



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

Preliminary Review of SPD Enforcement of Prostitution- Related Offenses

June 30, 2026

Purpose

Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 12A.10.040(G) requires the Office of Inspector General for Public Safety (OIG) to review enforcement by the Seattle Police Department (SPD) of local prostitution loitering laws passed in Ordinance 127086 (SOAP Ordinance). OIG is required to provide this preliminary review to Council by June 30, 2026, and a final report by December 31, 2026. As a preliminary review, the intent of this report is to provide stakeholders with early insight into SPD implementation of relevant prostitution-related laws, rather than awaiting a final report to understand implementation efforts.

Scope

The SOAP Ordinance requires OIG to report on implementation of SMC 12A.10.010 (prostitution loitering) and 12A.10.020 (prostitution), however this review provides a broader view of enforcement to include 12A.10.030 (promoting prostitution), and RCW 9A.88.070 – 9A.88.110 which have significant overlap in SPD records and provide a more comprehensive picture of enforcement. This review covers prostitution-related enforcement actions from October 1, 2024, through March 31, 2026. In the final report, this scope will be expanded to include the summer of 2026.

Executive Summary

This preliminary review finds that SPD prostitution enforcement actions have aligned with the intent of the SOAP Ordinance by focusing arrests on buyers and traffickers. Arrests have largely focused on buyers who agreed to pay a fee for sex acts. For the period of review, SPD records indicate the arrest of 65 buyers and 9 traffickers, and issuance of 26 Stay Out of Area Prostitution (SOAP) area restriction orders. OIG did not observe any instances of sellers being arrested or issued SOAP orders. OIG will provide more comprehensive reporting on case outcomes, referrals and diversions, and SPD training in the final report.

Background

The SOAP Ordinance was passed in September 2024, with the stated intent of disrupting the sex trade in Seattle by targeting traffickers and buyers, with an emphasis on diversion or referral over arrest for those who are commercially sexually exploited. The Ordinance introduces misdemeanor charges of ‘prostitution loitering’ and ‘promoting loitering for the purpose of prostitution’.¹ It also introduces an area restriction tool known as a SOAP Zone, designed to prohibit anyone charged with, or convicted of, prostitution-related crimes from entering that zone.

Note on RCW and SMC Language Related to Prostitution

RCW and SMC both use the term ‘prostitution’ to describe the engagement, agreement, or offer of sexual conduct with another person in exchange for a fee. SMC uses the terms ‘buyer’, ‘seller’, and ‘trafficker’ to describe the roles of individuals engaged in prostitution. This review will use these terms for consistency; however, OIG wishes to highlight that transactional language such as ‘buyer’ and ‘seller’ does not accurately reflect the situation of many who are pressured or even forced into participation by others who stand to profit.

¹ The crime of prostitution loitering was repealed from SMC in 2020.

Findings

Calls for Service Related to Prostitution Have Risen Since October 2024

From 2019 through Q1 of 2026, SPD officers have responded to 693 calls for service related to prostitution. Additionally, officers on-viewed² 796 suspected prostitution activities, however 43% of on-views occurred in the second half of 2019. Since October 2024, there have been 257 calls for service and 122 on-views logged in the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.

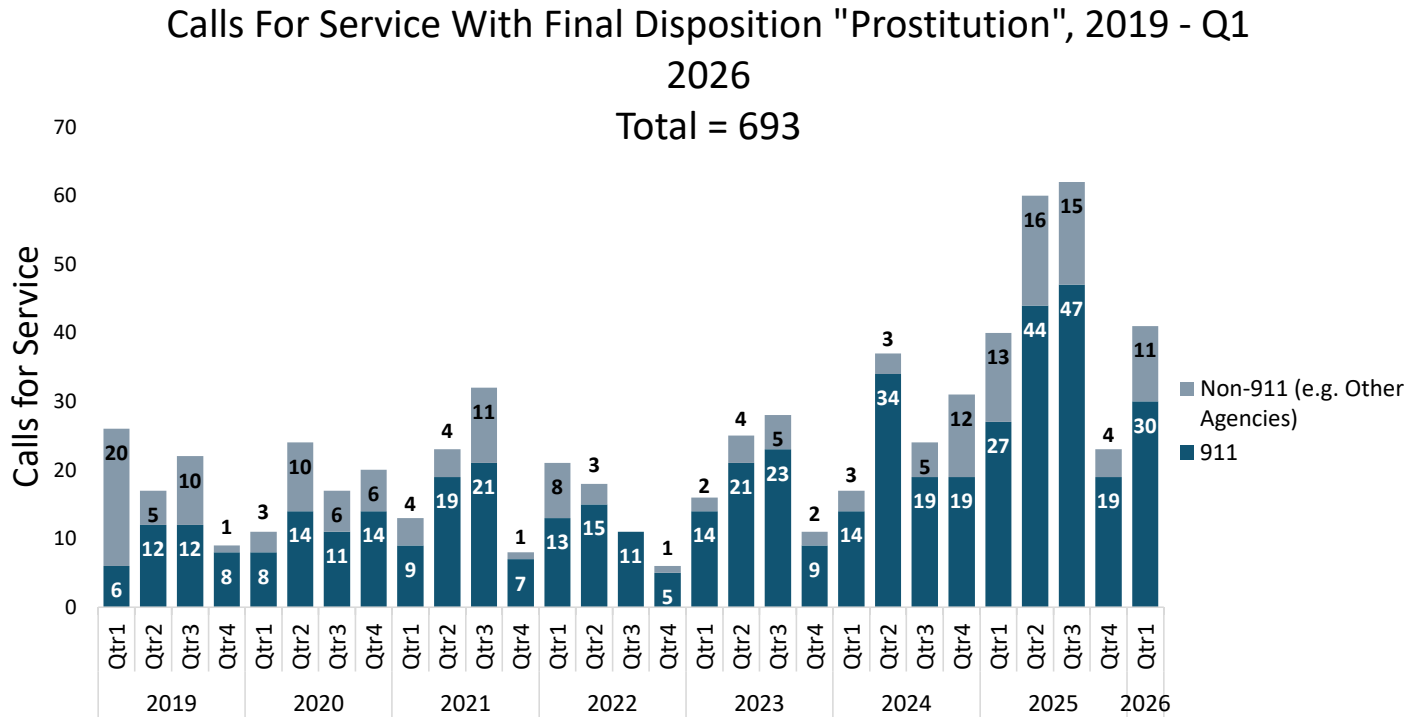


Figure 1.

Ninety-one percent of CAD events since 2019 have originated in three neighborhoods – Northgate (805), Bitter Lake (327), and Greenwood (228).³ These neighborhoods are all adjacent to each other along Aurora Avenue North and generally match the area of the first designated SOAP Zone.⁴

SPD Enforcement Actions and SOAP Orders Have Focused on Buyers

For the review period, OIG identified 112 Incident/Offense reports written by officers detailing their contacts with individuals during enforcement of prostitution laws. These contacts resulted in arrests of 65 buyers, 9 traffickers, and no sellers. SPD sent 83 warnings by mail to the owners of vehicles observed engaging with suspected sellers, as part of SPD’s Prostitution Awareness Campaign.^{5,6}

2 On-view is when an officer observes a potentially criminal activity and responds immediately.
 3 For comparison, the neighborhood with the 4th largest number of CAD events was Chinatown/International District (18).
 4 See Appendix B for a map of the SOAP Zone.
 5 <https://spdblotter.seattle.gov/2025/12/17/spd-prostitution-awareness-campaign-targets-more-than-40-vehicle-owners/>
 6 OIG is aware that SPD issued additional letters after the scope of this review. Updated numbers will be provided in the final review.

Direct Contacts With Individuals Involved in Prostitution October 2024 - March 2026 Total = 125

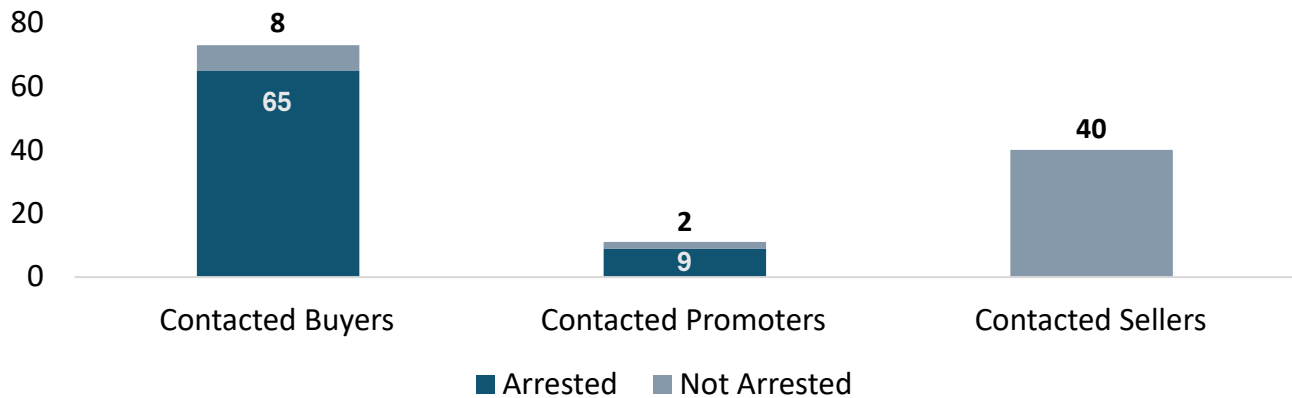


Figure 2.

Of the arrested buyers, nearly all (61) attempted to patronize an SPD officer posing as a seller. Seattle Municipal Court judges issued SOAP orders to 25 of these buyers.⁷ One additional SOAP order was issued for an arrested trafficker, and no SOAP orders were issued for sellers.

OIG will report on jail bookings, charges, and prosecution of the individuals arrested in the final report later this year.

15 of 40 Recorded Seller Interactions Were with Minors

SPD recorded 15 interactions with sellers who were minors. Of these, officers released nine back into the custody of their parents. Officers referred two to Community Service Officers, two to Child Protective Services. One minor had an outstanding warrant and was sent to juvenile detention, and another was interviewed while already in juvenile detention for separate convictions.

Seven out of 25 adult sellers were released without documented attempts to refer them to services, and in eight other cases there was no clear documentation of how officers resolved their interaction. Given there were no arrests of sellers, it is likely that these individuals were released. Officers made documented attempts to connect sellers with additional help or services on ten occasions. Further analysis of these referrals will be provided in the final report.

SPD Policy and Training for Prostitution-Related Arrests Aligns with SOAP Ordinance Requirements

The SOAP Ordinance required SPD to adopt policy and training for working with commercially sexually exploited individuals based on trauma-informed best practices. This review found that SPD developed policy and training materials which aligned with the requirements of the ordinance.

⁷ SOAP orders are a condition of pretrial release and/or condition of sentence that orders a defendant to stay out of a SOAP zone. Currently the only SOAP zone in Seattle is along the Aurora Avenue North.

Policy

SPD issued policy 15.310 – ‘Prostitution-Related Offenses’ on July 1, 2025. The policy meets the requirements of the ordinance by specifying that for prostitution and prostitution loitering offenses;

1. Diversion, referral to social services, safe house placement, substance use treatment, mental health/trauma care facilities, or other alternatives to booking are preferred to jail booking when a seller is arrested.
2. A lack of diversion opportunities will not be a reason to arrest a seller.
3. Sworn employees must receive trauma-informed training on policy, protocols, and best practices for interacting with victims of commercial sexual exploitation/sex trafficking and that employees without such training are not allowed to arrest sellers.

Training

SPD mandated all officers take two eLearning training sessions, issued in May 2025 and November 2025. The first training instructed officers how to investigate the new prostitution-loitering crimes and enforce SOAP orders, with an emphasis on diversion for sellers. The second instructed officers about trauma-informed best practices, including recognizing signs of trauma, non-judgmental questioning, offering resources, and includes the 10-minute testimonial of a trafficking survivor intended to provide insight on the individual challenges sellers may be facing.

Appendix A - SPD Response

SPD did not provide an official response to this report prior to the date OIG was required to publish. This report will be updated after publication if a response is received. SPD will also be provided an opportunity to respond to our final report later in 2026.

Appendix B - Map of SOAP Zone 1

