



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 7

## COUNCILMEMBER ROBERT KETTLE

May 22, 2024

**From: Councilmember Kettle  
Councilmember Saka**

**To: Chief of Police Diaz**

**Re: Seattle Police Department Emergency Vehicle Operations Policy**

I am writing to you to better understand the Seattle Police Department (SPD) policies on Emergency Vehicle Operations (EVO), specifically the training and risk management components of high-speed driving.

As of 4/22/24, the City of Seattle settled a lawsuit which involved an SPD vehicle that caused an accident and was not utilizing sirens and lights in 2018. This case brings up the tragic death of Jaahnavi Kandula, which makes at least two incidents where SPD officers were driving with no sirens and lights or utilizing sirens and lights in a manner that appears inconsistent with SPD Policy Emergency Vehicle Operations 13.030, resulting in collisions with civilians in the space of five years. Additionally, we are concerned there could be a pattern of officers not following department emergency vehicle operation policies, and that these two incidents are only in the public discourse because they resulted in collisions.

As the Council and the Public Safety Committee help SPD protect the City of Seattle, we also must conduct our oversight function. When situations like the above occur, it is my responsibility as Chair, in concert with you, your leadership team, and my fellow council members to find out how and where we can do better – we must do better.

With respect to the two incidents, Public Safety Committee Vice Chair Rob Saka and I are requesting the following:

- Have there been any changes to post-academy EVO training between 2018 and 2023, or since January 2023? We understand that high speed driving training has not happened since 2018 due to a lack of training facilities and resources, but have there been other changes?
- Can you please clarify – are officers of the SPD required to recertify their emergency vehicle operation qualification, and if so, is every officer currently up to date?
- Is there other supporting documentation (training plans, plans, policies) that show what SPD is doing to correct, or which shows that SPD has already corrected the factors that led to these incidents?
- Do other jurisdictions have specific policies that limit police vehicle speed based on the street posted speed limit among the other factors mentioned in 13.030, and has SPD considered adopting them?
- 13.030.3 states that Sworn Officers should consider the totality of the circumstances when deciding whether to continue emergency driving. Does that include an assessment

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600 Fourth Avenue, Floor 2 | PO Box 34025, Seattle | Washington 98124-4025

Phone (206) 684-8807 Fax (206) 684-8587 TTY (206) 233-0025

Email [robert.kettle@seattle.gov](mailto:robert.kettle@seattle.gov)

of their skill and their training standards? Does it consider the lack of high-speed driving training done after the academy, or potential impairment due to fatigue?


- Is there specific guidance on speed that officers consider based on the character of the street the officer is driving on, e.g. freeway vs side street? Is there any consideration given to the line of sight that the officer who is driving has regarding areas that pedestrians or cars may not be seen until the last minute? Said differently, are officers trained to drive at slower speeds on narrow streets that have buildings with no setbacks and trees on the sidewalk than on wider streets with setbacks and no trees, as an example?
- In the 6/29/23 SPD response to the CPC letter, you state that “Ultimately, there is no authority for peace officers to deviate from traffic laws unless emergency equipment is activated”. However, 13.030 states that “officers will use audible signals when necessary to warn others of the emergency nature of the situation”. Does this mean officers can chirp their sirens and lights or does it mean that lights and sirens must be continuously run? Is there other emergency equipment that may be better suited for dense urban environments like a subsonic signal?
- Given that all co-dispatched medical calls (Fire and Police) are Priority One calls, could SPD work with the Seattle Fire Department and the CARE department to determine which of these calls requires the most urgent responses where officers are going to use excessive speed to get to a scene that SFD is also deploying to? Could officers receive real-time information from the Fire Alarm Center?
- What are the options for post-academy EVO training, specifically on high-speed driving? We understand that there are considerable logistical and financial impediments, and SPD has previously rented out a portion of a highway which cost \$500,000. Are there options to operate post-academy high-speed driving training in tandem with the Criminal Justice Training Commission or a state-run training facility in the future?

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



Robert E. Kettle  
Councilmember, Seattle City Council District 7  
Chair, Public Safety Committee



Rob Saka  
Councilmember, Seattle City Council District 1  
Vice Chair, Public Safety Committee

CC: Deputy Mayor Tim Burgess  
Brian Maxey, COO, SPD