary correctly states, “The number of force complaints per thousand police contacts has declined 34 percent since 2004.” That statement, however, does not tell the whole story. Table 2.4 “Citizen-Initiated Complaint Allegations Reported by Category,” (p. 9) shows that use of force allegations as a percentage of total allegations have remained at a consistent eight percent since 2004. If you look at the data from that perspective, there has been no change in use of force allegations since 2004.
- The Executive Summary accurately points out that complainants’ satisfaction in the outcome of their cases increased by more than 11 percent and dissatisfaction decreased by 18 percent in 2007. On the other hand, Figure 5.10 (p. 57) shows that 32 percent of complainants are satisfied, 50 percent dissatisfied, and 17.9 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In other words, a large portion of complainants is not satisfied with the outcome of their cases. This is not clear if one reads only the highlighted points in the executive summary. Furthermore, this data should be interpreted with caution because it is based on a very small sample due to a large reduction in the number of surveys mailed to complainants in 2007 (p. 51).

Once again, we appreciate the IPR’s work on the report and are pleased that it is being presented at a City Council hearing. Next time we hope more notice will be given.