

PUBLIC INTEGRITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE

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INTRODUCTION

The 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury examined the policies and procedures of several law enforcement agencies within Los Angeles County to determine if they were conforming to California Penal Code 832.5, which requires, "That all law enforcement agencies in the State of California must establish policies and procedures to receive, investigate, and resolve citizen's complaints concerning their particular agency."

The 2004-2005 Civil Grand Jury received Citizen complaint letters alleging: 1) the inability to secure forms and/or instructions; 2) the inability to file forms at some agencies; 3) the inability to find out the resolution of the complaint; 4) dissatisfaction with resolution of complaint, and 5) feelings of being intimidated by some officers against whom complaints had been filed. The committee did not investigate specific cases but investigated the policies and procedures of agencies operating within Los Angeles County. Based on these letters, the committee on Public Integrity and Law Enforcement committed to visit five law enforcement agencies within Los Angeles County to examine their policies and procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving citizen complaints.

METHOD

The Civil Grand Jury received citizen complaint letters alleging problems with filing and the resolution of complaints filed at Hermosa Beach PD and Long Beach PD. Following approval by the entire jury the Public Integrity and Law Enforcement Committee decided to examine the policies and procedures a private citizen must follow to file a citizens complaint at the following agencies: Redondo Beach PD, Torrance PD, Manhattan Beach PD, Hermosa Beach PD, and Long Beach PD. The committee determined the availability of forms and instructions for filing complaints upon entrance to each facility. Question and answer techniques were used to understand the process each agency follows in receiving, investigating, and processing complaints.

HERMOSA BEACH PD

The committee met with a Commander who was unable to contact anyone from the Internal Affairs unit, which is responsible for receiving and compiling information on citizen complaints. Forms and instructions were not visible at the entrance but were made available upon request.

REDONDO BEACH PD

The committee met with a Sergeant from the Professional Standards Unit who provided detailed documentation of citizen complaints from files located in his office. He is responsible for receiving and reviewing each complaint filed. Citizen complaint forms and instructions for filing are available at the entrance to the station. After the investigation and findings, the compiled data is forwarded to the Chief of Police who makes the final decision. One officer had been required to take sensitivity training as a result of a citizen complaint filing and investigation.

LONG BEACH PD

The committee met with Internal Affairs officers, and with members of The Citizens Complaint Commission of Long Beach. Forms for filing and instructions for filing were available in the lobby of the downtown station as well as in the public libraries, and on the city website. Internal Affairs receives and investigates all complaints filed. After their investigation is completed a recommendation is made to the Chief of Police who is responsible for final disposition. The Citizens Complaint Commission automatically reviews each filing of citizen complaints resolved by Internal Affairs. The commission has its own investigators who act independently of the police department.

TORRANCE PD

The committee found brochures in the lobby of the station for filing citizen complaints. Posted signs indicated that a complainant must first speak with the Watch Commander. Officers indicated that this procedure allowed complaints to be screened to determine their validity. Officers indicated that they were in the process of revising their complaint forms and procedures. Following investigation of complaints by Internal Affairs, recommendations are made to the Police Chief who makes the final resolution of each complaint.

MANHATTAN BEACH PD

This department is currently in a temporary location while a new facility is being constructed. The Chief and a Captain explained the complaint process and made available all information regarding filing and resolution of complaints. The chief has final say in the resolution of investigations of citizen complaints. Complaint forms are available on the city web site. The committee was assured that once construction of the facility is complete forms and instructions will be available in the station.

FINDINGS

- Hermosa Beach PD and Torrance PD required that potential complainants talk with a police supervisor prior to receiving and or filing a complaint form
- Only the Long Beach PD has an independent review process for individuals who may feel the resolution of a complaint was unfair
- Three of the five agencies visited were in the process of reviewing and/or revising complaint procedures
- Manhattan Beach PD and Long Beach PD make complaint forms and procedures for filing available on the City web site
- Long Beach PD complaint forms and filing instructions are available in public libraries

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings, the committee makes the following recommendations:

- Torrance PD and Hermosa Beach PD should make citizen complaint forms and instructions for filing available to the general public without requiring the citizen to speak with an officer prior to receiving the forms and instructions
- The Hermosa Beach PD should establish lines of communication between shifts so that each officer responsible for investigating citizens complaints has access to the current status of each investigation
- Long Beach PD should make the general public more aware of the existence of the independent police commission and that it automatically reviews all citizens complaints resolved by Internal Affairs
- Many cities within Los Angeles County have established Independent Citizens Complaint Review Boards such as the Long Beach model, which has proven to be effective. Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, and Torrance should consider establishing a similar board
- Torrance PD, Hermosa Beach PD, Manhattan Beach PD, Redondo Beach PD, and Long Beach PD should identify and make sensitivity training a requirement for all officers, especially those who interact with the public in potentially volatile situations on a regular basis