

January 5, 2021

Feedback from Task Force member Pat Kernighan on RPSTF Phase I Recommendations

Re: “Reduce the Footprint of OPD”

- I agree that 911 calls for non-criminal or non-dangerous issues should be responded to by civilian staff, not sworn police officers. That civilian staff could be City employees or professionals from the County or other organizations. But sworn officers should not be “prohibited” from responding if the civilian first responder calls for help.
- Disagree that the resulting reduction in demand on officers’ time should first come out of patrol. Should reduce other police functions first, such as eliminate Internal Affairs and various desk jobs that could be done by civilians. Only when the response time for the calls needing a sworn officer calls comes down to a reasonable level should patrol staff be reduced. [Footnote: Oakland has highest number of violent crimes (as categorized by FBI) per officer than any city in the state/country.]
- I would support reducing the number of sworn officers only after the alternative response systems to 911 calls are functioning and actually reducing workload for officers. When that point comes, the number of officers could be reduced by attrition, (usually 60/year) but I would support keeping one police academy a year, producing 20 – 30 new officers. So the net loss per year would be 30 – 40 officers. Rationale for keeping one academies is getting more racial and gender diversity in the sworn ranks.
- Agree that Internal Affairs Division should be eliminated. Their work should be shifted to Oakland CPRA, NOT a private entity.
- The idea of merging 911 with the Fire Department dispatch or 311 could potentially be beneficial, but there are many practical issues to be sorted out before implementation. This change needs substantial research, including in-depth interviews with police dispatchers and fire dispatchers, the 311 staff and looking at models elsewhere in order to do this effectively and safely.
- I support having civilian staff do every job in OPD that does not require a sworn officer. I support civilians aiding in Criminal Investigations, various traffic enforcement and many other low level calls. The caveat is making sure that these jobs do not expose the civilian staff to undue risk of harm. Unfortunately, there is some risk of a violent incident in domestic calls, some moving violation traffic enforcement and even some mental illness calls. By consulting current practitioners in these subjects, I think this can be sorted out so that most of these calls can be handled by well-trained civilians. But if the civilian responder faces a

violent person that they can't handle, they need to be able to call for backup from an officer.

- I strongly support hiring more Police Service Technicians and Police Evidence Technicians. There is no need for a sworn officer to respond to a "cold call" burglary, for instance.

Alternative Responses and Reinvestments

- Definitely launch MACRO as soon as possible.
- I support the idea of a Community Emergency Response Network, as described. I also support having some of the 911 response being done by City and/or County employees. However, I seriously doubt that a savings of \$15,000,000 is going to materialize right away, for two reasons: 1. It will likely take about 12-24 months to put in place the alternative emergency responders, thus delaying the cut in workload for patrol and 2. The fiscal crisis due to the pandemic will mean that cuts don't necessarily result in a "surplus."
- Regardless of whether there are significant savings available from cuts to OPD, I strongly support actively seeking additional funding sources for both alternative response and community reinvestment. The County is clearly a key partner to be approached. I believe they already have some mental health staff accompanying OPD patrol officers on some calls. We need to find out the details and scope of this. The County will soon have new revenues from Measure W, which they promised would be targeted toward reducing homelessness and helping currently homeless people, as well as providing aid to mentally ill people.
- ***Regardless of funding availability, I believe it is imperative that the Task Force develop a robust list of specific suggestions of community reinvestments that should reduce violence and measurably contribute to the well-being of the residents in impacted neighborhoods. Ideally these proposals would be based on models that exist currently in Oakland and could be expanded or new programs from other cities that have shown results and could be replicated here.
- Having a well-researched and carefully considered list of community investments will serve to inspire the acquisition of funding, whether it be from OPD or elsewhere. It is important to get some of these programs up and running in order to inspire confidence among the public that non-police services can effectively reduce violence and serious crime.

Improvements to OPD

- I agree with all the draft recommendations to improve OPD.

- Further research is needed on how to re-invent the way they are trained during the Academy and to replace the current trainers and/or augment them with professionals in various subject areas. The trainers themselves need to have a different mindset than the current ones.
 - At some point, the Task Force should ask the officers what things they would like to change at OPD and what help they need to be successful. It is hard to impose change on an organization without getting some buy-in from the people who work there.
 - While I believe that the OPD culture needs to change substantially (including to eliminate the “us against the world” attitude), I also think that the officers need to be supported in a positive way so that they can feel appreciated for doing the job well and fairly. They presently feel reviled. While much criticism is warranted for past behaviors, we can’t expect them to change their mindset and develop a healthy relationship with the community they serve if we don’t treat them with some compassion and respect as well.
-