

City of Santa Rosa

Independent Police Auditor's Fourth Report re: Santa Rosa Police Department

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Introduction

OIR Group has served as the Independent Police Auditor for the City of Santa Rosa since the end of 2021. The model adopted by the City at that time is a distinctive one in our experience of working with jurisdictions throughout California and in several other states.¹

Its main feature is "real time" participation in the Santa Rosa Police Department's investigations into allegations of police misconduct. Instead of post-completion review or audits, as is often the approach (if there is any oversight of the law enforcement agency in the first place), Santa Rosa's model is designed to incorporate the IPA's scrutiny and perspective into the process from the beginning. We have full access to the database in which the Department enters and tracks new cases, and play an active role in the review of evidence and the deliberation as to outcomes.

To be clear, the primary responsibility for handling of these cases continues to rest with the Department. The IPA does not have the authority to *impose* a particular course of action on SRPD, and individual outcomes remain the purview of the organization's leadership. There are different reasons for

¹ Based in southern California, OIR Group has worked in the field of independent civilian oversight of law enforcement since 2001. Its team of experts in police practices has provided a range of monitoring, auditing, investigating, and consulting services to jurisdictions throughout California and in several other states. More information about our team, including dozens of public reports from past and ongoing projects, is available at oirgroup.com.

adopting this approach – not the least of which is the value of a police agency's own commitment to promoting accountability among its personnel.

But our early awareness of allegations², our opportunity to help frame the subsequent investigation and weigh in on appropriate resolutions, and our mandate to share concerns with City officials and the public through our reporting process all help to ensure the influence of objective independent oversight on the process.

We are pleased to share in this fourth Annual Report that the Police Department has been fully cooperative in making the model work – a dynamic that has been true since the beginning of our time in Santa Rosa. It takes the form not only of meeting all obligations and ensuring our unfettered access to materials, but also of engaging in regular (and sometimes spirited) discussions about individual cases and larger issues of policy and protocol. The Department's receptivity to dialogue does not always lead to full agreement. But we feel confident that our perspective is understood and taken seriously, and we can confidently endorse the fundamental legitimacy of the investigative process that is covered in more detail below, and the case resolutions that emerge from it.

The Department opened a total of 55 new misconduct cases in 2025, a slight decrease from 2024 numbers (62) and at the low end of the range we have seen in our years in Santa Rosa. As usual, most of these were complaints from members of the public, including two sustained allegations of officers making entry into residences without sound legal justification. But some of the more serious matters that were resolved last year were generated internally – and led to significant consequences for involved personnel.

For example, one of the year's most impactful cases related exclusively to internal dynamics – allegations of various improprieties by a supervisor in dealing with subordinates. In another, a detective mishandled an effort to constructively resolve an arrest of two subjects, including the submission of knowingly inaccurate police report. These were disappointing lapses. At the same time, rigorous investigation and appropriate resolutions helped to offset the concerning nature of the conduct at issue.

² In fact, a handful of complaints are initiated each year through outreach to our office.

Along with our active involvement in the handling of misconduct investigations, our role has also involved working with SRPD in an effort to strengthen other internal review systems. One of these is the development of new protocol for addressing "major incidents" in a more comprehensive and rigorous way. As we were first able to say last year, the Department has made significant strides in this area. A "Major Incident Review Board" panel now convenes in the aftermath of significant force deployments and other critical events. The goal is to formally assess officer performance and compliance with policy – but just as importantly to use these incidents as opportunities to test the effectiveness of operations more broadly. Training, policy, supervision, and equipment are just some of the categories that are given consideration, often leading to the emergence of responsive action items.

We discuss that process, and its various applications in 2025, below. Notably, one of the 10 incidents that was reviewed was the Department's first officer-involved shooting since 2019. This occurred in August, when an SRPD officer fired one fatal round in response to the actions of an armed male subject who had been barricaded inside a residence, and who fired at officers as he emerged from the home.³

Within days of the shooting, the Department held a comprehensive internal meeting to discuss the incident and identify potential action items that could be addressed administratively during the pendency of the criminal review. We had the opportunity to review that presentation as the Department navigated a new and constructive internal process.

The Department also continues to refine its force review process – an area of interest for us as auditors that has evolved in positive ways in Santa Rosa. Many of our recent formal recommendations have been focused on efforts to standardize a comprehensive approach to evaluation of these incidents, one that goes beyond the important but narrow question of compliance with policy

³ The Sonoma County District Attorney's Office issued its finding in April of 2026 regarding this case; it determined that the officer's use of deadly force had been reasonable in the totality of the circumstances, and that it did not have a basis to file criminal charges.

to look at holistic opportunities to adjust and strengthen performance. SRPD has been working to implement these through different initiatives.

A cornerstone of the Department's current commitment to effective force review is the new "Training and Compliance Unit," which the agency entrusts with considerable responsibility in this arena. This is a small but full-time cadre of officers that performs a number of relevant functions, and thereby ensures a measure of both quality control and effective responsiveness to trends and/or individual officer needs. While a number of factors (including ones that are beyond a law enforcement agency's control) can contribute to statistical changes from year to year, it is notable that the total number of force deployments in Santa Rosa in 2025 declined significantly from recent years. This Report describes some of the unit's focal points for 2025 as it refines its role to meet ongoing agency priorities.

The nature of the challenges may change from year to year, but the need for *some* form of adaptability and evolution will remain predictable for law enforcement agencies. We appreciate the chance to engage with SRPD personnel as they both respond to newly arising events and plan for the long-term priorities of the Department and the Santa Rosa community.

Complaints and Allegations of Misconduct

Overview

After three full years in the Independent Police Auditor role in Santa Rosa, OIR Group has established a defined, efficient, set of protocols with SRPD in order to meet the City's expectations regarding outside oversight of the discipline process. Our independent access is central to this dynamic. We are able to remotely link to the Department's internal database at any time, and have clearance to review confidential materials at the same level as SRPD leadership.

In the context of personnel investigations into officer misconduct, this means the ability to assess all elements of a case file. Our independent access to the underlying evidence allows us to ensure that facts are presented accurately in the case summary memo. And it provides a sound basis to weigh our own impressions against those of the Department's investigators and decision-makers.

Depending on the nature of the allegations, the investigation file could include police reports, an interview with the complainant, investigative interviews of witness and subject officers, and – importantly – body-worn camera recordings. As we have noted in prior Reports, body-worn camera technology has yet to fulfill the (optimistic) goals of ending debate and resolving the tensions that sometimes arise over law enforcement activity. However, it *has* had a major impact on the complaint investigation process.

As evidence of what actually occurred, recordings are often decisive in supporting or refuting the allegations at issue. This can have the effect of streamlining the process. Even more importantly, it reduces the uncertainty that once made it difficult to resolve cases when facts were in dispute– to the frustration of complainants, involved officers, or both.

But, while the review of body-worn cameras has become central to the investigative process, the chance to regularly interact with SRPD investigators and decision-makers during the pendency of cases is also a critical part of the model. We are able to ensure that all identified issues are pursued, and we can offer our input and suggestions while the investigation is still being framed. In cases where the accused officer is being interviewed (which happens when the review of other evidence is not conclusive, or when disciplinary consequences appear to be likely), the IPA has the opportunity to actively participate in those sessions.

From our vantage point, the quality of the Department's misconduct investigations is high. They are generally thorough and effective at each phase, starting with the intake interviews with complainants.

This initial step is a point of significant emphasis for us, given the influence of this experience on public perception. The Department's primary investigator takes a thoughtful approach to these interactions, with an emphasis on understanding the complainant's perspective and concerns, and a practice of refraining from defensiveness or justification about officer conduct.

The investigative memos, which set out the issues and then summarize the relevant evidence, are notably methodical, comprehensive, and clear.⁴ And the Department then has an appropriate internal review process at the lieutenant level for completed cases, with documented findings and analysis. Captains also provide a memorandum when the case results in a finding that policy was violated, with an attendant consequence for the involved officer.

In short, our overall impressions of the process are quite favorable, particularly with regard to the most serious cases. At the same time, we noted this year that a number of complaints involving less significant allegations were handled

⁴ This was particularly striking in 2025 in the context of several complaints that were multi-faceted and encompassing of numerous incidents over time – and sometimes involved complainants with documented mental health challenges. The memos reflected a genuine effort to identify and assess relevant police contacts in an objective manner.

by supervisors other than the "Professional Standards" sergeant who serves as the primary investigator. We had mixed feelings about this development.

On the one hand, we strongly endorse the idea of the discipline process being a shared responsibility throughout the supervisory ranks. Delegating some of the more straightforward, lower-level matters to a range of supervisors not only helps with workload issues but promotes the idea that maintaining standards and holding officers accountable is an agency-wide priority.

Perhaps predictably, though, the quality of these cases seemed to suffer at times. Issues ranged from less effective intake interviews to write-ups that lacked thorough explanation or analysis. While the "bottom-line" outcomes were all reasonable from our perspective, the process itself was not always as rigorous or convincing in its assessment of officer performance, especially with regard to non-discipline level shortcomings that perhaps still merited attention.

With this in mind, we encourage the Department to continue its commitment to a broader distribution of investigative responsibilities at the sergeant level. At the same time, though, it should also invest in some effort at preparing all new supervisors with targeted training. This will help ensure that the complaint investigation process will earn the confidence of the community members who engage with it, and will also maximize opportunities to identify and address performance issues that merit attention – even if they fall short of constituting a formal violation.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

SRPD should continue its commitment to involving a range of supervisors in the administrative discipline process, particularly by entrusting them with responsibility for handling lower-level allegations of misconduct.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

SRPD should explore additional ways to prepare new supervisors with the background skills needed to effectively intake, investigate, and assess public complaints of officer misconduct.

Case Totals

The Department opened 55 new matters in 2025. Twelve were initiated internally and the remainder came from public complaints about a range of allegations. A total of seventeen led to findings that officers had violated policy.

A "case status chart," with thumbnail descriptions of all 55 separate investigations, is included as Appendix A to this Report.

As in the past, the allegations were wide-ranging. For example, two quite straightforward cases that the Department opened involved officers damaging gas pumps by negligently driving away with the hose attached; another was created to formally address officer tardiness in submitting reports. Another two were related to preventable traffic collisions (neither of which resulted in injury).

Among the complaints that members of the public submitted to the Department were these:

- Four of the cases related to different complainants' issues with dispatch after calling for assistance. In each instance, the dispatchers were exonerated of misconduct claims, but the Department also looked for opportunities to enhance future communication and clarity.
- There was only a single complaint related to lost property in the context of arrest or encampment enforcement involving the unhoused; this constituted a significant reduction over recent years.
- Racial bias was raised as an issue in two complaints, neither of which was substantiated. Additionally, one complainant alleged bias against himself as a homeless person as officers responded to a disturbance call; in another case, a woman alleged that her disability had caused the officer to discriminate against her in investigating a traffic collision. The officers were also exonerated in both of these instances.⁵

⁵ Cases involving allegations of bias against protected classes also require the Department to provide notification to the state's Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission ("POST") as a means of ensuring that proper accountability is occurring.

- Only one case involved off-duty misconduct; an officer had gotten in a conflict while driving that led him to contact the company for whom the other driver worked, and was assertive to the point of generating concern on the manager's part. The Department sustained a policy violation.
- Officer discourtesy allegations were quite limited. However, our office noted different instances when specific comments or demeanor issues detracted from the overall impression within the encounter. These were raised with the Department and addressed as a peripheral component to the case.
- None of the cases involved an allegation of excessive force.

To the extent the totality of complaint cases suggested any sort of trend, it was not from a high volume of individuals who took exception to traffic stops or arrests or other enforcement activity to which they had been subjected. That category of aggrieved person is common for obvious reasons, but was less prominent this year. Instead, several of the complainants were residents who had contacted the police to report a crime or seek assistance – and were dissatisfied with the thoroughness and effectiveness of the Department's response.

Though some of these case reviews ended up exonerating the involved officer(s), others established that shortcomings had occurred. These included the following:

- Delays in completion of an accident report that the complainant needed for insurance.
- Inadequate follow-up investigation of an alleged battery; the case was re-assigned and led to two arrests.
- Failure to thoroughly investigate, and submit to District Attorney, a vandalism claim that arose from a dispute with neighbors. The report was ultimately provided to D.A.
- Failure to follow-up on an allegation of domestic violence in the context of a larger dispute between parties; this was ultimately processed by another officer.
- Failure to document supplemental investigation, which led a theft victim who acquired the reports to believe that it had not occurred.

Importantly, the identified gaps in service were closed through subsequent intervention, and the Department resolved the relevant accountability issues appropriately. But the high incidence of "dissatisfied customers" suggests the value of renewed attention on officer due diligence – especially with regard to timeliness and follow-through in cases requiring additional work beyond the initial call for service.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

SRPD should focus on addressing investigative thoroughness and documentation at the patrol level by evaluating workload distribution, supervision, remediation, and other potential forms of intervention.

Major Cases

This year was marked by a handful of especially notable cases – all of which resulted in findings that SRPD personnel had violated policy. To its credit, the Department addressed each of these matters with effective investigation and appropriate outcomes.

The first of them had actually been initiated in 2024, with the investigation and resolution then extending for several months. It began with a lengthy anonymous letter that was submitted to Department leadership through the agency's labor association. That letter detailed an extensive pattern of allegedly problematic conduct by an SRPD supervisor.

Significantly, the targets of the mistreatment were not members of the public, and the named issues had no direct bearing on enforcement activity or public safety. Instead, the listed concerns revolved around hostile workplace behavior directed at subordinates, allegations of inappropriate attention directed at female officers (by the male subject), and unprofessional commentary in briefing and other on-duty contexts.

These "workplace interactions" issues are generally not at the forefront of community focus with regard to problems in policing; for obvious reasons, misconduct that impacts member of the public and undermines the justice system are greater priorities. But the Department rightly treated these allegations as a critical issue. Supervisor-subordinate relationships, misuse of

authority, and the need for legitimate accountability at the managerial level are fundamental to an agency's culture – and, by extension, its operational effectiveness.

The ensuing investigation was driven by the specific incidents cited in the original complaint, and involved the interviews of nearly 50 Department members before it was over. Ultimately, while some of the individual claims were unsubstantiated or refuted, some 18 separate events were sustained as constituting proven misconduct according to one or more policy sections. The subject of the case is no longer with the agency.

Two other cases of note involved officers attempting to address legitimate enforcement concerns but, in doing so, running afoul of Constitutional protections involving people's rights in their private residences. In the first, two officers were attempting to locate a juvenile who was missing from home late at night and whom they believed to be at a particular location. Upon arriving at the home in question, they got no response to their initial attempts at contacting the people inside. They then noted an open sliding door facing the street, which they later said seemed odd and concerning. Based on the perceived exigency of confirming whether the missing subject was inside, they made entry with weapons drawn (and pointing downward) – only to encounter a small child and then his mother, both of whom had been sleeping. After investigation, the Department determined that the officers had lacked the proper legal standing to make a warrantless incursion into the home.

A different case involved the threshold of a private home – and two officers who separately placed a foot in the doorway to keep the resident from closing it as they conducted an investigation into a hit and run accident. While this "entry" was obviously less pronounced, it was also deemed improper, and was the precursor to a larger confrontation with the woman and her son.

While the different incidents were distinctive enough in their circumstances to fall short of a trend, the fundamentals of search and seizure are obviously an essential component of lawful policing and risk management for a police agency. A common denominator in the two cases was the involved officer's relative lack of experience in the field. Importantly, part of the remediation that ensued was directed training about the relevant concepts.

The Department also recognized the potential value in focusing attention on these issues more broadly. It has now subscribed to a well-regarded service that offers training videos on a range of relevant topics that can be shared during the briefing session that precedes each patrol shift. The Department's commitment to distributing these on a regular basis will ideally provide important updates and refreshers to its personnel.

Another significant allegation emerged when the District Attorney's Office identified a major reporting discrepancy in a report that had been filed by an SRPD detective. Two subjects had been brought to the police station under arrest after a traffic stop had uncovered weapons and other contraband in the vehicle. After his questioning of them, the detective made the ill-advised decision to re-characterize the events of the arrest in ways that were plainly inaccurate.⁶

Honesty in reporting is, of course, a baseline expectation for the justice system. The administrative investigation that followed established that the detective's motivations had been reasonable, but that his methodology was glaringly flawed in ways that he himself should have recognized. The Department sustained the primary allegation and imposed a series of responsive consequences.⁷

As noted above, these major investigations prompt a range of reactions. The underlying conduct falls below public expectations and, to varying degrees, reflects poorly on the officers and the agency. But the elimination of all performance lapses is an elusive goal. In the meantime, a willingness to identify, confront, and remediate these issues is a core element of a police organization's legitimacy.

⁶ Charges against both subjects were dropped soon after the concerns came to light.

⁷ The officer remains with the agency, though he has been re-assigned. He is also subject to future automatic disclosure to the defense regarding this matter when testifying in court, pursuant to Brady vs. Maryland.

Force and Critical Incident Review

Major Incident Review Board

2025 was the first full year for SRPD's "Major Incident Review Board" process. We had worked with the Department's leadership in developing this mechanism for evaluating significant force events as well as other incidents notable for their high profile or complexity. It is a way of ensuring a comprehensive, structured evaluation for enforcement activity that merits greater attention, not only in terms of officer accountability but also for the learning opportunities it potentially provides.

The development of the Board was in response to a gap in the Department's internal review mechanism – particularly with regard to deadly force cases. In the aftermath of an officer-involved shooting or in-custody death (which have proven to be infrequent in recent years), SRPD follows a county-wide protocol for an independent criminal investigation (by the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department) and subsequent review by the District Attorney's Office as to the legality of the involved officer's actions.

This process takes several months at a minimum. Then, after waiting for the criminal investigation and decision-making to be finalized, the Department would review those investigation materials and have its Professional Standards personnel assess the incident from the perspective of Department policy and potential training needs or insights.

Critical incidents vary in their nature, duration, and complexity. But insofar as physical force is the ultimate exercise of police authority, they are inherently worthy of close, comprehensive scrutiny, and often implicate a range of operational components (such as tactics, equipment, supervision, and policy) that can serve as learning opportunities for the future.

After first assessing that process as we began our time in Santa Rosa, we considered it to be limited in a couple of important ways.

One concern related to timing. While deferring its own evaluation process during the pendency of the criminal case, the Department was delaying its overall engagement with the incident and potentially missing opportunities for issue-spotting and response that were separate from questions of individual officer accountability, and could benefit from being addressed in a timelier fashion. The second (and related) limitation was that the review process occurred in relative isolation and had a somewhat narrow focus.

The Major Incident Review Board ("MIRB") concept resolves those shortcomings. It provides a robust mechanism for the Department to evaluate and learn from its most significant events. There were 10 of these that the Department reviewed in 2025.

The Board is comprised of Department executives as well as subject-matter experts. When it convenes, the Training Unit presents an overview of the facts, including relevant body-worn camera recordings, and then guides the Board through a discussion of the incident across a range of categories. When a use of force is at issue (as it generally is), the question of whether officer actions were justified and consistent with policy is part of the decision-making. But the analysis goes beyond that important but narrow issue to encompass the entirety of the event and determine whether elements of tactics, decision-making, supervision, communication, equipment, policy and procedure were implicated in ways that deserve affirmation or refinement.

Among the cases reviewed were the following:

- A takedown that resulted in a fractured thumb to the subject.
- Two different cases – involving the same subject – in which the arrestee appeared to lose consciousness after being taken to the ground. He was medically cleared at the hospital on both occasions.
- A fatal traffic collision caused by a driver whom an officer had noticed driving erratically and had sought to find (though a pursuit had never been initiated).
- 5 incidents involving a K-9 bite.

We considered each of these to be worthwhile. K-9 deployments, for example, are a high liability tactic that has come under increased public scrutiny and challenge in recent years – including proposals by state legislators to limit the use of dogs in apprehending subjects.⁸ Ensuring that the Department's policies and procedures are both current and being followed effectively is a worthwhile subject for thorough, multi-faceted review.

If anything, we would encourage SRPD to use the process even more inclusively. While the thresholds for MIRB review are established by policy (such as for significant injury), there are other incidents that are also worthy of additional review by virtue of their complexity, risk profile, notoriety, or other features. One force case we looked at this year involved a subject fleeing from a DUI checkpoint; what ensued was a vehicle pursuit, crash, takedown, and rib strike with an officer's knee. The subject was later diagnosed with a broken rib – which the Department found to be of sufficiently uncertain origin that it did not initiate the MIRB protocol. Apart from considering that to be debatable, we thought the totality of the incident made it worthy of a comprehensive look – to the same or greater extent than (for example) the aforementioned thumb injury that "made the cut" on a relative technicality.

While recognizing that the agency is adjusting to a new paradigm, and is hesitant to overload the Training cadre, we urge it to embrace the effectiveness and potential of the process to the full extent in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

SRPD should take an inclusive approach to the selection of incidents presented to the Major Incident Review Board, to maximize the benefit of a thorough, structured consideration of matters that are distinctive, impactful, or otherwise worthy of additional scrutiny.

⁸ The judicial system has also focused on the practice. A 2024 9th Circuit federal court case, for example, spoke to an expectation that a bite will be terminated by the handler once it is clear that the subject has surrendered and is "under officer control."

In reviewing the documentation for others of the cases looked at last year, we also found there was room for the Department to enhance its documentation (and potentially its substantive follow-through) with regard to the "action items" identified during the Board deliberations. Along with reaching a conclusion about involved officer compliance with policy, the Board often identifies peripheral topics that involve training, equipment, or other needed interventions. This is one of the significant values of the new process, but issue-spotting is obviously only the first step. Making sure that items assigned for follow-up are completed, and ensuring that the results are included in the relevant file for the incident as a whole, should become a routine step in the process of finalizing these reviews.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

SRPD should refine its new Major Incident Review protocol to ensure that identified action items are assigned, completed and documented prior to closure of the case file.

As mentioned above, the Department also utilized the process for the first time in conjunction with a fatal officer-involved shooting that occurred in August. A female victim reported that a twenty-one-year-old male subject, with whom she had an infant child in common, had been in a domestic violence incident with her. She also noted that he was armed.

The subject eventually barricaded himself inside the female's residence, and a standoff lasting several hours ensued. The Department's SWAT personnel and a Hostage Negotiations Team representative attempted to contact the man and secure his safe surrender, but were not successful. A search warrant was obtained, and officers developed a tactical plan that ultimately included breaching the door and deploying gas into the residence. The subject ran out the front door and fired one round in the direction of officers. A SWAT officer inside an armored vehicle fired one shot in response, which struck and killed the subject.

Within days of the incident, we attended a presentation that compiled the available (though still preliminary) information about the case and discussed the different elements of the SRPD response – before, during and after the use of deadly force. We were impressed with the thoroughness of the

information gathering and the scope of issues that were identified and considered for potential further action.

Unlike the other incidents discussed above, though, a MIRB involving a deadly force case requires a second phase of assessment. This is because a full evaluation of involved officer performance (including compliance with policy) is intentionally deferred in light of the pending criminal case. When that decision has been made (as it was very recently in the August officer-involved shooting incident), the Department can and should then move forward with an administrative assessment of officer performance.

As currently framed, the MIRB policy is unclear on the mechanics of this. SRPD should address this gap to ensure that a clear process exists for conducting any additional investigation and ensuring a formal determination with regard to this aspect of the incident.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

SRPD should establish a clear "back end" process for the administrative resolution of officer-involved shooting incidents, which are initially presented prior to the conclusion of a criminal investigation into the case.

Other Force Cases

Appropriately, the Department continues to focus attention on use of force by its personnel. The Training and Compliance Unit is a hub for executing many of these initiatives, which include equipment updates, policy revisions, and, of course, training – both at the Department-wide and individual officer level.⁹

⁹ Identifying an officer's specific performance concerns (such as arrest control techniques, or tactically sound positioning, or use of a particular restraint tool) is a clearly a worthwhile by-product of the rigorous supervisory review process we have been advocating, and that SRPD has made significant strides toward standardizing. The Training and Compliance Unit is a vehicle for accomplishing the relevant interventions in efficient ways that are tailored to the needs of the officer.

The Training staff also continue to play an active role in the assessment of individual cases. It serves as a clearing house of sorts for the reviews conducted by sergeants and then reviewed by lieutenants in the aftermath of every force incident. And it has responsibility for producing an annual force report that provides a statistical overview of the number and type of incidents that SRPD officers are involved in. This information not only heightens internal awareness as to trends, but can further guide training priorities.

Our own emphasis in recent years has been encouraging the Department's movement toward "holistic" assessment of force cases – an evaluation that goes beyond the question of whether the force itself was justified and in policy, and instead looks at the totality of the incident as a means of identifying ways that performance in the field can be improved. SRPD has been responsive, and there had been progress. We looked at a number of supervisory evaluation memos, and saw several instances in which the sergeant or lieutenant flagged a performance issue worthy of follow-up.¹⁰

This is encouraging, though there is room for more consistency across the managerial ranks. The way that some supervisors are identifiably more likely than their peers to note and address a range of performance issues is probably more attributable to their approach than to the "raw material" of the underlying cases they happen to be responsible for.

Fortunately, the Department continues to provide infrastructure that should facilitate ongoing improvement in this important area. The switch to a new data tracking platform at the beginning of 2026 has provided an opportunity to revise the "template" and allow for efficient but detailed documentation of key facts.

¹⁰ Several of these related to profanity. In one, the sergeant (who was at the scene of the arrest) acknowledged his own fault in this regard (he was not alone among responding officers). In another, the lieutenant took exception to the profanity that had been used – but that the reviewing sergeant had *not* chosen to note. While officers were "counseled" about the issue in these (and several other) cases, the Department should consider taking a firmer approach to accountability regarding this topic.

One of the changes we noted related to a more overt "prompt" for supervisors to focus on de-escalation efforts. This is not a new concept in law enforcement. But it is something that the public has, in recent years, become more aware of; there is a heightened expectation that officers will engage in tactics and deploy strategies with a consciousness of reducing the likelihood that force will be needed. That interest led the state legislature to require police agencies to consider whether de-escalation efforts were afforded in reviewing the legitimacy of force incident.

Such efforts could be something as simple as attempting to establish a verbal rapport, or waiting for a backup officer before engaging in order to encourage compliance, or using distance and cover to slow down an encounter and lessen the need for a precipitous reaction.

While de-escalation is not always feasible prior to a force deployment under the circumstances of a given incident, officer mindfulness of it as an expectation can help shape the direction of an enforcement action in constructive ways. (This approach can also promote officer safety as well as reducing the likelihood or severity of force.) And one way to reinforce this mindfulness is to have it become established as a lens through which officer decision-making will be assessed.

For this reason, we are pleased to see the new prominence of de-escalation in the review template, and look forward to seeing whether and how it will have a substantive influence going forward.

"Show of Force" Review

One category of review that is relatively new to the agency is for encounters that involve a *show* of force, which is how the Department designates the "pointing of a firearm at a person" ("PFAP") in order to gain compliance. Recent years have seen a trend among law enforcement agencies – and the jurisdictions they serve – to recognize that this action is an exercise of authority that is sufficiently significant and impactful to warrant greater formal attention than in the past.¹¹

¹¹ New case law has also imposed greater restrictions on law enforcement with regard to the required justification for pointed firearms.

In Santa Rosa, this has taken the form of a new requirement for formal review. Officers affirmatively report the instances in which they point their firearms and articulate the rationale for doing so, and supervisors are expected to assess this action in the context of the encounter and make a determination as to whether the tactic was consistent with training and expectations.

SRPD listed 54 of these events in 2025. Some of these occurred in conjunction with physical force in order to overcome resistance and effect an arrest. But in several cases, the weapon-pointing (or "show" of force) was unaccompanied by other options. In the past, the lack of physical contact meant that a brief moment of pointing a firearm might not even have been noted, and almost certainly not formally evaluated. Now, the Department goes through the exercise of evaluating the propriety of the tactic – and, significantly, taking the opportunity to look for training points or other issues worthy of follow-up.

We were impressed with the overall quality of the write-ups that we reviewed. The relevant factors were often articulated with clarity and thoroughness by the handling supervisors, and the emergence of specific training points occurred regularly. Examples included tactical considerations to enhance officer safety, suggestions for improved reporting, counseling as to avoidance of gratuitous profanity, and legality of searches incident to arrest.

In short, the process reflects the goals of supervisory review that we have been espousing throughout our tenure in Santa Rosa: efficient but formal documentation, appropriate accountability, thoughtful and holistic review and, where applicable, useful interventions. It seems clear that the Department's executives have made this a point of emphasis, and supervisors have responded effectively.

The seemingly productive adjustment to the new requirements of the "Show of Force" protocol is noteworthy. It is also a reminder of how focused attention can speed the process of adapting to new approaches.

While the "prioritization of everything" can be a contradiction in terms, we consider the regular force review process to be another place where extra attention would be especially beneficial. SRPD has worked to enhance its

regular force review process in recent years by refining the mechanics and promoting a mindset of thorough, constructive scrutiny among its supervisors. As noted above, this has paid dividends, and the Department's new data entry platform should further facilitate it. We have seen examples of excellent work at the sergeant and lieutenant level. But *standardizing* that level of rigor and insight is a goal that the administration should continue to advance.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

SRPD should look for ways to replicate the success of its "PFAP" review process, and instill in officers and supervisors at all levels a commitment to thorough and holistic review of force incidents.

Regional Training Facility Proposal

One other initiative that the Department shared toward the end of 2025 is its hopes to begin the lengthy process of securing approval for development of a Regional Training Facility in the area. Citing some of the points of emphasis from prior Reports by the Independent Police Auditor, the Department makes a compelling case for the potential benefits of creating such a facility.

Many of these are practical, and relate to the efficiencies of replacing the current paradigm (which regularly requires SRPD personnel to travel extensively to attend training) and serving as a "host facility" that neighboring agencies could use (thus defraying costs). More substantively, the proposed facility would greatly enhance the Department's ability to provide more regular and effective driving and scenario-based training opportunities for its own officers.

The facility would also have positive implications for liability and risk management. This relates both to a better prepared, skilled workforce and to compliance with evolving legislative requirements and law enforcement standards.

Clearly, the achievement of this worthy but ambitious goal depends on several factors, only some of which are in the Department's control. But we encourage SRPD to remain committed to the concept, and to look for ways to actualize it through collaboration with City leadership and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

Apart from our work in Santa Rosa, one of our additional roles is to offer training several times a year to newly promoted lieutenant-level supervisors throughout the state, as part of a three-week course they are required to attend. Along with our core curriculum topics of administrative discipline and risk management, we often end up discussing the ways the profession has changed in recent years.

A certain nostalgia for the "good old days" would probably have been a common theme in a similar class ten or twenty years ago – and perhaps ten or twenty years from now. And we can remember when, for example, body-worn camera technology was a source of apprehension and resistance for many officers; now the equipment is almost universal, quite familiar, and generally recognized to be an asset that officers are glad to have.

That said, there is no question that the time since our first project in Santa Rosa (which related to the "after-action review" of protest response by SRPD in the summer of 2020) has been a period of significant, challenging new demands on law enforcement. Accountability to the public has never been higher, transparency is far greater than at any point in recent state history, and legislation has imposed new standards and expectations in several facets of police operations. Moreover, like society at large, law enforcement is figuring out how best to take advantage of artificial intelligence while adapting to any potential downsides of new technology. (For example, SRPD is moving cautiously but steadily in the direction of AI-assisted report writing for officers.)

Our impression of SRPD is that it is both proud of the service that it provides to the community and cognizant of the need to strive for continuous adaptation and improvement. We appreciate the opportunity we have had to contribute to the Department's systems of accountability and internal review, and look forward to bringing our independent perspective to new challenges in the months ahead.