



COVID-19 Update

As you may know, OPA has closed its office due to issues surrounding COVID-19. This decision was made both to protect OPA staff and to ensure that the illness is not spread to first responders. Right now, the work you, as officers, are doing is of the utmost importance. We do not want to undermine or compromise that.

Given the above, any pending OPA interviews will be cancelled. If you have not yet heard from OPA about a pending interview, please reach out to the assigned OPA investigator directly.

Due to interruptions in interviews, transcriptions, and other OPA functions, we've requested extensions to the 180-day deadlines for all pending investigations. SPOG has granted 30-day extensions (for the 55 active investigations) and SPMA has tolled the deadline (in eight active investigations). OPA has agreed to provide a status update to the unions in 15 days to determine whether additional extensions are needed. Understanding the stress open investigations can cause for officers, we will only be requesting further extensions if needed. OPA has not requested extensions for new cases (any complaints initiated or received after the March 12, 2020, extension requests) and will process those as normal. You will continue to receive notices on those cases at the usual contractual intervals.

Please stay safe and take care of yourselves. We appreciate all that you do for our collective health and safety.

Wellness Policy Recommendation

An officer (the NE) believed his partner was potentially intoxicated during a shift. He confronted his partner twice on the day in question and offered to give him a ride home. His partner denied being intoxicated. Three days later, the NE confronted his partner once more before ultimately reporting the incident to a supervisor. In the interim, the NE sought alternative ways to help his partner, including reaching out to Peer Support and Code 4 Northwest.

In this case, the evidence of the misconduct was perishable and there was a time constraint on reporting the alleged policy violation to prevent a loss of evidence. By failing to immediately report potential serious misconduct, no supervisor could conduct a timely fit-for-duty exam to determine if the officer was impaired while on duty. Therefore, the supervisor referred to OPA the NE's failure to timely report potential misconduct.

Policy clearly required the NE to report, and OPA recognizes the substantial danger that an intoxicated officer could pose to the community. However, in this specific circumstance, OPA believed that punishing the NE for failing to immediately report potential misconduct would not address the larger issue of how the Department will approach substance abuse and mental illness among its employees. OPA further did not believe that discipline in this case would result in more officers reporting and, instead, was concerned that it would have the opposite result.

In evaluating this question, OPA noted the significant rise in officer suicides over the last year, as well as the stressors of law enforcement work and the traumatic incidents observed by officers each day. These take a significant toll on officers and can create or exacerbate alcohol and/or drug dependencies. These issues are serious enough that they, at least in large part, caused the Department to recently create a Wellness Unit.

Given the above, OPA ultimately [did not sustain](#) any findings against the NE. Rather, OPA [issued a recommendation](#) that SPD evaluate less punitive methods of addressing employee addiction and mental illness to encourage officers to report such issues and seek out City resources and care. OPA also recommended that the Department emphasize our collective commitment to a compassionate and treatment-focused harm reduction model and use the Wellness Unit to effectuate this. [SPD has fully implemented](#) this Management Action Recommendation.

If you have questions, feedback, content requests, or to add/remove your name from this distribution list, please contact Anne Bettesworth, OPA Deputy Director of Public Affairs, at anne.bettesworth@seattle.gov.