



Joint News Release

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Audit Finds SFPD Needs Clearer Guidance and More Proactive Governance for Better Use-of-Force Data Collection and Reporting

The SFPD's approach to collecting use-of-force data is effective, but policy gray areas and process weaknesses led to inaccurate reporting of use-of-force incidents.

SAN FRANCISCO (October 5, 2020) — The City and County of San Francisco's Controller Ben Rosenfield and Department of Police Accountability (DPA) Executive Director Paul Henderson announced today the release of an audit report, *The Police Department Needs Clearer Guidance and More Proactive Governance for Better Use-of-Force Data Collection and Reporting*. The audit assessed whether the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) collects and reports use-of-force data adequately and effectively.

Law enforcement officers must use force under some circumstances, but some necessary force can result in pain, injury, or death to a subject. In other circumstances, force may be unnecessary or excessive. SFPD must accurately collect and report data so it can examine how it uses force and, consequently, apply it appropriately.

The audit concluded that SFPD's approach to collecting use-of-force data is effective and results in reasonably accurate data collected for incidents with reported force. However, policy gray areas and process weaknesses led to inaccurate reporting of use-of-force incidents, such as underreporting and overreporting uses of force in an incident, data entry errors, and

misfilling or missing use-of-force documentation. Further, inadequate analysis of use-of-force data led to missed opportunities to monitor policy compliance, gain insight into the role bias plays in the use of force, and inform force-reduction efforts.

“Data is critical for development and monitoring of sound policies and practices, but for it to be effective, it has to be accurate. This has been a pivotal year for communities rightly demanding accountability from those entrusted with the paramount responsibility of ensuring public safety,” Rosenfield said. “The 37 recommendations we’ve presented to the SFPD will help the department better meet those community standards and expectations.”

“Performance audits ensure that law enforcement agencies meet their own guidelines and conform to leading practices. Reliable data is necessary to provide transparency to the public, assist in policy and oversight decisions, and better understand factors that contribute to officers using force,” Henderson said. “DPA is proud to make this report available to the public, as it is a valuable tool in furthering the discussion around force reduction efforts.”

Working closely with SFPD, the auditors and DPA developed actionable recommendations to help the Police Department better collect and analyze critical use-of-force data. Key recommendations are that SFPD should:

- Issue supplemental guidance to clarify what constitutes reportable uses of force in areas of inconsistent reporting, including the use of physical control holds and instances of pointing a firearm. (SFPD expanded reporting in a recent policy change.)
- Implement and improve control processes to ensure each use-of-force incident has all required documentation and an accurate record in the use-of-force database.
- Use data to monitor compliance with policy, better understand factors contributing to using force, and gain insight into officer bias.
- Align public reports of use-of-force data with best practices to better meet stakeholder needs and comply with its policy requirements for use-of-force reporting.

The audit used statistical random samples to be 95% certain that what it found is true for all SFPD use-of-force incidents. Also, the auditors received a court order that allowed them to review incidents with juvenile subjects, which are usually excluded from such evaluations. (The auditors were not allowed to see the names of the juvenile subjects.)

The Controller and Department of Police Accountability will work with SFPD to follow up every six months on the status of the open recommendations made in the report.

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