



# Citizens Police Oversight Commission

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Dear Interim Commissioner Stanford:

The Citizens Police Oversight Commission has conducted a policy analysis of the Philadelphia Police Department's response procedures for low-level non-emergency police reports. Attached you will find a general overview of the project, which contains a comprehensive policy review along with the following recommendations:

- 1. PPD should create a Non-Emergency Reporting Unit, reinstating telephone crime reporting and adopting an online crime reporting system. To reduce the burden on sworn personnel, PPD should utilize civilian hires to receive telephone and online crime reports.**
- 2. PPD should thoroughly review all priority 3, 4, and 6 calls to identify all calls that do not require a physical police response.**
- 3. If PPD accepts these recommendations, CPOC will be available to assist the department in their efforts to establish a new unit and publish progress reports for the public.**
- 4. Should a Non-Emergency Reporting Unit be implemented, CPOC will collect data and report on the unit's effectiveness.**

Due to increasing 911 wait times, high crime rates, and staffing shortages, CPOC is making these recommendations in effort to effectively divert a portion of calls from 911 and PPD Patrol Officers. Successful implementation of telephone and online reporting systems would allow the department to maximize its efficiency given its current staffing levels.

Through this proposed reform, PPD officers could respond to emergency calls for service sooner. Additionally, removing certain calls from an officer's workload provides them with more time to engage in thoughtful, proactive, community-oriented policing. PPD should consider the recommendations in this report as they seek to improve public safety in Philadelphia and better the PPD's relationship with communities citywide.

Sincerely,

Anthony Erace, Interim Executive Director, CPOC

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**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**  
**CITIZEN POLICE OVERSIGHT COMMISSION**  
**PPD POLICY RECOMMENDATION**



<b>Title:</b> Telephone and Online Reporting for Non-Emergency Police Reports	<b>Type of Report:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Final <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental
<b>Type of Report:</b> Policy and Practice Recommendation	<b>CPOC File Number:</b> 22-16

**I. Executive summary**

The City of Philadelphia lacks an efficient reporting process for citizens to file low-level non-emergency crime reports to the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD). Regardless of how low of a priority the reported crime is, citizens must call 911 and have a PPD officer dispatched to take their report in person. Given the staffing challenges facing the police department and 911 Dispatch, the current reporting system is not an efficient use of 911 resources or deployment of PPD personnel.

The PPD must explore proven methods that maximize production of its 911 call system and increase the efficiency of its sworn personnel. At a time when Philadelphia, like most American cities, is experiencing high crime rates, coupled with staffing shortages across the department, the PPD must find ways to position itself to better respond to calls for service, while proactively strengthening the relationship with Philadelphians who depend on the department's services.

CPOC is recommending PPD reinstate telephone reporting and adopt a system for citizens to file non-emergency police reports of certain crimes online. Allowing low-priority, non-emergency calls for service to be diverted from 911 and PPD Patrol Officers will allow the department to maximize its efficiency in responding to emergency calls for service, which can improve both public safety and community-police relations in Philadelphia.

Diverting as many calls as possible from a physical police response would allow patrol officers to respond to in-progress emergency calls faster and give them more free time on their shift to engage in proactive community-oriented police work. Furthermore, an efficient and accessible mechanism for residents to file low-level non-emergency crime reports will save them the frustration of calling 911 only to be subjected to long wait times for a police officer to arrive and take a report for a crime such as simple theft.

CPOC has conducted a policy project to explore best practices in taking non-emergency police reports. Additionally, CPOC examined the PPD's current reporting systems, and its previous use of a Differential Police Response Unit that allowed citizens to file police reports over the phone. CPOC reviewed other police departments' policies surrounding crime reporting to propose recommendations for which the PPD can allow citizens to safely and efficiently file certain crime reports.

Two in-depth case studies with the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) were integral to developing CPOC's recommendations. CPOC staff conducted interviews with both departments to understand how they operate their telephone and online reporting systems, as well as the impact both systems have had on their 911 call center and patrol operations. Both case studies are attached as appendices to this report.

**CPOC Non-Emergency Police Report Recommendations**

**1. CPOC Recommendation: PPD should create a Non-Emergency Reporting Unit, reinstating telephone crime reporting unit and adopting an online reporting system. To reduce the burden on sworn personnel, PPD should utilize civilian hires to receive telephone and online crime reports.**

Allowing Philadelphians to report various low-level non-emergency crimes online or over the phone could greatly benefit the PPD and its relationship with communities across Philadelphia. If properly implemented, the PPD could improve the efficiency of its 911 call system while providing patrol officers in understaffed districts more time to respond to emergency calls sooner or engage in proactive community-oriented police work.

**To maximize sworn personnel, the Department should focus on hiring civilians to staff a non-emergency reporting unit.**

Given the PPD's current staffing crisis, it is critical that any effort to reinstate telephone reporting and adopt online reporting focus on hiring permanent full-time civilian employees to receive and review these reports. Prioritizing civilian hires is possible due to the groundbreaking arbitration between the City of Philadelphia, the PPD, and the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 5, which allows the department to begin civilianizing roles previously held by sworn members of the department.<sup>1</sup>

Civilian employees may provide a cost-effective solution, as salaries, training, and equipment are comparatively less than sworn law enforcement officers. Civilian hires will not require expensive equipment such as firearms, body armor, or tasers.

Hiring civilians will also prevent PPD from detailing sworn members to another unit, which is crucial, as the department faces a critical staffing shortage in multiple units, to include its 911 dispatch center. Moving any sworn person to a telephone and online reporting unit will leave a vacancy somewhere else in the department. Regardless of how non-essential a vacancy may be, the PPD is not in any position to allow for reallocating sworn members to staff a new unit and will not be for some time given their current staffing levels.

While civilian staff will still require background checks to gain access to necessary police databases and training on accurately taking and reviewing police reports, these hires may allow for stability and sustainability in a non-emergency reporting unit. It is CPOC's stance that should the PPD attempt to reinstate their previous practice of using only sworn members on limited-duty status, they will have difficulty keeping the unit appropriately staffed, as members may be cleared for duty, suspended, or terminated at any given moment.

PPD could explore the possibility of utilizing a hybrid staffing model, like their 911 and Police Radio operations, utilizing sworn personnel for command and supervisory roles, allowing civilian hires to file police reports over the phone and review submitted online crime reports.

Through implementation of civilian staffed telephone and online police reporting systems, the PPD could do more with the fewer uniformed sworn officers it currently has. This will benefit the department as it continues its efforts to recruit more officers and ultimately maximize efficiency should the department fill the large number of vacancies in the future.

**PPD Must Conduct Additional Best Practices Research**

For PPD to launch a successful telephone and online reporting service, the department must conduct their own best practices research to determine the most efficient way to manage this service. It is important the department examine how they operated their previous Differential Police Response Unit (DPR) and

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<sup>1</sup> City of Philadelphia. (2022). City Announces Arbitration Award Allowing for Redeployment of Police Department Resources. <https://www.phila.gov/2022-11-15-city-announces-arbitration-award-allowing-for-redeployment-of-police-department-resources/>

compare that to successful telephone and online reporting efforts being conducted in peer police departments nationwide.

In researching this proposal, CPOC staff identified certain operating procedures that may have been a part of the previous DPR's low call volume. For instance, the previous DPR operated 24/7. This contrasts with many other departments' telephone reporting units. Both Baltimore and Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Departments stop taking reports at 11 pm. The Portland Police Department's TRU operates from 7 am to 8 pm and the DC Metro Police Department's TRU ceases operations at 5 pm. These departments utilize a voicemail system for callers who attempt to call in a report after operating hours. Citizens may leave a voicemail, call back the next day, or submit their report online.

Many departments do not see any benefit from staffing these units 24 hours a day as many of the incidents they are responsible for filing are not reported after midnight. This aligns with PPD command staff's anecdotal accounts of the former DPR only receiving one or no calls on the overnight shift.

It is a much more cost-efficient practice to only pay staff to work these reports on two shifts. If a citizen does call for a non-emergency police report after hours, they can either leave a voicemail or file their report online. If they call 911 instead, 911 can direct them to the telephone reporting unit to leave a voicemail.

Additional issues such as a lack of effective outreach efforts to inform citizens of the previous DPR was another concern CPOC identified as leading to the DPR's ineffectiveness. Although citizens can still call and be transferred to DPR from 911, providing them the ability to dial DPR directly can ultimately reduce the overall call volume for 911. Baltimore BP for example, conducts regular outreach using social media, news outlets, and community meetings, to inform citizens they can call their Telephone Reporting Unit (TRU) directly. Additionally, the BPD has the non-emergency number for the TRU posted on all their vehicles along with 911.

Furthermore, a proper workload assessment must be conducted of PPD's 911 call system to best determine proper staffing needed to operate a potential telephone and online reporting unit.

## **CPOC Assistance**

Should the PPD decide to conduct an implementation assessment and plan, CPOC staff would assist in these efforts. CPOC's expertise comes at no cost to PPD's operating budget, or at the expense of the department's time and resources. Furthermore, any successful collaboration between CPOC and PPD will only strengthen the relationship between both agencies, which can have positive impacts on the PPD's relationship with Philadelphia communities.

### **2. CPOC Recommendation: PPD should thoroughly review all priority 3, 4, and 6 calls to identify all calls that do not require a physical police response.**

The DPR's former operating framework of accepting all priority 6 calls outside of 'stolen car' should be reviewed to determine if other crimes that could be effectively reported without physically dispatching a police officer could be added to the new non-emergency reporting list. While all priority 1 and 2 calls for service should warrant an immediate police response, there may be multiple calls that are listed priority 3 or 4 that the department did not identify as reportable through the DPR.

PPD should conduct a comprehensive analysis of all priority 3 and 4 calls and identify which calls could justify alternative police response. The more calls the PPD can safely divert from dispatching overburdened patrol officers, the more effective this effort will be. CPOC would be available to assist the PPD in analyzing 911 calls to identify additional incidences that may be routed to telephone and online reporting.

### **3. If PPD accepts these recommendations, CPOC will be available to assist the department in their efforts to establish a new unit and publish progress reports to the public.**

PPD will provide updates to CPOC on the research, design, and implementation plans regarding telephone or online reporting systems. CPOC will work with PPD command staff on the department's progress in building this new service and will be informed if the department encounters any barriers or delays. As CPOC gathers this information, it will provide regular reports to the public to keep them informed as department's progress in implementation.

#### **4. Should a Non-Emergency Reporting Unit be implemented, CPOC will collect call data and report on the unit's effectiveness.**

Accurate data collection and analysis is essential for CPOC and PPD to be able to produce reports to Philadelphia residents, allowing them to be informed on the most up to date information regarding policing in their communities.

CPOC will be responsible for building a comprehensive data collection platform for CPOC and PPD to capture data related to non-emergency reporting. This instrument will be freely used by PPD, 911/Police Radio, and CPOC moving forward, to provide both internal and external data reporting to inform policy and practice of the department, while enhancing the PPD's commitment to transparency. Once this data is collected, CPOC will analyze it and produce reports to detail the findings and assess operational efficiency. These reports will be made available to the public through CPOC's website.

## **II. Background**

For decades, police departments across the country have faced the pressing issue of developing an efficient, user friendly process for citizens to file police reports for non-emergency crimes that do not require physical police response. Calls for police service for such low-level crimes as theft or car break ins have little to no chance of a suspect being apprehended and charged by a jurisdiction's district attorney's office. Because of this, many police departments have determined that sending a police officer to physically take these kinds of police reports is not an efficient deployment of resources.

Departments have adopted differential police responses such as telephone and online crime reporting to allow citizens to file their reports. These processes allow patrol officers to remain in their district to respond faster to emergency calls for service or engage in proactive community-oriented policing. Today, citizens in cities across the country such as Washington DC, Baltimore, Portland Oregon, Charlotte, and Seattle can file non-emergency low-level police reports over the phone or online through their police department's website. The PPD did operate a unit that filed police reports via telephone but disbanded the unit in 2017.

### **Current PPD Non-Emergency Response Practices**

When the PPD receives 911 calls for service, they dispatch a patrol officer to take the police report from the citizen in person. Unless the call is deemed routable to 311 (i.e., broken fire hydrants or graffiti), callers must wait for a police officer to come and take their report. The only call for which PPD will not dispatch an available officer to is for a minor car accident with no reported injuries, as these calls must be reported in person at the district of occurrence.

After a 911 call is answered and screened, an officer is dispatched to respond to the call. Calls are prioritized in the following order based on the call's urgency<sup>2</sup>:

- Priority 1 – Highest priority (e.g., in-progress violent crimes and emergencies)
- Priority 2 – High priority incidents (e.g., domestic situations or car accidents with reported injuries)

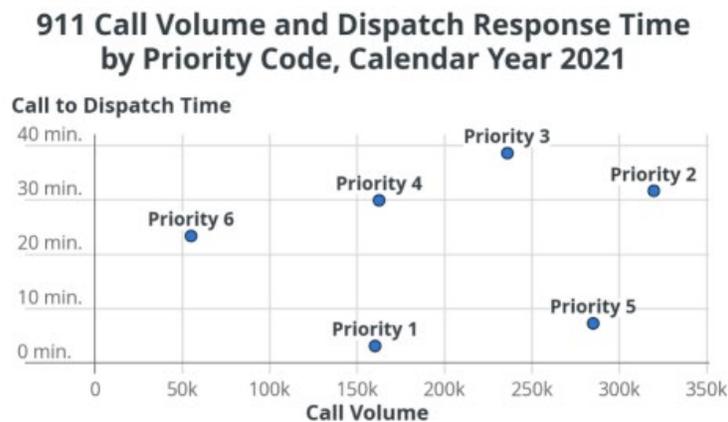
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<sup>2</sup> City of Philadelphia, Office of the Controller (2022) *Review and Analysis of the Philadelphia Police Department and Other Related Police Spending*. <https://controller.phila.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/PPD-Review-Final.pdf>

- Priority 3 – Incidents such as burglar alarms
- Priority 4 – Incidents such as illegal parking or noise complaints
- Priority 5 – Incidents in which patrol officers reactively engage in encounters such as car or pedestrian stops; officers will notify 911 when occupied with a priority 5 call.
- Priority 6 – Low-level, non-emergency, not in-progress incidents (i.e., graffiti or vandalism)

## 911 Dispatch Times & Call Volume

The following chart, taken from a recent report from the City of Philadelphia’s Office of the Controller, shows the citywide call to dispatch time for 911 calls by priority for all 911 calls in 2021.<sup>3</sup>



While priority 6 calls average 25 minutes to be dispatched citywide, 18 of PPD’s 22 Patrol Districts reported above average wait times for priority 6 calls to be dispatched within their District. Eight of these Districts reported dispatch times above 45 minutes, five of them reported wait times over an hour for these calls to be dispatched to available officers.

Regarding wait times, it is important to note that the time to dispatch is not the total response time for an officer to arrive at the scene to take a report. Once dispatched, the officer must travel to the scene to meet the caller. According to the Controller’s report, the total response time for priority 1 calls averaged 8 minutes and 43 seconds. This is a longer response time than other cities such as New York, Miami, San Francisco, and Houston.

In 2022 the City received approximately 2.4 million 911 calls. Of those calls 194,492 were tagged priority 1. Priorities 2, 3, and 4 calls accounted for the majority of total 911 calls, while 911 received 77,469 priority 6 calls in 2022. If the PPD could divert these priority 6 calls from physical police response and identify other priority 3 and 4 calls that may not require physical response, they may allow for faster police response to emergency calls for service.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that PPD’s 911 call center is significantly understaffed. According to PPD command staff, as of December 2022, the PPD is approximately short 78 of their 352 allocated positions for 911 call operators. Creating an efficient system for crimes to be reported online may allow 911 operators better capacity to prioritize answering and dispatching officers to higher priority calls for service.

Significant wait times for such low-priority calls may create a barrier to citizens who wish to file a police report for these crimes but may not have the time to wait for an officer to be dispatched to take a report.

<sup>3</sup>City of Philadelphia, Office of the Controller (2022) *Review and Analysis of the Philadelphia Police Department and Other Related Police Spending*. <https://controller.phila.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/PPD-Review-Final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Data provided by the Philadelphia Police Department.

These factors may deter some citizens from filing a report altogether, which not only skews crime statistics but more importantly further strains the relationship between the PPD and Philadelphia residents, particularly those in patrol districts with documented longer 911 dispatch times.

Allowing these reports to be filed online or over the telephone at the citizen's convenience may greatly improve their perception of the PPD, provide better service to residents, and improve the department's relationship with the community.

### **III. Telephone and Online Reporting Units**

#### **Telephone Reporting**

For decades, law enforcement agencies nationwide have adopted telephone reporting to improve efficiency and community relations. The practice was first introduced in 1980 during a National Institute of Justice led program in three cities (Garden Grove, CA, Greensboro, NC, and Toledo, OH) that tested alternative ways police departments could receive reports. The program proved successful, reducing patrol officer's workload by one-fifth and 90% of residents surveyed reported satisfaction with alternative police responses. Furthermore, the study found these departments were able to field as many as 45% of their reports over the phone.<sup>5</sup>

Telephone reporting has since become a common practice for law enforcement agencies across the country. In 2000, a Department of Justice (DOJ) survey of 467 police departments reported 56% of all agencies had a Telephone Reporting Unit (TRU) in operation. Of those agencies surveyed with a population of more than 250,000 people, 93% reported an operational Telephone Reporting Unit (TRU).<sup>6</sup>

By 2011 the Portland Police Department's TRU fielded approximately 3,700 calls monthly and the Rockford, IL Police Department took 25% of its reports over the phone.<sup>7</sup> In 2014, 61% of police departments surveyed by the DOJ reported they projected to increase their use of telephone reporting in the next two years.<sup>8</sup>

#### **TRU operations**

Telephone Reporting Units typically operate during fixed hours (e.g., 7 AM – 11 PM) seven days a week. These units allow residents to call in and report low-level non-emergency crimes that are not in-progress and there is no offender information, so the chances of an offender being apprehended at the scene are very low. Oftentimes, these reports are being filed solely for the purpose of a citizen needing the report for their insurance company.

TRUs receive calls by residents calling them on a direct number or they can receive calls transferred from 911 and 311. Depending on the jurisdiction, if a 911 or 311 operator determine a call for service should be forwarded to the TRU, the caller may remain on the line while they are transferred, or the caller's information will be passed along to the TRU, who will call them back after the operator hangs up the phone. TRUs are often situated within a department's 911 and radio operations. This is due to the

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<sup>5</sup> Kennedy. David. (1993). *The Strategic Management of Police Resources*. Perspectives on Policing. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/139565.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing. (2003). *Call Management and Community Policing: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement*. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/call-management-and-community-policing-guidebook-law-enforcement>

<sup>7</sup> Wilson. Jeremy. M. & Weiss. Alexander. (2014). *A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation*. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/ric/Publications/cops-p247-pub.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing. (2014). *Future Trends in Policing*. [https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free\\_Online\\_Documents/Leadership/future%20trends%20in%20policing%202014.pdf](https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Leadership/future%20trends%20in%20policing%202014.pdf)

frequent interactions with 911, as well as regular use of the same technologies such as Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems.

### **TRU staffing**

TRUs can be staffed by sworn officers, civilians, or a mix of both. Staffing a TRU with sworn officers allows a department to rotate officers in and out of the unit while they are on limited-duty status due to medical concerns or are pending discipline. Using sworn members to staff these units provides two benefits: the first being that the department does not need to hire any new personnel, which can be time-consuming. The second benefit is that sworn officers are already trained in fielding police reports so little additional training is necessary.

Unfortunately, limited-duty sworn officers can be cleared to return to full-duty status at any time, which can disrupt staffing.

By staffing a TRU with civilian call takers, departments can permanently fill these positions. Because civilians typically have lower salaries, fringe benefits, and do not require costly training and protective equipment, using civilian call takers can save a department money. The primary drawback to hiring civilians is that they will require training before they are ready to begin fielding police reports and will still require extensive background checks and clearances to be allowed access to police databases. Depending on a department's budget and hiring processes, they may determine staffing a telephone reporting unit in a hybrid model of both sworn personnel and civilians to be the most effective method to properly run a TRU. Often, sworn personnel serve as supervisors and commanders of these units, while civilians serve as call takers.

### **Online Reporting**

Online reporting has grown tremendously over the past 20 years. In a survey conducted in 2000, just 6% of police departments across the country reported the use of online reporting, with San Jose Police recording 25-30 reports daily.<sup>9</sup> In 2014, 82% of police departments surveyed by the DOJ reported they anticipated increasing their department's use of online crime reporting over the next two years.<sup>10</sup> In 2016 LexisNexis, which provides online police reporting software to law enforcement agencies recorded 875,000 online reports submitted by over 400 police departments across the country.<sup>11</sup>

With online reporting, residents can file police reports for certain crimes 24/7. When a report is submitted through a department's website, it will go to personnel within the department to review the report for validity. Many of the same reports that a department's TRU can receive may also be reported online. If the report is not valid (say the reviewer determines someone reported their crime as a larceny, but the dollar amount elevates the crime to a different code, or the circumstances warrant a robbery report) the resident will receive an email notifying them that their report was rejected (e.g., attempting to report a crime that did not occur within a police department's jurisdiction, etc.). If a report is rejected it is up to the resident to follow up and attempt to report it via 911.

If a report is accepted by the reviewer, the subject will get a notification via email that allows them to receive a copy of their police report. Accepted reports will then be uploaded to the department's case management system and sent to the department's records department. Jurisdictions that have both online

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing. (2003). *Call Management and Community Policing: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement*. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/call-management-and-community-policing-guidebook-law-enforcement>

<sup>10</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing. (2014). *Future Trends in Policing*. [https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free\\_Online\\_Documents/Leadership/future%20trends%20in%20policing%202014.pdf](https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Leadership/future%20trends%20in%20policing%202014.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Burkhammer, Randy. & Marler, Roy. (2017). *Beyond Cost Savings: Online Community Reporting Tools Forge Stronger Community Bonds*. The Police Chief. <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/technology-talk-beyond-cost-savings/>

and telephone reporting systems can combine both into the same unit and have their personnel monitor both systems.

Online reporting has the potential to allow a department to track statistics more accurately for the crimes residents can report online. Online crime reporting software such as LexisNexis allow departments to easily run reports on all crimes reported through a department's website.

### **Possible Concerns of Telephone and Online Reporting**

One primary concern with telephone or online reporting is a potential for false reports being filed since a police officer is not physically present to take the report. While this is a valid concern it should be noted that no published articles reviewed or researched regarding telephone or online reporting systems have shown false reporting to be a problem. Furthermore, interviews with multiple police departments, as well as PPD command staff that used to oversee the PPD's previous Differential Police Response Unit have said there were no proven significant issues with false reports.

Departments may also be concerned that reports may be recorded improperly by a civilian or sworn officer due to them not being present to have eyes on the scene. For instance, a person reporting vandalism to their car may not properly describe the extent and location of the damage to the vehicle. Because the person taking the report is not there to see the vehicle, they are only documenting what is told to them over the telephone. This issue can be prevented through proper training of personnel who are taking reports to ensure they're asking questions properly to document the incident correctly. Additionally, online crime reporting allows citizens to upload photos to their report if they have them.

Accessibility is a valid concern regarding the use of online reporting, however, a survey conducted in 2021 by the City of Philadelphia's Office of Innovation and Technology reported that 84% of all Philadelphia households have broadband internet access. The City survey also found that 81% of Philadelphia households have a desktop, laptop, or tablet.<sup>12</sup> For the remaining 16% of Philadelphians who do not have access to the internet, telephone or in person reports remain an option. If the citizen is able, the Free Library of Philadelphia has over 50 locations that would allow them to access a computer to file a report online as well.

Departments may be worried about potentially recording reports that are outside of their jurisdiction. Online reporting software can be formatted to not allow a report to be submitted without valid addresses attached to the report. Department staff reviewing submitted reports can also be trained to identify and reject any reports they determine not to have occurred within the department's jurisdiction.

Security may be a concern regarding online reporting; however, it should be noted that police reports are typically public information. Furthermore, the types of crimes being reported online are typically for incidents where there is no offender information. Online reporting software also provide secure links for departments to take reports.

### **IV. PPD's Former Differential Police Response Unit**

The PPD had a unit assigned to field police reports via telephone known as the Differential Police Response (DPR) Unit. CPOC staff conducted multiple interviews with various PPD command staff, who provided the following information regarding the DPR.

The DPR was designed with the goal of alleviating non-emergency calls that are not in-progress from Patrol, 911, and Police Radio. The unit was disbanded in 2017 due to ineffectiveness, which lead PPD command staff to feel the unit was not worth allocating department funds to keep running.

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<sup>12</sup> Gross, Page. (2021). *Philly Broadband Survey: 84 Percent of Homes Have High-Speed Internet, Up From 70 in 2019*. WHY?Y. <https://why.org/articles/philly-broadband-survey-84-percent-of-homes-have-high-speed-internet-up-from-70-in-2019/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20about%2084%25%20of%20Philadelphia%20households%20have%20broadband%20access.>

The DPR was under command of Police Radio and fielded police reports by Philadelphia residents for various calls for service. Calls were screened and forwarded to DPR by 911 operators. The DPR utilized a callback service where 911 operators would inform callers that their complaint was being forwarded to DPR who would immediately call them back to file their report. PPD confirmed that the department does not have any data on how soon the DPR operators would call a complainant back but have anecdotally stated that given the unit's previous low call volume that average times to call back would not have been more than a few minutes.

DPR completed reports for all priority 6 calls except for stolen auto calls that occurred in Philadelphia. Quality of life calls for fire hydrant issues and graffiti complaints were previously reportable through DPR but are now made reportable through 311.

PPD command staff have confirmed that they do not have any data on how many calls were received by the DPR or how many police reports DPR staff completed when the unit was last in operation.

The PPD did confirm that in 2016, the unit's last full year in operation, the PPD received 25,162 priority 6 calls not including stolen vehicle calls. While PPD cannot confirm all these calls were in fact received by the DPR, they have confirmed that these calls were eligible for DPR service.

DPR personnel would receive the call and complete an incident report (75-48) for the complainant. Reports were then submitted to the Reports Control Unit where complainants could formally request their copy after paying the required \$25 fee. If an operator determined a report required further investigation by the Detective Division of occurrence, DPR personnel would complete the request for investigation (75-49) and submit it to the Division.

The unit operated 24/7 and was staffed with both sworn and civilian personnel that were on limited-duty due to medical reasons or pending behavioral discipline.

**The DPR filed reports for the following not in-progress crimes:**

- Graffiti (except religious institutions, schools, or City property)
- Harassment complaints
- Fire hydrant assignments
- Landlord/tenant disputes
- Lost/missing property
- Neighbor disputes
- Attempted vehicle thefts
- Barking dog
- Animal complaint (except vicious dogs)
- Short dumping
- Dog bites (not hospital cases)
- Vandalism/destruction of property (except religious institutions, schools, or City property)
- Theft under \$10,000
- Vendor complaints
- Lost/stolen vehicle tags
- Narcotics sales (inside building)
- Other complaints not requiring a police officer

**The following incidents that happened inside Philadelphia but reported outside of Philadelphia by non-residents would be filed by the DPR:**

- Stolen vehicle
- Motel/hotel burglaries
- Fraud

- Theft over \$10,000

### **Concerns with the former DPR**

PPD stated the primary reason for disbanding the DPR was a lack of call volume across all shifts. According to PPD, the unit typically only fielded approximately 7 calls during the 4 pm – 12 am shift, which was the unit's busiest shift. Overnight shifts typically received 1 call the entire night. Because of this, the department ultimately decided it was no longer worth funding this unit and decided to reassign the personnel that were in the DPR so they could better serve the Department.

According to PPD, another reason the DPR was less effective stemmed from the unit being primarily made up of sworn officers on limited-duty status, specifically due to active Internal Affairs investigations or pending discipline for alleged misconduct. These officers were typically less motivated to work and were often disgruntled, requiring stronger supervision.

There is no policy or union agreement that states an officer who is on limited-duty status because of an injury to stay in their assigned district or unit until they can return to duty. However, if an officer on limited-duty status for this reason is a good officer who is well respected by their supervisors, their supervisors and Commanding Officers will usually request they remain in their district, completing administrative work until they are cleared for duty. This typically led to only those officers under investigation or facing discipline to be available for DPR work.

PPD command staff speculated another potential reason the DPR did not receive many calls was because certain calls such as broken fire hydrants, graffiti (not school, religious institutions, or government property), and abandoned auto were made reportable through 311. While 311 does receive these reports and forwards them to the PPD for follow up and records keeping, the PPD was only responsible for 315,305 service requests by 311 from December 2014 to February 2023, or approximately 28,000 requests per year.<sup>13</sup>

### **Costs of Former DPR**

PPD confirmed they do not have a budget for how much funding the PPD utilized to operate the DPR during its last year in operation. The only figure available was \$96,000 the unit cost Police Radio in overtime in 2016. This overtime specifically came for supervisors that were pulled from other parts of Police Radio to supervise the DPR when DPR's full-time supervisors had scheduled days off.

## **V. Conclusion**

At a time when PPD and its 911 call system face a critical staffing crisis the city remains besieged by gun violence and other violent crimes. When PPD is receiving more calls for the lowest priority crimes (priorities 4 and 6) than the highest priority emergency calls (priorities 1 and 2), it is imperative that the department works to remove as many low priority calls for service from PPD's limited Patrol Officers.

PPD must work to implement systems that will improve the department's efficiency for residents of Philadelphia. It is critical that the department engage in as many reforms as possible to maximize efficiency with the limited personnel it has, as the current staffing crisis has no short-term end in sight. PPD should not delay improvements to its services at the cost of public safety or its relationship with the public.

Allowing citizens to file a report over the phone or online provides better service for many incidents. This way, the citizen can file a report on their own time, saving them long wait times that can eclipse an hour in certain districts. It should be reinforced that many of these crimes have a very low likelihood of solvability and oftentimes the person is only filing the report for insurance purposes. Because of this,

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<sup>13</sup> City of Philadelphia. <https://data.phila.gov/visualizations/311-requests/>

CPOC is confident that keeping patrol officers from responding to these reports may allow them to spend more time proactively patrolling or engaging in community-oriented policing efforts that may in turn have a better impact on preventing such low-level crimes within their districts.

CPOC recognizes that citizens may still dial 911 more than a direct line to a non-emergency police line, regardless of how much outreach the department does. CPOC believes that given the current long wait times for these calls, it will still be faster for 911 to transfer the call service to a non-emergency operator, ultimately increasing their capacity to handle emergency calls for service more efficiently, as opposed to completing the call and seeing through the dispatch process.

An operational civilian-staffed telephone and online reporting system is necessary to maximize police efficiency, improve public safety, and strengthen community-police relations. These reporting systems have proven successful in other jurisdictions over the past few decades in improving police services in patrol and dispatch, and departments across the country utilize these methods to better serve their communities. At a time when the PPD is facing crucial staffing challenges, removing the lowest priority calls from 911 and Patrol may greatly benefit the department and Philadelphia communities and should be prioritized by the department to improve services for all Philadelphians.

## **Appendix A: Baltimore Police Department Case Study**

The Baltimore Police Department has an operational TRU and allows residents to file certain low-level non-emergency police reports online. The BPD implemented its Telephone Reporting Unit in 2013 with the intention of diverting low-level calls away from 911, police radio, and patrol in effort to improve police response times for serious emergency calls for service. The TRU and online crime reporting are part of the BPD's Strategic Management & Alternative Response Tactics (SMART), which aims to improve the BPD's efficiency in responding to calls for service to better physical response and police services from patrol officers.

### **Telephone Reporting Unit**

The BPD's TRU operates 7 days a week from 6 AM to 11 PM in two separate shifts. If residents call outside of business hours, they can leave a voicemail and receive a call back from a TRU operator the next day.

In the TRU's first year of operation the unit received 809,579 calls for service. From July 1, 2022, to September 12, 2022, the TRU received 31,000 calls. Of those calls only 815 have been deemed not TRU appropriate and routed to patrol.

The TRU receives calls for service that:

- Are not in progress or just recently occurred within the past 30 minutes
- Non-emergency
- No injury or threat present
- Not domestic related
- Very little to no offender information

The following crimes are authorized to be reported to the TRU:

- Auto accidents that do not require a tow, no injuries reported, and/or do not involve a government vehicle
- Civil matters
- Destruction of property
- False Pretense
- Hit and run with no identifying striking vehicle information
- Lost property
- Larceny
- Larceny from auto
- Nuisance complaints (excluding parking complaints involving blocked driveways and handicapped spaces)
- Out of jurisdiction
- Stolen auto where no citation is necessary
- 911 no voice calls where confidence that no emergency exists

### **Staffing**

BPD staffs their TRU with sworn officers that are on limited-duty status who rotate in and out of the unit as they are cleared to return to full-duty. The unit has five sergeants that are permanently assigned to supervise the unit. Because officers rotate in and out of the unit, the actual number of personnel can fluctuate. When the unit first became operational in 2013, it had 12 sworn officers assigned to take calls. Currently, the TRU averages 26 sworn officers assigned to receive police reports via telephone. The five supervisors and 26 officers cover both shifts 7 days a week.

The BPD is currently seeking to expand their TRU's call taking capacities by hiring additional permanent full-time civilian call takers. The department has recently received funding to hire and train 12 civilians.

Once hired, civilian call takers will need to be trained in taking BPD police reports, along with how to operate all necessary law enforcement databases.

### **TRU call cycle**

The TRU can receive calls from 911 and 311. TRU personnel monitor the 911 Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system to identify calls that they may request from 911. Residents may also call the TRU directly through a telephone number that is advertised on all BPD platforms. If a 911 or 311 operator determines a call is appropriate for the TRU's response, they will inform the caller that the operator will be sending their information to the TRU and the caller will receive a call back from a TRU member who will then take their report.

While callback time can vary, BPD command staff reported an average callback time of 25 minutes. Once TRU receives a call for service from 911 or 311, the operator will make three consecutive attempts to call the resident back to take their report. If the caller does not answer any of the TRU's calls, the call will then be sent to patrol and an officer will be dispatched.

TRU personnel have the capability to route calls back out to patrol if they determine at any point during the call that the call warrants immediate police response. This may occur for various circumstances such as a resident reports a larceny, but during the call the TRU operator determines the call to be a robbery, or an operator receives a call for a minor car accident where the TRU call taker determines a tow may be required, or suspects injuries may exist.

TRU operators will take the citizens police report, uploading them directly into the BPD's Axon police report system. Once the report is approved by a supervisor it will be forwarded to the BPD's Records Management Division. If the citizen provides a valid email address, they will also receive a copy of their report once it is approved by a TRU supervisor, typically occurring at the end of each shift.

If applicable, when a caller is on the phone with a TRU operator, they can receive a link via text message that will allow them to submit relevant photos or videos to their report.

The TRU does have a direct phone number that citizens can call to bypass a transfer from 911. BPD has done and continues to do extensive outreach to let the public know they do not have to call 911 at all. Despite this, BPD TRU command staff confirmed that most of their calls are still transferred to 911.

### **TRU reception and expansion**

When the TRU began operations, it was staffed with approximately 12 officers to cover both shifts 7 days a week. This led to concerns from command staff within the BPD's Patrol Districts regarding the high volume of calls that sometimes would be routed back to patrol. This was a result of the demand for non-emergency calls being higher than the initial TRU staffing levels could manage.

Because the TRU was receiving so many calls, it did not have the capacity to field them in a timely manner, leading the calls to be routed back to patrol. This led the BPD to expand staffing to its current levels, where it is still in the process of expanding through the use of permanent civilian hires.

Originally, if a citizen called 911 to report a crime that could be done through the TRU or online, 911 operators would allow the resident to choose to be forwarded to the TRU or still wait and have an officer be dispatched in person to take their report. However, to maximize the BPD's efficiency, citizens may no longer opt to have an officer physically dispatched. 911 operators will instruct the citizen to either file their report online or receive a TRU callback.

### **BPD online reporting**

The BPD has been utilizing online reporting since 2012. The BPD uses LexisNexis Desk Officer Reporting System software to allow residents to report certain non-emergency crimes through a secure

portal on the BPD's website. Using the LexisNexis software, residents may report the following incidents online:

- Hit and run
- Illegal dumping
- Lost property
- Theft
- Theft from vehicle
- Vandalism to property
- Vandalism to vehicle

Throughout 2022, the BPD received 5,372 online crime reports. Of those reports 1,000 were rejected. The most reported crimes were larceny, followed by hit and runs. Just on the first day of 2023 the department received 180 police reports online.

BPD staff have stated that LexisNexis as a vendor offers a wide variety of crimes that can be securely reported through their system and allows their software to be customizable to the specific needs of the department.

The only significant issue reported with LexisNexis use for the BPD occurred when the department made a move from using paper police reports, to digital police reports through Axon. BPD staff stated that when this occurred, there were some difficulties in transferring certain datapoints, however, LexisNexis support staff were very prompt and worked with BPD and the City of Baltimore's IT Department to rectify the issue.

### **Costs and Savings**

The BPD spends \$27,000 annually on their LexisNexis contract. BPD staff reported no significant issues with LexisNexis as a service provider and the staff stated that LexisNexis personnel are always available to assist with any requests by the BPD.

Using online crime reporting, the BPD has saved 8,058 hours of officer time. Furthermore, the department has saved \$268,600, which is almost 10 times the amount the department spends on their vendor contract. On January 1, 2023, the year-to-date total savings through online reporting was \$9,000.

### **Reporting Process**

When a resident submits a police report online, it is reviewed by civilian personnel within the BPD Records Division. BPD command staff stated a report submitted online will be reviewed within 24 hours on average.

The LexisNexis software will not allow a report to be submitted unless it is completed in its entirety. To deter reports from being rejected, the first page of the online report clearly states when to call 911 in red letters, as opposed to filing the report online. For instance, both options to report theft and theft from vehicle incidents have the following disclaimer:

**THEFT DOES NOT INCLUDE INCIDENTS WHERE YOU HAD PERSONAL CONTACT WITH THE PERSON WHO TOOK YOUR PROPERTY.**

**If you had personal contact with the person who took your property call 911.**

As a resident continues with their online report, answers to the questions on the report may generate similar notifications to let them know they cannot file the report online and must dial 911. For instance, if reporting a hit and run online, if a resident answers yes to the questions "were there personal injuries as a result of this incident," or "are there known witnesses or camera footage that would identify a suspect," the following notification appears in red:

You are not authorized to submit your report online. If this is an emergency call 911. For a non-emergency you may call 311.

Once a submitted report has been reviewed, the complainant will be notified via email if their report was approved or rejected by the department. If the report is rejected, (for example if the location of the incident did not occur within BPD jurisdiction), it is up to the complainant to call 911 and report their crime.

If the report is accepted, the reviewer will then upload the police report into the BPD Axon system for it to be submitted to the Records Division. The complainant will be emailed a copy of their police report from Axon.

Multiple interviews were conducted with BPD command staff from both the TRU and Online Reporting. All staff were asked if there were any issues in which false reports were filed through either method of reporting. No BPD staff member indicated any significant issue with false reporting through these methods.

### **Appendix B: Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department Case Study**

The CMPD's Non-Emergency Police Services (NEPS) manages telephone and online reporting systems for Charlotte residents to report non-emergency low-level offenses that do not require dispatching a sworn patrol officer. The NEPS was founded in 1998, originally only utilizing telephone reporting, beginning online reporting in 2005. CMPD has seen an increase in online crime reports specifically over the past four years. Department staff stated they do not have an official cause for this increase but would attribute this trend in part to factors such as cultural shifts away from in-person and telephone communication toward text and other digital forms of communication. This may have further been driven by the covid pandemic in 2020.

Prior to the unit's creation in 1998, the CMPD still utilized telephone reporting through a disbanded Expeditors Unit that took telephone reports. The former Expeditors Unit was staffed with sworn officers that were on limited-duty status. Through disbanding the Expeditors Unit and creating the civilian staffed NEPS, CMPD was able to expand their use of telephone reporting for Charlotte citizens.

The NEPS completes the following police reports over the telephone:

- Theft from storage/utility shed or detached garage
- Financial identity fraud
- Fraud
- Indecent exposure
- Simple assault (not domestic related)
- Someone you know took your vehicle
- Theft from vehicle
- Damage to property
- Stolen property
- Harassing telephone calls
- Communicating threats
- Lost driver's license or passport
- Receipt of a worthless check over \$2,000
- Add information to an existing police report

Charlotte residents can file the following police reports online:

- Theft from vehicle
- Damage to property
- Stolen property
- Harassing telephone calls

- Communicating threats
- Lost driver's license or passport

The NEPS operates 2 shifts 7 days a week from 7 AM to 11 PM. The unit receives approximately 15,000 calls and 765 online reports each month. In 2022 the unit received 118,208 calls from Charlotte citizens.

### **Staffing**

CMPD staffs the NEPS entirely with civilian technicians, supervisors, and managers. The unit has 18 technicians, four supervisors, and a unit manager. Each shift operates with a supervisor and four to five technicians on each shift.

Because civilian NEPS personnel have lower salary ranges than sworn personnel at all levels, CMPD spends less staffing the NEPS with all civilian staff. Comparing salary ranges for entry level CMPD police officers and civilian NEPS technicians, the CMPD saves approximately \$16,000 per technician.

### **Telephone reporting**

The NEPS receives calls through 311 operators between 7 AM and 7 PM. If someone calls 311 to file a police report between 7 PM and 11 PM they may connect to NEPS through 311's automated answering service. Calls after 11 PM can still connect to an NEPS answering machine where they can leave a voicemail for a call back during the next day.

When a citizen calls 311 to submit a non-emergency police report, they are placed on hold until a NEPS technician can answer their call. The average time for a resident to remain on hold for a technician is 4 minutes and 50 seconds. If the caller hangs up while on hold the call is considered abandoned and NEPS technicians will not call the complainant back. The NEPS averages approximately 24% abandonment of calls.

NEPS may also receive calls transferred from 911 in the event residents call 911 for incidents that fall within the NEPS' jurisdiction. NEPS technicians may also transfer calls to 911 and CMPD Patrol Operations if calls warrant immediate police response.

Certain calls such as larceny or communicating threats are sent to patrol for follow up investigations after the reports are filed by the NEPS. Technicians complete police reports over the phone which are filed directly into the CMPD's Knowledge Based Community Oriented Policing (KBCOPS) case management system.

Once a report is completed by a technician in KBCOPS and approved by a supervisor, the report is available for the complainant to receive a copy. If the complainant provides a valid email address, they will receive a copy of their report immediately from KBCOPS once approved. If they prefer, they can pick their report up in person at CMPD's Records Management Division.

### **Online reporting**

CMPD uses LexisNexis software for residents to file police reports through the department's website 24/7. The department began using Cop Logic (bought out by LexisNexis in 2014) as their vendor in 2010.

Prior to securing an outside vendor, CMPD used an in-house system that allowed citizens to file reports through the CMPD's website, which were emailed to NEPS technicians. This system soon became unsustainable for the department's IT office to maintain in-house, and the department began to look for an outside vendor in 2008.

One benefit of Cop Logic(now LexisNexis system) is a cloud-based storage of reports filed online. This saves CMPD resources from needing large amounts of storage for reports filed by citizens.

After securing a contract and developing their system through Cop Logic, CMPD began their initial rollout of the online crime reporting system in November 2009 with a full citywide implementation in February 2010.

CMPD's initial contract fee when the contract was initially secured was \$33,000, with annual maintenance fees of \$6,000. Currently, the department pays \$13,000 each year in maintenance fees to LexisNexis.

CMPD staff stated that throughout their time using LexisNexis, they have encountered no significant issues with them as a vendor and they have yet to look for another vendor to source their crime reports. CMPD personnel stated that LexisNexis support staff is always available to assist in creating templates for new crimes to be reported online. LexisNexis staff were reported to be very helpful in facilitating seamless imports of reports from CMPD's website into KBCOPS, reducing the potential for error by NEPS staff if they were to manually upload an accepted report.

When reports are filed, they are reviewed by the NEPS technicians. The NEPS typically reviews online reports within 72 hours.

Much like the BPD's system, if the report is rejected by NEPS, the complainant receives an email notification explaining why their report was not accepted and the onus is on the complainant to follow up with 911 to report their crime. If a report cannot be accepted due to certain factors such as certain information is missing or the technician needs something clarified, NEPS technicians will attempt to call the complainant to follow up and complete the report. If the report is accepted, the technician will upload the report in KBCOPS, and the complainant will receive a copy of their report via email.

Although the CMPD's website explicitly states reports for stolen auto tags cannot be filed online, oftentimes residents will file a theft report online for their stolen auto tag, which will be rejected by NEPS.

NEPS technicians sometimes receive online reports that are very incoherent, and the complainant's narratives may appear to depict a person experiencing a mental health crisis. Because the report cannot be submitted without valid addresses, NEPS sends these reports to patrol. CMPD dispatches officers to the addresses to attempt welfare checks on said complainants.

One issue CMPD stated was duplicate reports. Sometimes a citizen may file a report online and then call shortly afterward and file the same report via telephone. Personnel interviewed by CPOC stated the department does not currently track duplicate reports but does not suspect that it does not happen enough to create a significant issue. CMPD personnel continued to advise CPOC that it may benefit PPD and the City of Philadelphia in developing a system to track this occurrence should the department adopt both telephone and online reporting.