



# Seattle Office of Inspector General

September 26, 2018

To: Carmen Best, Chief of Police

From: Lisa Judge, Inspector General for Public Safety

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Judge".

Re: Peer Intervention Program Recommendation

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Peer intervention programs for police officers, for example the New Orleans EPIC (Ethical Policing Is Courageous) Program, have gained attention from police departments and professional associations in the last couple of years as an innovative approach to reducing situations that result in complaints against officers and/or occurrences of officer misconduct. An effective peer intervention program provides officers with training and tools, and empowers them to intervene before one of their own makes a mistake with significant consequences, engages in unprofessional behavior, or commits misconduct. (While there is already an expectation SPD officers will intervene in instances of misconduct, a peer intervention program provides additional tools and empowerment to intervene well in advance of misconduct, to interrupt situations that are detrimental to community trust, and which may generate a complaint, but haven't risen to the misconduct level. Such a program can also set a positive tone regarding stepping in to protect others from making unnecessary mistakes, rather than viewing it as interference or "snitching.")

Significant social science research has been done on the issue of the "bystander effect," and the effect bystanders have on each other in terms of willingness to intervene to stop wrongful conduct. Generally, bystanders are categorized as "active" or "passive," with most people being inherently passive bystanders. This natural human tendency to look to others for social cues about whether to take action to stop harm from occurring can have significant detrimental effects in the realm of police misconduct, as research has demonstrated that failing to intervene can create an atmosphere of tacit acceptance of wrongful conduct. Training SPD officers to be "active bystanders," whereby they are able to recognize when a situation may be escalating into unnecessary force (or when flaring tempers are creating a situation that may devolve into unprofessional conduct) AND are empowered to intervene to redirect the situation, can greatly improve service delivery and build trust with the community, and provide officers a mechanism to protect each other and the reputation of SPD.

A good peer intervention program can benefit the community by reducing the likelihood that law enforcement officers will react inappropriately or unprofessionally in a high stress or heated situation. It can also benefit officers and the SPD by acknowledging the realities of human nature in a high stress or frustrating encounter, affording officers the training and tools to step in and assist each other in de-escalation and avoidance of unprofessional behavior or misconduct.

I recommend SPD develop and implement a peer intervention program with the aim of providing SPD members with tools, training and authority to intervene when they observe a fellow officer engaging in unprofessional or improper behavior or conduct. I welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff to develop the supporting policy and training. Thank you for your partnership.