

Board of Police Commissioners: 2023 Annual Report



Letter from the Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners

I am writing to reflect on the significant progress made by the Board of Police Commissioners (BPC) during the past year. This progress would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of many individuals, and I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all involved.

The BPC's establishment and function are critical to fostering accountability and transparency within the Springfield Police Department (SPD). The BPC has faced challenges in its inaugural year, particularly in developing its operating manual. These challenges stemmed from various factors, including legal considerations, collective bargaining negotiations, and the need for robust community engagement.

However, I am pleased to report that the BPC Manual has finally been published. This manual provides essential guidelines for BPC operations, empowering the Board to effectively fulfill its responsibilities. The manual's development involved a collaborative effort between the City's Law Department, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the community. Valuable feedback from all stakeholders was incorporated into the final document, ensuring it aligns with the community's expectations and the BPC's intended role.

The BPC's success is a testament to the collaborative spirit and unwavering support of several individuals and entities. I want to specifically acknowledge the following:

The City's Law Department: Their legal expertise and guidance were instrumental in navigating the complexities of developing the BPC Manual.

The Department of Justice: Their dedication to fostering transparency and accountability within the SPD played a crucial role in driving the BPC's establishment and ongoing development.

The Community: Their invaluable feedback and active engagement enriched the BPC Manual and ensured its alignment with community needs.

The BPC Members: Their commitment to serving the community and upholding the principles of accountability is commendable. They volunteered their time and expertise despite facing initial resource limitations, which have since been addressed by the City.

The BPC is committed to continuously improving its operations and fulfilling its role as an independent oversight body. Training for BPC members, facilitated by the Law Department and external experts, is already underway. Additionally, the BPC has applied for membership in the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE), further enhancing the BPC's access to professional development and peer support opportunities.

As the BPC continues its journey, we remain committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders, including the community, the SPD, and other relevant entities. We believe that strong, transparent, and accountable policing is essential for building trust within our community, and we are dedicated to upholding these principles in all our endeavors.

In closing, I want to reiterate my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the BPC's progress. Together, we are building a stronger and more accountable future for the Springfield Police Department and the community we serve.

Sincerely,

Albert Traghese

Albert Traghese, Chair
Board of Police Commissioners

INTRODUCTION

2023 marked a significant milestone for the City of Springfield, with the establishment of the Board of Police Commissioners and its inaugural year of collaboration with the Springfield Police Department. This report serves as a testament to the Board's commitment to transparency and accountability, offering a comprehensive overview of its activities throughout the year.

The establishment and successful launch of the Board of Police Commissioners was made possible through the unwavering efforts of the Mayor's Office, the City's Law Department, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Compliance Evaluator Team. The City Law Department provided invaluable legal expertise and guidance throughout the process, navigating the complexities of establishing the Board of Police Commissioners and ensuring its legal framework adhered to the highest standards. The DOJ's expertise in police reform and commitment to fostering transparency within law enforcement proved instrumental in driving the BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS' development and shaping its operating manual.

However, the Board's first year was not without its challenges. Developing the operating manual, a critical document outlining the Board's structure, procedures, and powers, proved to be a complex undertaking. Balancing legal considerations, collective bargaining negotiations, and the need for robust community engagement presented initial hurdles.

Nevertheless, the Board of Police Commissioners, in collaboration with the City Law Department and the community, persevered through these challenges. Through open communication, a commitment to incorporating diverse perspectives, and a shared vision of fostering trust within the community, the Board of Police Commissioners successfully finalized the operating manual, ensuring a strong foundation for its future endeavors.

Guided by the principles of fairness, justice, and community trust, the Board has undertaken crucial initiatives to foster a more transparent and responsive police department. This report delves into the details of these efforts, shedding light on:

- Complaint Trends: Examining the nature and frequency of complaints received by the department, providing insights into areas of concern and potential improvements.
- Disciplinary Actions: Highlighting the framework for addressing substantiated complaints, demonstrating the Board's commitment to holding officers accountable for their actions.
- Public Outreach and Engagement: Detailing the Board's efforts to build trust and collaboration with the community through various outreach initiatives.

By delving into these key areas, this report aims to not only inform the public but also foster dialogue and understanding between the community and the police department. It serves as a valuable stepping stone, showcasing the progress made in 2023 and paving the way for continued improvement and collaboration in the years to come.

COMPLAINT TRENDS AND INVESTIGATIONS

In 2023, the department and the Internal Investigation Unit (IIU) received a total of 62 complaints, originating from both members of the public and department employees. Thirty-three (33) of these complaints originated from members of the public, and twenty-nine (29) were from department employees. From the complaints received and investigated by IIU, a total of five (5) were sent to the Board of Police Commissioners for review.

Focus on Procedural Issues and Professional Conduct:

A significant portion of the complaints, 27 of the 62 complaints, fell under the category of Preliminary Investigations of Employees (PIEs). These investigations primarily addressed allegations of discourtesy and procedural violations. While these may not involve the most serious categories of misconduct, they are essential for ensuring that officers uphold professional standards and treat the public with respect. Discipline imposed for PIEs are intended to be remedial in nature and include retraining and written reprimands. Addressing these issues promptly and effectively helps to build trust within the community.

Investigating More Serious Allegations:

For complaints involving potentially more serious misconduct, categorized as Special Orders, the IIU conducts more in-depth investigations. For examples of SOs initiated in 2023, one officer was given a written reprimand for missing a Court Assignment and another was given a 2-day suspension for failing to respond to a call in an adequate amount of time. Although there were no allegations that the SPD engaged in any of these activities in 2023, use of excessive force, corrupt acts, an alleged violation of a citizen's constitutional rights, a custodial death of a prisoner, an officer involved shooting, or a departmental vehicle pursuit that results in death or serious bodily injury would all necessitate an SO. IIU investigations of SO's involve witness interviews, evidence gathering, and a more rigorous review process. If substantiated, SO's can result in disciplinary action ranging from retraining to termination.

Limited Cases Requiring Board Action:

It's important to note that of the 35 complaints categorized as Special Orders, only 5 reached the stage of requiring a hearing and potential disciplinary action by the Board of Police Commissioners. This suggests that the majority of complaints were either unsubstantiated or addressed through corrective measures within the department.

Looking Forward:

The Board recognizes the importance of analyzing complaint trends and using this information to improve departmental practices. By understanding the nature of complaints and the outcomes of investigations, the Board can identify areas for improvement in training, policies, and procedures. This ongoing process is crucial for ensuring that the department operates with the highest level of professionalism and accountability.

Additional Considerations:

It's important to acknowledge the limitations of the data, as a single year may not provide a complete picture of long-term trends. For example, one year may not capture the typical volume or nature of complaints received by the department. Fluctuations can occur due to seasonal variations, high-profile incidents, or changes in reporting procedures. A single year's data doesn't provide historical context to

compare against. Analyzing trends over several years allows for a more nuanced understanding of whether complaints are increasing, decreasing, or remaining steady. This Annual Report is the first to be issued, and the City will issue one every year moving forward. Thus, we will be able to analyze and understand the nuances in our complaint trends moving forward with later annual reports.

Data from the first year of the Board's operation might not fully reflect the established practices or procedures as laid out in the newly implemented Board of Police Commissioners Manual which was released in March of 2024. As the Board and the IIU become more familiar with their roles, reporting practices may evolve, potentially affecting the data collected. In order to address these limitations, the Board will benefit from:

- Multi-Year Analysis: In future reports, the Board can compare data from 2023 with information from subsequent years to identify emerging trends and patterns.
- Benchmarking: The Board can benchmark its data against national averages or data from similar-sized jurisdictions. This provides a broader context for understanding how Springfield's complaint volume and outcomes compare to others.
- Qualitative Analysis: Supplementing quantitative data with qualitative information from focus groups, surveys, and community meetings can offer valuable insights into residents' perceptions of police conduct and their experiences with the complaint process.

By incorporating these strategies, the Board of Police Commissioners can move beyond a one-year snapshot and gain a more comprehensive understanding of long-term trends related to police complaints and investigations. This deeper analysis will be crucial for informing future policies, training programs, and community outreach initiatives aimed at fostering trust and accountability within the Springfield Police Department.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

It's important to acknowledge that the Board of Police Commissioners is a new entity, with 2023 being the Board's first full year of operation. As a result, the data available on disciplinary actions taken by the Board is limited to the year 2023. This initial report provides a starting point for future reports, which will offer a more comprehensive analysis of disciplinary trends as more data becomes available.

Data Analysis:

The data reflects the number of Preliminary Investigations of Employees (PIEs) and Special Orders (SOs) conducted by either the subject officer's commanding officer or SPD's Internal Investigation Unit (IIU) in 2023. It's crucial to remember that this data only represents investigations initiated and does not reflect final outcomes or disciplinary actions taken by the Board of Police Commissioners.

Here's a breakdown of the data for the year 2023:

Total PIEs: 27¹

Sustained complaints: 3 (resulting in "Retraining" and "Admin/Disciplinary Action")

Not Sustained complaints: 4

Unfounded complaints: 20

Total SOs: 35

Sustained complaints: 17

Not Sustained complaints: 3

Unfounded complaints: 9

Exonerated: 1

Pending: 5 (pending complete investigation by IIU or BOPC hearing)

Out of all of the complaints received in 2023, only 5 of the SOs required hearings by the Board of Police Commissioners. After hearings on those 5 SOs, the Board sustained certain charges and found just cause to impose discipline ranging from a seven (7) day suspension to a termination in one case.

SO#23-005: Terminated by BOPC.

SO#23-009: 10 day suspension without pay by BOPC.

SO#23-028: 7 day suspension without pay by BOPC.

SO#23-059: 10 day suspension without pay by BOPC.

SO#23-180: Indefinite suspension without pay by BOPC.

The Board plays a vital role in ensuring accountability within the SPD by reviewing the IIU investigations sent to the Board for review, deciding whether to conduct hearings on cases, holding disciplinary hearings, and imposing appropriate disciplinary actions when necessary. This process is outlined in the

¹ Note: Not all PIEs and SO's result in disciplinary actions: Even if a complaint is sustained, the disciplinary action could range from retraining to termination, depending on the severity of the offense.

Board of Police Commissioners' operating manual, which was developed in collaboration with the Law Department, DOJ, the Compliance Evaluator Team and the community.

To be clear, the Board of Police Commissioners does not directly initiate investigations. The IIU conducts the investigations, and the Board reviews the investigations sent to the Board for review, meets to decide whether to hold hearings on the investigations, then conducts hearings and imposes disciplinary action when necessary.

The Board of Police Commissioner's commitment to fairness and due process is paramount throughout the entire disciplinary process. This includes:

Thorough review of investigation reports: The Board carefully examines all evidence and findings presented to the Board by the IIU investigators, and determines whether or not to hold a hearing on disciplinary charges.

Opportunity for officer response: At a disciplinary hearing, officers have the right to respond to the allegations and present a defense and any mitigating evidence before the Board makes a final decision on disciplinary charges.

Fair and consistent decision-making: The Board strives to ensure that disciplinary actions are imposed consistently and fairly, considering the specific circumstances of each case.

While the data available for 2023 is limited, it provides a starting point for future reports that will offer a more comprehensive analysis of disciplinary trends. The Board of Police Commissioners remains committed to upholding its role in reviewing complaints, ensuring thorough investigations, and imposing fair and consistent disciplinary actions when necessary.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Recognizing the importance of community trust and collaboration, the Board actively engaged with diverse groups in 2023, including advocacy organizations, government agencies, elected officials, faith communities, police unions, and oversight bodies. These engagements included one on one discussions by individual Commissioners and a community meeting at the Indian Orchard Citizens Council. Community members also participated in public commenting on both the Board of Police Commissioners' manual and at the publicly held Board meetings. These interactions helped identify areas for improvement in police accountability, ultimately strengthening the relationship between residents and the police department.

Springfield residents have multiple avenues to engage with the Board, from attending formal meetings and public events to filing complaints and contacting individual commissioners directly. In 2024, the Board plans to expand its outreach by hosting additional meetings with stakeholders, professionals, and oversight agencies, building upon the relationships established this year.

At monthly meetings the Board facilitated discussions on:

- Use of force policies
- Racial profiling
- Community policing initiatives
- Transparency and accountability measures

This open dialogue helped identify areas for improvement in police accountability and practices, ultimately strengthening the relationship between residents the Board of Police Commissioners and the Springfield Police Department.

Resident Engagement:

Springfield residents have multiple avenues to engage with the Board, from attending formal meetings and public events to filing complaints and contacting individual Commissioners directly.

Formal meetings: The Board holds regular public meetings where residents can voice their concerns and recommendations. These meetings are on a monthly basis and will be posted on both the City and SPD websites.

Filing complaints: Residents can file complaints about police misconduct through the IIU's online portal or in person. More information can be found at: <https://springfieldmapolice.com/internal-investigation-unit/>

Contacting commissioners: Residents can reach out to individual Board commissioners with questions or concerns:

Commissioner Gary Berte – 413-351-5920
Gberte@springfieldpolice.net

Commissioner Albert Tranghese – 413-726-8614
Atranghese@springfieldpolice.net

Commissioner Madeline Fernandez – 413-432-9169
Mfernandez@springfieldpolice.net

Robert C. Jackson – 413-432-9641
RJackson@springfieldpolice.net

Norman Roldan - 413-726-8159
nroldan@springfieldpolice.net

Looking Ahead:

The Board of Police Commissioners will be holding their first annual public meeting on March 13, 2024 where the Board can engage with the community and discuss trends and lessons learned from the previous year. In addition, building upon the foundation established in 2023, the Board plans to expand its outreach efforts in 2024 by:

Hosting additional meetings: This could include targeted meetings with specific community groups or stakeholders.

Organizing workshops and forums: These events could focus on specific topics of interest to the community, such as de-escalation tactics or implicit bias training.

Strengthening collaboration with oversight agencies: Working together with other oversight bodies can enhance transparency and accountability within the department.

CONCLUSION

This report provides a valuable overview of the Board's initial year, highlighting its commitment to transparency and engagement. The Board of Police Commissioners' inaugural year has been marked by a resolute commitment to transparency, accountability, and community engagement. While challenges remain, the Board of Police Commissioners has laid a solid foundation for fostering a more trusting and collaborative relationship between the Board, the Springfield Police Department and the residents they serve.

This report has highlighted the Board's initial efforts in establishing clear operating procedures, reviewing complaints, and initiating dialogue with diverse community stakeholders. However, the Board recognizes that its work is ongoing and requires continued dedication.

Looking Forward:

In the coming year, the Board of Police Commissioners remains committed to several key priorities:

Enhancing Transparency and Accountability: The Board will continue to refine its complaint review process, ensuring thorough investigations and fair outcomes. Additionally, the Board will strive to provide the public with clear and accessible information about its activities and decisions.

Strengthening Community Collaboration: The Board of Police Commissioners is committed to fostering deeper engagement with residents through expanded outreach initiatives, including targeted meetings, workshops, and forums. Building trust through open communication and active listening is paramount to addressing community concerns and improving police-community relations.

Promoting Continuous Improvement: The Board of Police Commissioners recognizes the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation. By analyzing data, soliciting feedback from stakeholders, and embracing best practices, the Board will continuously strive to enhance its effectiveness and ensure the SPD serves the community with the highest standards of professionalism and fairness.

The Board of Police Commissioners acknowledges that building trust takes time and consistent effort. However, the Board is confident that through transparency, accountability, and a commitment to open dialogue, a stronger and more equitable relationship between the police department and the community can be achieved. This collaborative approach is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of all Springfield residents.

The Board of Police Commissioners welcomes your continued feedback and engagement as we move forward together in building a safer and more just Springfield.