

# Seattle Police Recruitment and Retention Plan



**City of Seattle**  
Mayor Bruce Harrell





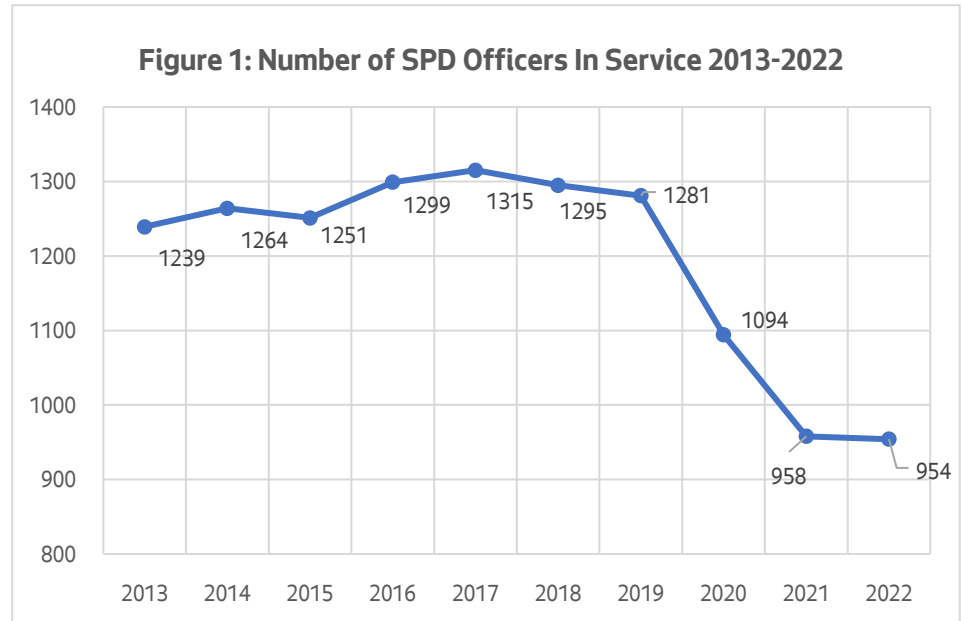


## Address Seattle's Staffing and Response Challenges

Over the past two-and-a-half years, the loss of more than 400 police officers has depleted the Seattle Police Department (SPD) to the point where essential services cannot be delivered promptly and effectively. As of May 2022, the number of trained and deployable officers — just 954 — is the lowest in over 30 years.<sup>1</sup>

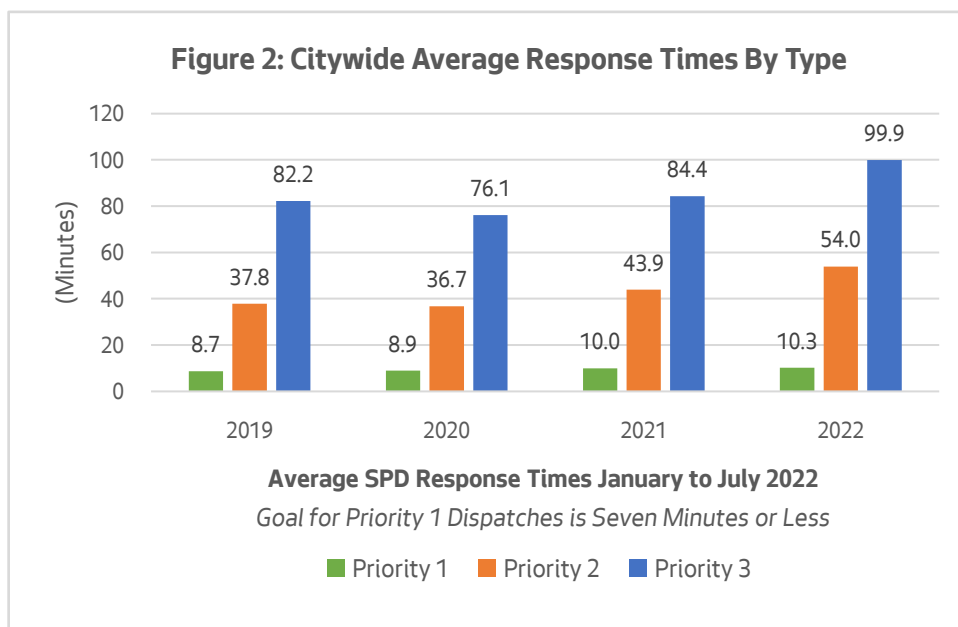
In addition, SPD has been unable to meet its annual recruiting goals in recent years. Nationally and across the state, police departments have faced similar hiring challenges, creating an extremely competitive environment where SPD tries to attract the highly effective, culturally competent, and strongly committed officers needed to meet its public safety obligations.

To provide a minimum level of service, SPD must make up for this severe staffing shortage by relying on overtime-paid officers almost daily, a significant expense to the city.



This reality is contributing to exhaustion and low morale among officers, as the police department's staffing crisis harms public safety.

Because of the shortage of officers, SPD often limits patrol dispatches only to Priority 1 calls — life-threatening emergencies, serious crimes in progress, and other circumstances where police are immediately needed with a target response time of seven minutes — as well as Priority 2 calls.<sup>2</sup>



SPD has historically dispatched officers to other lower priority calls (Priority 3 and 4), however, officers are now rarely dispatched to these calls for service due to the current staffing crisis.<sup>3</sup>

This inability to respond frustrates the people of Seattle, who expect to see police officers addressing their needs and providing a full array of police services.



## Increase Number of Officers to Prevent and Solve Crime

Police follow-up investigations of serious crimes are essential for holding people accountable and improving long-term public safety. These investigations have been negatively impacted because of the need to transfer detectives back to first-response patrol units.

During pre-pandemic years, SPD's follow-up investigative units have had 230 or more detectives assigned. This detective work often requires specialized training and skills, especially for complex and traumatic crimes. After acceleration of the essential re-assignment strategy in 2020, fewer than 140 detectives are performing this necessary work today.

The lack of resources for vital investigative work, the loss of more than 400 "in-service" police officers since 2019, and the continued challenge of recruiting new officers creates an unacceptable situation which constrains the ability of the City to provide public safety services.

**“In One Seattle, every person has an absolute right to safety. But we cannot deliver without a well-staffed and well-trained police department. This strategy is our opportunity to restore and rebuild a Seattle Police Department with the right number and right kind of officers so that it lives up to our highest values and priorities.”**

– Mayor Bruce Harrell



This plan is designed to improve the recruitment of new officers and serve as a basis to retain those officers who remain committed to SPD and the welfare of the people of Seattle. Mayor Bruce Harrell's goal is to increase the number of Seattle police officers who are authorized, funded, fully trained, and deployable to 1,450, a ratio of 1.9 officers per 1,000 residents.<sup>4</sup>

To achieve this goal, SPD will launch innovative and comprehensive short- and long-term strategies, including taking full advantage of state academy slots available to Seattle.

This plan will continue to be iterated and improved as we evaluate success and challenges based on historical data and real-time results.

Some of the elements of this plan may need to be collectively bargained, and the City is committed to doing so expeditiously and in good faith with the police unions and their members.



## Make Hiring Easier, Faster, and More Efficient

### 1. Increase the capacity, efficiency, and effectiveness of the recruitment process without compromising the quality of applicants, their fit within the department, or the community's expectations.

a. Strengthen SPD's existing recruiting team, which includes a lead recruiting officer and volunteer support officers, by partnering with the Seattle Department of Human Resources (SDHR). SDHR and the assigned officers will perform critical recruiting functions, including community engagement, event attendance, and other outreach efforts.

*(Target implementation: Aug. 2022)*

b. Create and hire a civilian recruitment manager in SDHR. This position would oversee recruiting, implement new systems and processes to streamline recruiting, and implement the new brand and message platform, and a media plan to increase staffing levels. *(Aug. 2022)*

c. Create and hire a civilian position assigned to the police officer and firefighter testing team in SDHR. This position would be responsible for increasing police testing results reporting frequencies and the implementation of preference points. *(Sept. 2022)*

d. Create and hire two civilian recruiting specialists in SDHR. These positions would be responsible for day-to-day recruiting activities, establishing relationships with applicants, and achieving the new officer hiring goals. *(Oct. 2022)*

**“The police profession is a service profession, and our mission is to help people. We will hire only the most compassionate, dedicated, and qualified employees.”**

– Interim Chief Adrian Diaz



### 2. Redesign systems to accelerate the recruitment and application process to increase the number of successful applicants without sacrificing quality.

a. Improve the physical agility test by eliminating travel requirement, increasing rate of retesting, and using a proven outside service to speed up processing. Currently, applicants must travel to Seattle for testing, and those who do not pass must wait six months before attempting a retest. *(Oct. 2022)*

b. Leverage technology to conduct virtual oral board interviews instead of in-person meetings to attract more candidates and improve the application timeline. *(Oct. 2022)*

c. Accelerate candidate background review with automated document exchange and verification of employment, education, and credit history before SPD detective investigation. *(Oct. 2022)*





## Attract Top Recruits with Competitive Compensation

**3. Create a competitive compensation package through hiring bonuses, moving reimbursements, and other incentives to attract recruits and lateral transfers with values and experiences aligned with Seattle.**

a. Institute a competitive hiring bonus in line with neighboring jurisdictions based on market demand up to a maximum of \$7,500 for recruits and \$30,000 for lateral transfers.<sup>5</sup> (Aug. 2022)

b. All City employees who make a referral of a lateral hire or a new recruit are eligible to receive a referral incentive of up to \$1,000, payable when the applicant is hired or enters the state police academy.

c. Support candidates by reimbursing applicant fees, travel expenses, and approved moving costs, as well as housing and job finding assistance for partners or spouses, upon employment by SPD. (Aug. 2022)

d. Prioritize the recruitment of applicants with bilingual/multilingual skills, college degrees, and experience providing social services.<sup>6</sup> (Jan. 2023)

e. Create new initiatives to inspire and maintain candidate interest, including "ride-along," "leave no candidate behind," and recruitment "ambassador" programs based on the City's [2019 Innovation and Performance Team recommendations](#). (Aug. 2022)







## Recruit Candidates Committed to Our Community

### 4. Develop a new and innovative values-based recruitment brand and message platform to attract applicants with shared values.

- a. Create and implement a new branding and marketing campaign with a Seattle-experienced agency to identify target audiences, reach them through social media and other online channels, and encourage them to apply for a public service career with SPD. *(Nov. 2022)*
- b. Modify all recruitment-related public-facing websites, literature, and application materials to be consistent with the new brand and message platform. *(Nov. 2022)*
- c. Develop ideal candidate profiles prioritizing people who reflect our community and who are committed to caring for and improving the quality of life for all of the people of Seattle. Expand the pool of law enforcement recruits to include people with diverse racial and immigration backgrounds, people with college educations and language skills beyond English, and people who value living in Seattle.



### 5. Develop innovative methods of communicating with potential recruits to boost applications.

- a. Create a recruiting speakers bureau of respected individuals in the community who can inspire interest in a law enforcement career and a position with SPD. *(Nov. 2022)*
- b. Partner with businesses, private organizations, educational institutions, and community-based organizations to promote public service careers in law enforcement, expand the potential field of applicants, share application resources and information, and publicize job opportunities. *(Oct. 2022)*

### 6. Explore the creation of a pipeline of potential recruits through a college/university-based program centered on public safety careers.

- a. Evaluate the feasibility of a program covering tuition for individuals seeking an undergraduate degree or higher in a defined course of study who commit to a minimum of five years of employment with SPD following graduation. *(Jan. 2023)*
- b. Design a cadet program for individuals 18-24 years of age to connect them with SPD jobs in non-law enforcement positions and create a pathway to career opportunities. This will allow young people to see law enforcement careers firsthand, and SPD to gain insight from a younger generation. *(Jan. 2023)*





## Retain Officers through Opportunities and Appreciation

### 7. Ensure a comprehensive and competitive economic package to retain officers.

- a. Engage officers and labor partners to implement this package through collective bargaining.

### 8. Create more career advancement opportunities.

- a. Institute an assignment rotation policy, so officers can develop skills across various responsibilities, enhancing their ability to work in multiple positions and advance their careers.
- b. Establish a leadership academy to prepare officers, detectives, and sergeants for promotion by fostering management and leadership skills.
- c. Explore a new special designation to recognize and incentivize officers who engage in innovative efforts that enhance the delivery of police services and demonstrate leadership and mentoring skills.
- d. Establish bureau advisory councils within SPD to create an additional outlet for officers to elevate their perspectives, experiences, and opinions to command staff and City leadership. (Sept. 2022)

- e. Explore the inclusion of existing officers in a new tuition assistance program designed to cover education costs for officers seeking a bachelor's or higher degree in a defined course of study who commit to a minimum of five years of employment with SPD following graduation.

### 9. Demonstrate commitment to officers' wellness and morale.

- a. Implement regular roll-call visits by senior SPD command staff, elected officials, and senior staff from the mayor's office. (Aug. 2022)
- b. Implement "office hours" in the precincts by senior command staff, so they can meet with officers, answer questions, and discuss issues of importance to officers. (Aug. 2022)
- c. Implement patrol officer shifts and schedules that prioritize employee wellness and help ensure long term stability and sustainability, e.g. 4 days/10 hours.
- d. Implement a comprehensive wellness program for all employees of SPD, including a staff clinical psychologist and trauma-informed care services.

### Endnotes

1. In-service officers are in authorized and funded positions, fully trained, and available to be deployed. Prior to 1991, only the total number of officers — regardless of in-service status — was documented.

2. Priority 2 calls include threats of violence, major property damage, incidents where officer presence is required to avoid escalation, disturbances involving weapons, serious injury vehicle collisions.

3. Priority 3 calls include follow-up investigations or minor incidents where response time is not crucial. Priority 4 calls include nuisance events where an officer's presence is not immediately necessary.

4. From 2012 to 2019, the ratio of Seattle officers per 1,000 residents was 1.7 to 2.0; in 2020 it dropped to 1.48 and has continued to decline. At the end of May 2022, the ratio in Seattle was 1.25. In 2021, the

average police officer to population ratio in U.S. cities over 250,000 residents was 2.3; in the Pacific states, it was 1.7.

5. A recruit hiring bonus of \$7,500 matches what is currently offered by the King County Sheriff. Auburn, Bellevue, Federal Way, and Renton offer recruit hiring bonuses ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. Lateral transfer bonuses are also common. Auburn, Bellevue, Everett, Federal Way, Issaquah, Kent, the King County Sheriff, Kirkland, Renton, and Tacoma all offer between \$15,000 and \$30,000 for lateral transfers. In this plan, all hiring and lateral transfer bonuses would need to be paid back if the employee voluntarily leaves city employment before five years of service have been completed.

6. Preference Points are applied to a public safety candidate's application and passing exam grade for a specific skill, experience, or veteran's status.



