

March 25, 2025

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Public Safety Committee  
**From:** Greg Doss, Analyst  
**Subject:** Background for Resolution 32167 – Recognizing Seattle’s first responders and Consent Decree reforms

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On March 25, 2025, the Public Safety Committee will discuss Resolution (RES) 32167, which would:

- (1) Recognize and appreciate the services provided by the Seattle Police Department (SPD) and Seattle’s other first responders, the Seattle Fire Department (SFD), and the Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department; affirm the City’s obligations to fully support, train, and equip first responders; and commit to a diversified public safety response system; and
- (2) Recognize the City’s prior and current actions to reform the Police Department under the 2012 federal Consent Decree, and commit to resolving remaining the Consent Decree issues that have been identified by the US District Court.

The Public Safety Committee Chair has indicated that the Committee will hear and potentially vote on RES 32167 in today’s Committee meeting. A full Council vote could come as soon as April 1, 2025.

This memo provides background and context for both the findings in Section 1 of RES 32167, as well as the City commitments made in subsequent sections.

**Background: The City’s Commitment to SPD Sworn Officers:** RES 32167 reverses any prior City commitments or pledges to defund or abolish SPD services or personnel which led to the resignation of hundreds of police officers.

In the summer of 2020, the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis caused several local governments to acknowledge the histories of institutional racism within their law enforcement systems. Nationwide, some cities approached the important challenge of reimagining public safety by attempting to “defund” or cut up to 50% of the funding dedicated to the support of sworn police forces; and some Seattle City Councilmembers made public commitments to: (1) reduce funding to the Seattle Police Department; and (2) reduce the overall size of the sworn police force.

In mid-year adjustments to the 2020 budget, forced by pandemic-driven revenue shortfalls, and in adopting the 2021 budget, the Seattle City Council reduced SPD’s annual budget by a combined 11%. This was achieved by transferring the 911 Communications Center, Victim

Advocates and the Parking Enforcement Officers out of SPD, capturing salary savings for vacant positions, and reducing overtime dollars used to support special events staffing that was not needed during the pandemic. No layoffs of sworn personnel occurred as a result these budget actions.

Prior to a majority new Council taking office on January 1, 2024, SPD officer separation surveys showed that some departing SPD officers indicated a perceived lack of support from Seattle's elected representatives. It is likely that this sentiment contributed to the largest number of sworn officer resignations in recent history - a net reduction of no less than 352 Fully Trained Officers and 365 Deployable Officers.<sup>1</sup> This reduction in deployable officers led to a significant increase in 911-call response times as well as a reduction in the number of calls that receive a police response.

The Year-end 2024 SPD Police Staffing Report shows that officer separations are trending down, and officer hiring is increasing, potentially assisted by: (1) hiring bonuses offered for new recruits and lateral hires; and (2) changes to the City's officer recruitment and retention programs made through Ordinance 127026, passed in May 2024.

**Background – The City's commitment to a diversified public safety response.** RES 32167 reaffirms the City's commitment to a diversified public safety response system, including the CARE Department and SFD's Mobile Integrated Health Program.

CARE's Diversified Response: Ordinance 126233 created the Community Safety and Communications Center (CSCC) effective January 1, 2021, which included the 911 call answering and dispatch center that had been housed within SPD. In November 2023, the CSCC was re-named the Community Assisted Response and Engagement (CARE) Department, and the department launched three CARE teams to provide a response to persons in crisis and other incidents where police officers are not needed. The CARE program has expanded in the last two years and now employs 24 CARE responders.

Health One is SFD's Mobile Integrated Health response unit. Launched in 2019, it is designed to respond to individuals in need of medical care, mental health care, shelter or other social services. Health One is a multidisciplinary team, with firefighters and case managers each bringing unique skills and approaches to the scene. SFD also operates Health 99, which was launched in 2023 and focuses narrowly on individuals who have experienced opioid overdoses. This team aims to connect overdose survivors with medications for opioid use disorder, primary care and other supportive services. SFD currently manages two Health One teams, one Health 99 team and a two-person overdose follow-up unit.

**Background – The City's efforts to reform the Police Department under the federal Consent Decree.** As noted in RES 32167, passage of Ordinance 127182 on February 11, 2025, and the

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<sup>1</sup> SPD Q2 2024 Staff Report, Table 1 showing the difference between Dec 2019 and 2024 Q2 staffing data of incoming new officers and outgoing officers who retired or separated from service.

Mayor's signing of the ordinance on February 14, 2025, positions the City to address its outstanding crowd management obligations under the Consent Decree.

On September 7, 2023, the US District Court issued an order that found that the City has demonstrated sustained full and effective compliance with the majority of the core commitments of the Consent Decree. However, the Court also found that the City and SPD have not yet demonstrated sustained compliance with the use of force provisions of the Consent Decree as applied to crowd control situations. In addition, the Court held that the City has more work to do in ensuring a sustainable accountability system. The specific accountability provisions previously criticized by the Court are currently under negotiation and may ultimately be decided in binding arbitration, as required by the state when municipalities reach impasse with public safety unions.

In a hearing on October 16, 2024, the parties represented, upon questioning from the Court, that they were close to being ready to file a motion to end the Consent Decree and ask the Court to dismiss the case. The Court directed the City to move forward expeditiously to submit final SPD policies on crowd management and less lethal tools to the federal monitor and the DOJ for their review, and subsequently to the Court for its approval.

Please direct any questions on RES 32167 to Greg Doss at 206-755-6385. Thank you.

cc: Ben Noble, Director  
Yolanda Ho, Deputy Director