

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Complaint Process

### *Who oversees the Investigation Section process?*

The Office of Professional Accountability (OPA) Director (a civilian position appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council) is responsible for the management and oversight of the investigative process and ensures the highest standards for documentation, investigation, reporting, and resolution of complaints.

An OPA Auditor, who is a respected member of the community and appointed by the Mayor and City Council, reviews every complaint and investigation to ensure that each receives a thorough and objective investigation. In addition, an OPA Review Board, composed of three civilians appointed by the City Council, will review closed cases and report on the fairness and efficacy of the OPA process.

### *How do I file a complaint?*

Citizens who believe that an officer or other Department employee has engaged in misconduct may file a complaint in person, by telephone, by mail, by E-mail, or via the on-line Commendation/Complaint form.

While we encourage those who make complaints to provide their names and other identifying information, we do accept anonymous complaints. We also accept complaints from outside agencies and from witnesses or other third parties reporting on behalf of others.

**Complaints of misconduct are taken very seriously. You will be asked to certify that the information you provide is true to the best of your knowledge.**

We ask that complaints be filed as soon after the event as practical. Filing a complaint does not affect other civil or criminal proceedings.

### *What type of complaint may I file?*

OPA handles all complaints involving SPD employees. OPA considers whether the type of misconduct alleged, if true, would violate Department policies and procedures, or may constitute a violation of law. If your complaint is about Department policies or tactics, rather than misconduct by an individual officer, OPA will document your complaint and share it with the appropriate unit within the Department.

### *What if I want to commend a Police Department employee or make suggestions to the Department?*

We happily accept commendations and will forward them to the employee with our sincere appreciation.

The Seattle Police Department is in partnership with the community to make Seattle a safe and enjoyable place to live and work. We strive to provide excellent service to our community. In that regard, your complaints and commendations are important to us as they allow us to improve the job we do for you.

### *Will my complaint be investigated?*

Depending on the seriousness of the allegation, your complaint may be resolved with information from the section or referral to the officer's supervisor for review. Other complaints will receive further investigative efforts. You will be notified on how your complaint will be resolved.

### *What happens if my complaint is assigned for further investigation?*

You will receive a notice that includes a case number, name, and telephone number of the investigator assigned to your complaint. **It is very important that you continue to participate in the complaint process.** You may be asked to give a more complete, tape-recorded statement.

You may also be asked for any additional documentation that relates to your complaint and, if appropriate, you may be asked to allow photographs of any injury or property damage, and to consent to the release of any medical records associated with your complaint.

### *Who will investigate my complaint?*

Every complaint is documented and reviewed by the Captain of the Investigation Section and the Director of the OPA, who is not a police officer.

Complaints requiring investigation will be investigated by police sergeants, who work in the Investigation Section of the Office of Professional Accountability, or by other sergeants working under their direction.

The Investigation Section will forward its investigation and recommended findings for review by the civilian Director of the OPA. The Director may concur with the recommended findings, direct additional investigation, or recommend a different finding to the Chief of Police.

Depending on the circumstances of your complaint, it may also be referred for review/investigation to the commander of the employee named on your complaint.

### *How long will it take to investigate my complaint?*

Some allegations can be resolved by discussion with the OPA-IS investigator or by a supervisor. These are usually resolved within 60 days. If further

investigation is required, it will likely take longer. Investigations must be fully completed within 180 days, though every effort is made to close them sooner. If you have any questions during the process of your complaint or have not heard from our office about the status of your case, you are encouraged to call and check on the status of your investigation.

### *Will I be notified of the outcome of my complaint?*

Yes. If your complaint was assigned for Supervisory Referral, you will receive a closing letter describing what steps were taken to resolve the issue. If your complaint is assigned for investigation, you will be advised of the steps that were taken to investigate, the outcome of the investigation, and an explanation of the finding reached.

### *What can I do if I am unhappy with the outcome of my complaint?*

If you do not agree with the classification or results of the investigation of your complaint, you may submit a letter to the OPA Director requesting reconsideration. The OPA Director will review the investigation, determine if it was handled properly, and notify you of the review findings in writing.

*Note: Department policies prohibit retaliation against citizens for making a complaint.*

## *Understanding Mediation A Different Approach to Resolution*

The mediation program represents a great opportunity for citizens and police to gain a better understanding of differing perspectives, as well as to bring prompt, non-judgmental resolution to the complaint. Certain complaints will be selected by OPA for third party mediation, where both the party making the complaint and the officer(s) involved agree to participate in this confidential process.

**A note from the Chief:**

The Seattle Police Department is committed to thoroughly and objectively investigating complaints against its members. Only by strictly adhering to this commitment can we maintain the trust and confidence of those we serve. We hold ourselves to the highest expectations of fair and professional law enforcement services.

*R. Gil Kerlikowski*  
R. Gil Kerlikowski  
Chief of Police

**A note from the OPA Director:**

Your complaint is very important, and we will make every effort to ensure that it receives full and fair consideration. We are committed to seeing that complaints brought to the OPA are investigated in a expeditious manner while ensuring fairness and thoroughness for everyone involved in the process. If you have questions or concerns about the OPA process please contact me directly at the OPA address or number provided.

*Kathryn Olson*  
Kathryn Olson  
Director, Office of  
Professional Accountability

**Where can I file a complaint?**

You may submit your complaint via email:  
[OPA-IS@seattle.gov](mailto:OPA-IS@seattle.gov)  
or  
via online form on the OPA website:  
[www.seattle.gov/police/opa](http://www.seattle.gov/police/opa)

or you may file at any of these locations:

**OPA - Investigation Section**

Police Headquarters  
610 5th Avenue, P.O. Box 34986  
Seattle, WA 98124-4986  
(206) 684-8797

*(The Investigation Section is open Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM. Voice messaging will record your message when the office is closed, and you will be called as soon as possible.)*

**Customer Service Bureau**

City Hall  
600 4th Avenue, 1st Floor, P.O. Box 94726  
Seattle WA 98124-4726  
(206) 684-CITY (2489)

*We also investigate complaints referred to us by the Mayor's office, City Council members, and referral agencies.*

**All Seattle Police Department Precincts**

Any SPD employee can receive and document your complaint; however, you will usually be referred to a supervisor.

The precincts are located at the following addresses:

West Precinct  
(206) 684-8917  
810 Virginia St  
Seattle, WA 98121

South Precinct  
(206) 386-1850  
3001 S Myrtle St  
Seattle, WA 98108

Southwest Precinct  
2300 SW Webster St  
Seattle, WA 98106

East Precinct  
(206) 684-4300  
1519 12th Ave  
Seattle, WA 98122

North Precinct  
(206) 684-0850  
10049 College Way N  
Seattle, WA 98133

To contact the Director directly with questions about the OPA:

**Office of Professional Accountability**  
**Kathryn Olson, Director**

Police Headquarters  
610 5th Avenue  
P.O. Box 34986  
Seattle, WA 98124-4986  
(206) 615-1566  
FAX: (206) 615-0763  
E-Mail: [OPA@seattle.gov](mailto:OPA@seattle.gov)

To make a complaint:

**Office of Professional Accountability**  
**Investigation Section**

Police Headquarters  
610 5th Avenue  
P.O. Box 34986  
Seattle, WA 98124-4986  
(206) 684-8797  
E-Mail: [OPA-IS@seattle.gov](mailto:OPA-IS@seattle.gov)

[www.seattle.gov/police/opa](http://www.seattle.gov/police/opa)

**OFFICE OF  
PROFESSIONAL  
ACCOUNTABILITY**



*How Concerns about  
Police Misconduct  
are Resolved*

