



**Training Advisory
Council Official
Recommendation**

**Expansion of the
Public Safety Support
Specialist Program**

July 8, 2020





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EXPANSION OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

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1. Team

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2. Recommendations

The Training Advisory Council (TAC) strongly recommends that the Public Safety Support Specialist (PS3) program be significantly expanded in order to create a new branch of the Portland Police Bureau specifically trained for and tasked with handling lower level calls not involving a crime. This includes:

- Expanding the PS3 program as officers retire by replacing 75% of newly opened sworn officer positions with PS3s until at least a minimum of 75 PS3 positions are reached. The TAC supports utilizing funds to grow the PS3 program at a faster rate than the annual number of retirements would allow.
- Performing analysis utilizing call, custody, and use of force data to better understand what percentage of current calls could be handled by PS3s.
- Experimenting with the responsibilities of PS3s with an eye towards broadening the number and type of calls they are allowed to handle.
- Further developing training, directives, and protocols for the bureau to better establish the PS3 as an integral part of 21st century police work.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the program on public perceptions of trust and legitimacy via an annually conducted survey of public opinion regarding both PS3s and sworn officers.

The TAC also recommends that the bureau transition to utilizing the PS3 program as an apprenticeship program for its sworn officers. This includes:

- Transitioning over the next four years towards a new officer training system where all recruits must spend at least one year as a PS3 prior to becoming a sworn officer.

3. High Level Summary

Changes in the types of calls for service and the lack of community resources available to address a growing number of societal issues have resulted in the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) handling an increasing workload outside of the traditional scope of law enforcement. As a result, officers are being put into the unfair position of being a one-size-fits all solution, setting the stage for a lackluster performance that can erode public trust and diminish officer confidence. In turn, the evident increasing workload with lack of support to aid performance makes employment as a law enforcement officer less appealing, making it more difficult to recruit. To help overcome these challenges, we recommend expansion of the existing Public Safety Support Specialist (PS3) to become a fully recognized branch of the PPB specifically tasked with handling low level calls and calls not involving crimes. We also recommend the program be utilized as an apprenticeship program for training new officers.

This recommendation fits well with the goals of City Council members to re-evaluate and reform how the bureau trains and recruits officers. This recommendation is viewed as but one reform out of many that is needed to re-establish public trust in the legitimacy of the PPB. We feel it is equal in importance to the expansion of the Portland Street Response (PSR) program, which utilizes teams of paramedics and mental health workers to respond to calls involving individuals undergoing a mental health crisis. Moving forward, the TAC envisions transitioning to public safety being supplied by sworn officers, the PS3 program, and the PSR program; the three groups working in concert, combining their skill sets as needed.

The TAC recognizes that this recommendation is an outline which has many details that will need to be more fully explored in order to achieve its goals. Flexibility will be needed to fully develop a transition plan.

4. Challenges

In 2019, the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) received 363,447 calls for service, of which an estimated 16% resulted in a reported crime, 6% in custodies, 0.2% in the use of force, and 0.06% in a use of force involving a weapon or vehicle. Of the 59,917 crimes reported in Portland in 2019, 79% were property crimes. In total, 70% of the calls for service were citizen initiated. Over the past decade there has been a significant shift in calls for service. A growing number of calls are less about crime and more about situations which frighten and/or inconvenience community members. Likewise, it seems police are being asked to handle personal disputes and issues which do not rise to the level of a crime. This trend has been greatly exacerbated by our community's failure to provide access to needed services to the most vulnerable members of our population.

As a result, in addition to the traditional roles of law enforcement, police officers have been forced to take on the role of mediators, mental health experts, houseless community liaisons, youth advocates, customer service representatives, public outreach coordinators, and more. The resulting model of policing not only fails to meet the needs and values of the community, but also negatively impacts the morale and mental well-being of the officers. Expecting one person to be trained to a level of expertise in all of the areas required by the current model of policing is unrealistic. Utilizing a one-size-fits-all strategy of public safety inevitably sets up those entrusted

with such roles for failure. This is not working for the community and this is not working for the bureau.

At the same time, the PPB is facing a significant recruitment challenge, that will likely not be helped by the current public outrage regarding police practices. An estimated 100 officer positions remain open at the bureau; though this will be greatly reduced by officers being re-assigned from programs being ended this upcoming fiscal year; and an estimated one third of all sworn officers will be eligible for retirement in the next five years. Due to these recruitment challenges, the bureau has lowered its education requirements from an associate's degree or military experience to a high school diploma or GED. There are concerns regarding possible negative affects this change may have on the effectiveness of the bureau; including applicants with reduced writing and administrative skills and less exposure to a wide variety of people.

Overarching all of this is the fact that trust in the police is at an all time low. The tragedy of George Floyd's death has catapulted the need for police reform to the center of the public consciousness, bringing to light the need for significant changes to police accountability. Continued systemic issues of bias and inequity throughout the justice system, and our society as a whole, suggest this is a time for re-evaluating current PPB structures. Multiple factors have led to our city's current state, such as overall long-term inequity regarding economic opportunity and access to housing, education, and capital. Additionally, the intentional and unintentional biases and prejudices of the general population extend beyond the police. If the police have any hope of regaining trust with the community, they must take ownership of their part of the problem, and offer much needed reforms to correct them. The legitimacy of the police cannot be recognized if many communities see the police as threats rather than as public servants.

5. Opportunities

The Training Advisory Council (TAC) strongly recommends that the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) significantly expand its Public Safety Specialist (PS3) program over the next several years with a goal of creating a branch of the bureau specifically designed to handle low level non-criminal complaints and incidents. The PS3 program is a unique opportunity with regards to community engagement, specialization, improved training, diversification, overcoming difficulties regarding recruitment, and cultivating positive interactions and outcomes. We also recommend that the bureau's training requirements shift to require all new officers to spend at least one year as a PS3, giving them valuable on-the-job experience prior to gaining the authority to arrest or use force. Though many bureaus have programs similar to the PS3 program, to our knowledge utilizing it as an apprenticeship program would be a new and unique way forward regarding police training.

Overview of the Current Public Safety Support Specialist Program

Established in 2018, the Public Safety Support Specialists are non-sworn members of the PPB who carry out duties that do not require law enforcement authority. This includes issuing citations, making arrests, or otherwise engaging in law enforcement actions. Rather, they focus on responding to lower level non-emergency calls for service, assisting community members with livability complaints, and assisting officers in the carrying out of their duties. Unlike officers, PS3s are unarmed except

for pepper spray, have uniforms that consist of a simple polo shirt and work pants, and drive transit vans marked with the City of Portland logo rather than police vehicles. The original goals of the program were to create a resource for responding to lower level calls, giving police officers more time to engage with the public and carry out foot patrols, as well as to create a stepping stone for recruiting new officers.

PS3s undergo the same background check and psychological evaluation as officers. Their training consists of two weeks of introductory training, followed by a month of police ride-alongs, two to three months of responding to PS3 calls with a trained partner, and then four weeks of additional training. Introductory and subsequent sessions include 40 hours of crisis intervention training, as well as training in community interaction, de-escalation, CPR, and self-defense. PS3s have a one year probationary period from their time of hire, are required to follow all of the same policy and reporting requirements as officers, and are represented by the Portland Police Association.

Currently there are 12 PS3 positions, of which 10 are filled. Six PS3s have already transferred over to officer training. Recruits have been one-third younger individuals who are trying out policing as a career, one-third older professionals who have an interest in law enforcement but not in being sworn officers, and one-third former police officers who have retired but want to continue to serve the community. Currently, recruits tend to be more ethnically diverse than officer recruits, possibly because the position does not have the same stigma as police officers. Additionally many of the recruits are bilingual.

The current work load of the PS3s is estimated to be 46% involving stolen vehicle cases, 27% theft reports, 5% follow up, 4% vandalism reports, and 14% other duties. Stolen vehicle cases take up a large amount of time due to the significant reporting and time requirements involved in both reporting a stolen vehicle and returning it to its owner after recovery. Public response to the program has been overall positive.

Phased Transition to Significantly Increase PS3 Program

The ultimate goal is to create an unarmed branch of the bureau which focuses on working with the public to find solutions to non-crime issues currently being dealt with by sworn officers.

A TAC review of the dispatched call data provided by the PPB suggests that between 25% to 30% of all police calls could be handled by the current PS3 program. We recommend that as officers retire, the PS3 program be expanded by replacing 75% of these newly opened sworn officer positions with PS3s until at least a minimum of 75 PS3 positions are reached. Once this initial level is reached, considerations should be given for further expansion until an optimal balance of PS3s and officers is achieved. This optimal balance should be decided based upon the following:

- Analysis of police call, custody, and use of force data to identify call types and priority ratings most likely and least likely to require a sworn officer
- Learned experience over time allowing for adjustments to the PS3 program to better meet community needs and city and bureau directives.
- Experimentation with the goal of expanding the role of PS3s in handling a larger portion of current police non law-enforcement duties, including patrol duties and administrative duties.

- Annual evaluations of the effectiveness of the program, including surveys on public perceptions of trust regarding both PS3s and sworn officers.

The percentage of calls handled by PS3s could be increased further with tweaks to the program to give them broader responsibilities and a shift in protocols and expectations regarding how the bureau responds to calls for service.

The TAC supports utilizing funds to expand the PS3 program faster than the rate of retirement in order to reach the initial level of 75 PS3 positions.

Phased Transition in Police Training Requirements

We recommend that over a four year period the bureau transition to requiring all new sworn officers serve as PS3s for a minimum of one year prior to beginning their sworn officer training. This will give new officers valuable experience regarding interacting with the public in a public safety setting prior to giving them the authority to make arrests or use force. This will aid the bureau regarding its lowered minimum education requirement by effectively creating a longer apprenticeship period for new officers. It will also give the bureau an opportunity to identify possibly problematic recruits prior to granting them full police authority.

During this transition period, the bureau will likely have to continue to hire and train a certain percentage of officers who have not served as PS3s in order to avoid experience gaps in the officer ranks. However, during this transition period preference should be given to PS3s who wish to become sworn officers.

Regarding officers who transfer from other bureaus: We recommend they do not have to meet the PS3 requirement if they give the bureau full access to personnel records from all of their previous police departments.

Though the PS3 program will be utilized as an apprenticeship program, it is recognized that for many being a PS3 will be a career. Given the specific types of skill sets utilized in such a career, this should be encouraged for those who do not wish to become sworn officers.

Recruitment

The expansion of the PS3 program is expected to help alleviate recruitment issues, both with regard to the number and diversity of recruits, while still allowing the bureau to respond to the current call for service load. PS3s can be fully trained and operating independently within five to six months of being hired, considerably shorter than the fourteen months required by sworn officers. The PS3 position is viewed as a better starting option for individuals interested in a career in public safety, allowing them to get an idea of the nature of the work prior to committing to becoming sworn officers. Furthermore, recruits from communities with negative perceptions of the police, will likely receive less stigma from their peers and communities when applying for PS3 positions.

Training and Directives

Further adjustments to PS3 and sworn officer training and directives will need to be made for this type of program expansion to be effective. This would include enhanced training for PS3s, sworn officers, dispatch, and sergeants on how best to utilize PS3s to ensure both their effectiveness and safety. Protocols need to be

more fully developed regarding when and how PS3s extract themselves from situations which require the presence of sworn officers. Currently, the PS3 program has no formal leadership structure. Directives will need to be created formalizing a structure and its relationship to the existing sworn officer led command structure of the PPB.

Currently the PS3 program does not include a post-probationary period review and only has training updates rather than formal in-service training. Both of these issues need to be rectified. Slightly over half of the current sworn officer in-service training is likely relevant to the duties that would be carried out by PS3s, with the remainder focused on law enforcement requirements, weapons use, and high-speed vehicle pursuit. In comparison, PS3 in-service training could focus more on de-escalation, community engagement, problem solving, conflict resolution, working with specific groups such as the houseless community, and education regarding available community resources.

Training and directives should also focus on how to utilize PS3s and sworn officers as a team. It is important that both see themselves as specialized units within the same organization trained to utilize each other's expertise in solving public safety issues. Training courses and scenarios should emphasize this interconnectedness, with a focus on how combining their skill sets can be valuable in solving difficult situations.

Community Policing and Interactions

This transition will allow for a greater amount of community policing and an increased number of positive interactions with community members. Utilizing PS3s for lower level calls gives sworn officers more time to deal with higher level calls, perform street patrols, connect with the community, and put into practice mental wellness techniques following difficult calls. Greater use of PS3s also creates opportunities to build public trust with communities which view the police as untrustworthy or a threat, avoid using police in low level situations where the arrival of a fully armed officer may escalate the situation, and increase human interactions and the providing of resources to meet community needs.

Budgetary Considerations

Shifting the bureau towards an increased number of PS3s will result in cost savings that can be used to support other community programs. The current beginning salary for a PS3 is \$49,816, which is \$11,024 below the beginning sworn officer salary of \$60,840. These annual savings increase over time as currently the maximum PS3 salary is \$62,326 while the maximum sworn officer salary is \$100,980. Further cost savings will come from the reduced training time for PS3s, lower equipment costs for PS3s, and lower training costs for officers who have gone through the PS3 program. The city should re-invest some of these savings into increasing the PS3 beginning salary and overall salary range to help attract the best candidates.

Other Considerations

We recognize that this recommendation is but one part of a broader set of reforms needed both in the areas of policing and the justice system overall.

We expect an expanded PS3 program will work not only in concert with the bureau's sworn officers, but also with an expanded Portland Street Response program, which utilizes teams of paramedics and mental health workers to respond to calls involving individuals undergoing a mental health crisis. We also believe that to fully meet the city's public safety needs all three programs must work together utilizing team approaches to coproduce public safety. They must work in concert, combining their skill sets as needed. Towards this, protocols must be created regarding when and how these three groups respond to calls for service, both individually and as teams.

We understand this recommendation has many details that will need to be more fully explored in order to achieve its goals. We also understand that in this type of transition there are many unknowns that will need to be dealt with which will require flexibility. We look forward to working with the bureau, advisory groups, and the community in finding solutions that will make Portland a safe, welcoming city for all members of our community.

6. References and Sources

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