



**Training Advisory  
Council Official  
Recommendation**

**Public Safety Support  
Specialist Program  
Training**

**November 11, 2020**





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# PUBLIC SAFETY SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM TRAINING

November 11, 2020

## 1. Team

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## 2. Recommendations

The recommendations contained in this report, build off of the Training Advisory Council (TAC) recommendation regarding Expanding the Public Safety Support Specialist Program (PS3) issued on July 8, 2020. Further information on this earlier recommendation can be found at:

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/763833>

With regards to training, the TAC strongly recommends that the PS3 be trained in a fashion in order to allow for it to be utilized as an expanded alternative to the use of sworn officers in responding to low level calls. This training should include:

- Improved classroom training and content; including longer overall classroom time, increased scenario training, and improved integrated training with sworn officers.
- Crisis intervention training for mental health issues.
- Enhanced de-escalation training.
- Better training on the ability to multi-task and prioritize tasks.
- Regular in-service training to improve skills.
- The development of a mentoring program so each new PS3 has a dedicated “go to” person for questions.
- Scheduled opportunities for the PS3’s to discuss cases/situations and learn from each other, overseen by a senior sworn officer.

Outside of training, the TAC also makes the following recommendations regarding the PS3 program:

- Checklists specific to PS3’s need to be developed for quick reference in the field; specifically for handling of stolen cars, writing reports, and checking for or identifying a person with an active warrant or on parole.
- The system for dispatching PS3’s needs to be better developed in order to improve their efficiency and better focus their use on their trained capabilities.
- The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) should perform an analysis of calls for service data, including what calls are more likely to result in custodies and

- uses of force, to better understand the types and volume of low level calls which could be better handled by PS3's.
- The PS3's should be utilized in an increased number of situations to better engage the community and to bring about greater trust for, and an improved image of, the PPB.
  - The currently high levels of sworn officer retirements and transfers out should be partially compensated for via increasing the current number of PS3's to 25 by June of 2021, then further expanded to 75 within three years.

### 3. High Level Summary

There is a very evident public trust issue with the current PPB formula. Change is coming, either internally through the PPB, or externally by mandate, ballot measure, or City Council resolution. Now is the time for the bureau to act, before being directed. This is why the TAC recommends that the PS3 be more formalized and utilized in the everyday functions of the PPB. Letting the PS3 become the more recognized face of the PPB will allow for a less critical public view of the current police bureau. In order to do this, the bureau will need to:

- Increase the number of PS3's, with an initial goal of up to at least 25 positions by June 2021 with further expansions over the next five years.
- Improve and expand PS3 training, both in the classroom and on the job.
- Increase the primary duties of the PS3 to alleviate the time spent by sworn officers on non-critical issues; such as stolen vehicles, crime scene interviews and photos, parking tickets, authorizing the towing of vehicles, and responding to theft and vandalism calls.
- Increasing the number of PS3 vehicles to meet the increased demand.

### 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 (79% were property crimes), 6% in custodies, 0.2% in the use of force, and 0.06% in a use of force involving a weapon or vehicle. Over the past decade, citizen-initiated calls have risen from 48% of police calls for service to 72%. This growth has been largely driven by an increase in low priority calls, which are less about crime and more about situations which frighten and/or inconvenience community members, personal disputes, and issues related to the city's houseless population. Low priority calls currently account for 43% of all citizen-initiated calls.

The growth in these low priority calls have greatly limited the ability of the bureau to put into practice the tenants of community policing. Citizen-initiated calls on average take 2.5 times longer than officer-initiated calls, resulting in a significant erosion in officer-initiated calls and sworn officers increasingly being unavailable to focus on their traditional role of preventing and solving crimes. These trends are expected to continue to grow over time.

## 5. Opportunities

Increasing the number of PS3's, combined with them taking on a greater role, will go a long ways in relieving these and other current issues as laid out in the TAC recommendation regarding the expansion of the PS3 program, issued on July 8, 2020. As part of this expansion, greater focus must be put on analysis to identify new ways to utilize the PS3's, and enhanced training and protocols must be put in place to better prepare the PS3's to better carry out both their existing and expanded roles. Towards this goal, TAC members interviewed PS3's and sworn officers who previously served as PS3's, and reviewed current directives and training documents.

### **Background**

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.

### **Improved Training and Content**

Interviews and a review of training documents shows that the PS3's would benefit greatly from an increased focus on both initial training after being hired and continual

training opportunities via regular in-service. Overall the amount of training received by PS3's should be increased to make the a more effective and versatile part of the PPB, including increased scenario training. Areas of specific focus for increased training should include crisis intervention training for mental health issues, enhanced de-escalation training, and better training on the ability to multi-task and prioritize tasks. Special focus should as well be put on enhanced integrated training involving both PS3's and sworn officers, to aid in improving the utilization and effectiveness of PS3's, and to help the two groups see themselves as different tools within the same public safety toolbox.

To aid in peer-to-peer training, the PPB should develop a mentor program so that each new PS3 has a dedicated experienced peer to go to when they have questions. In addition, the PPB should regularly schedule opportunities for the PS3's to discuss cases and situations, allowing them to learn from each other's experiences. These opportunities should be overseen by a senior sworn officer, to ensure discussed solutions fit within bureau directives and policy.

### **Reference Aids**

Interviews indicated that PS3's, especially newer PS3's, would benefit from the development of quick reference aids for use while on duty. Such aids are not uncommon for many duties currently handled by sworn officers. Specific areas identified as needing quick reference aids include handling the report of and return of stolen vehicles, writing reports of all types, and checking for or identifying a subject who has an active warrant or is currently on parole.

### **PS3 Dispatching**

The system for dispatching PS3's needs to be better developed in order to improve their efficiency and utilization, and to better focus their use on their trained capabilities. Currently the majority of dispatchers, supervisors, and sworn officers are unsure of how to best utilize PS3's in the carrying out of their duties, and as a result the effective use of PS3's varies by shift, precinct, and rotating management roles. To counteract this, the PPB needs to fully develop protocols regarding the proper utilization of PS3's. They also need to develop training on these protocols for dispatch, supervisors, and sworn officers. When possible, training scenarios should involve both sworn officer and PS3's.

### **Increasing PS3 Capabilities**

A TAC review of citizen initiated call data provided by the PPB suggests that between 25% to 30% of all police calls could be handled by the current PS3 program if protocols were established to create an effective working relationship between PS3's and sworn officers. To aid in the development of these protocols, the PPB should perform an analysis of calls for service data, to better understand which call groups and types are more likely to result in armed subjects, custodies, and the possibility of police use of force. The goal of this analysis should be to expand the proportion of calls that can be handled by PS3's rather than sworn officers. It is the belief of the TAC that utilizing PS3's in an increased number of situations will greatly enhance the public's trust and image of the PPB.

It is important to note that the TAC fully expects an expanded PS3 program to work in concert with not only sworn officers, but also with an expanded Portland Street Response program. These three programs should be seen as different tools in the

same public safety toolbox, with the understanding that at times multiple types of tools are needed to effectively handle a situation. It is the view of the TAC that protocols and training need to be developed for all of these groups to work together in concert, and that failing to do so will result in a disjointed and ineffective public safety system.

## 6. References and Sources

### ***PPB Personnel Interviews***

Acting Captain Greg Stewart, Acting Head of the Training Division  
Officer Jeobany Giron  
Specialist Kris Grogan  
Specialist Michelle Plumb  
Specialist Myrna Ortiz  
Specialist Robert Wolfson

### ***TAC Public Safety Support Specialist Expansion Recommendation***

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/763833>

### ***Information on Current Public Safety Support Specialist Program***

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/741045>

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/78174>

### ***TAC Updated Police Context Data Report***

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/765707>

### ***PPB Open Data Statistics***

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/71673>

### ***PPB Dispatched Call Data***

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/76454>

### ***News Report Regarding Rise in Disorder Calls***

<https://www.wweek.com/news/2019/02/06/portlanders-call-911-to-report-unwanted-people-more-than-any-other-reason-we-listened-in/>