



League of Women Voters of Portland

PO Box 3491, Portland, Oregon 97208-3491

503-228-1675 • info@lwvpdx.org • www.lwvpdx.org

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DATE: April 17, 2023
TO: Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners Gonzalez, Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan
FROM: Debbie Kaye, president
Debbie Aiona, Action Committee chair
RE: Portland Police Bureau Officer-Involved Shootings and
Critical Incidents
OIR Group Eighth Report, January 2023 (Agenda item 314)

The League of Women Voters of Portland has been involved in issues related to police oversight since the 1980s. The OIR Group’s periodic reports and recommendations on police shootings and in-custody deaths are valuable not only for the Portland Police Bureau, but also for the public. In addition to the analysis and recommendations, they shed light on the most serious police/community interactions and provide information the public would not otherwise know. We would like to thank the OIR Group for the report and Independent Police Review for facilitating this work. In addition, we want to express our gratitude to Director Caldwell for releasing the report well in advance of the City Council session.

Within the next few years, Portland will have a new community-centered oversight board responsible for handling police misconduct complaints. Its authority extends to shootings and in-custody deaths. Careful evaluation of closed investigations by experts in the field will continue to be essential to improving police bureau practices and policies and also to providing the public with information on cases of utmost community concern.

As regular readers of these periodic reports, we found it troubling to see some of the same recommendations repeated yet again. The bureau and community would benefit from expanding the next contract with the OIR Group to include a thorough accounting of past recommendations and their current implementation status. Perhaps with a clearer picture of what has been accomplished and what still needs to be addressed, we would see greater progress. At least one deficiency, the failure to conduct prompt interviews of involved officers, dates back to the late 1990s when a different consulting group conducted the reviews.

In this year’s report, issues of greatest concern include the lack of careful reflection and analysis by command staff in addressing specific areas of review in the officer-involved shooting investigations. In addition, a repeat recommendation

about the importance of analyzing pre-shooting tactical decision-making deserves serious attention; it has the potential to save lives by avoiding the use of deadly force altogether. As the report notes: it is a “well accepted tenet that tactical decisions meant to keep officers safe reduce the likelihood that those officers will find themselves in a position where they feel deadly force is necessary.” (P. 47)

Additional findings and recommendations of note include the following:

- At least four of the eight cases the OIR Group reviewed involved people with mental health or addictions issues.
- The bureau should pay much more careful attention to the thoughtful analyses provided by the Training Division.
- In addition to accepting or rejecting OIR Group recommendations, the chief’s response should include an implementation plan for the ones with which the bureau agrees.
- None of the cases in the report met the U.S. Department of Justice-imposed 180-day time limit for completion of investigation and analysis. Careful evaluation of barriers to completion might shed some light on how the process could be expedited. In some cases, however, going over the time limit is necessary in order to conduct a thorough evaluation.

The League would like to thank IPR and the city for engaging the OIR Group in conducting this critical analysis. Taking an individual’s life is one of the most consequential actions a governmental body can take. The city should do all it can to improve policies and practices related to police officers’ interactions with vulnerable and challenging individuals, in order to save lives and protect the victims, involved officers, and the community from the resulting trauma.