



LaToya Cantrell
MAYOR

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

*715 South Broad Street
New Orleans, LA 70119*

"to protect and to serve"



Michelle M. Woodfork
SUPERINTENDENT

August 10, 2023

Edward Michel, OIG
Office of the Inspector General
525 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70130

RE: NOPD Recruitment and Retention

Dear Inspector General Michel,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to extend my sincere appreciation for your exceptional observations in the positive reforms put forth by the New Orleans Police Department in our staffing, recruitment, and retention efforts. Most notably we are excited that your office has observed the dedication and commitment displayed by the department in maintaining a strong and competent police force sincerely dedicated to constitutional policing coupled with complying with best practice recruitment methods recommended by the US Department of Justice (DOJ).

The professionalism, integrity and hard work demonstrated by our team has undoubtedly contributed to the improved recruitment and retention processes which emphasize recruiting highly qualified individuals, coupled with pay increases and bonuses, modified applicant process, and comprehensive training and development programs, has resulted in a highly effective recruitment and retention initiative. Another key point worth mentioning is that we are extremely confident that the current retention & recruitment strategies are on track to assist with alleviating the dissolution penalties associated with the unfunded accrued liabilities.

Moreover, the New Orleans Police Department is actively fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment, which has played a significant role in officer retention. Our department's proactive approach to addressing the needs of our current and newly recruited officers is providing opportunities for their growth and advancement and reflects a genuine concern for their welfare.

The impact of a well-staffed and dedicated police force extends beyond mere statistics, subsequently it cultivates a sense of trust and confidence within the community. Therefore, we believe that initiatives such as outreach programs, partnerships with local educational institutions, and a comprehensive marketing campaign has assisted in attracting a diverse and qualified pool of applicants and we are confident that our current resourcefulness will assist in meeting adequate staffing levels to meet the growing demands of our city.

"an equal opportunity employer"

More importantly, we have also been laser focused addressing the issue of retention and ensuring experienced officers are staying with the department by additionally offering competitive compensation packages, opportunities for professional development, and creating a supportive work environment have been crucial steps in retaining talented officers and reducing turnover. When I started here as Superintendent, I took the time to listen and learn about our officer's concerns. To that end I have begun the process of addressing these issues. Some of these efforts are visible such as the deployment of 600 new vehicles throughout the department to allow for officers to have take-home units and over 100 cell phones which were given to district investigators. Others are subtle, such as the ongoing efforts to revamp the Public Integrity Bureau. All are real and substantial changes being made to this department to ensure our members have a professional work environment.

I would also call upon all New Orleanians to find ways they can support our men and women on the front lines of public safety within our community. They deserve not only the support of the department, but the support of the community. From friendly waves, to district clean ups, to the commitment of our community leaders, acts both big and small go a long way towards improving officer morale and thus retention.

Your recommendations listed below are well received. We are grateful these proposals give our department another opportunity to demonstrate real change is not found in words, but in actions that can be felt across our community.

1. *The NOPD's recruitment initiatives should be strengthened by carefully monitoring and analyzing data to identify bottlenecks and points at which applicants frequently fall out of the application process. The results of this analysis should be used to aggressively address the most significant obstacles in the application process. For instance, a large number of initial applicants who express interest in joining the NOPD never take the written exam. The NOPD should, therefore, work to identify additional methods of outreach that are targeted to these stalled candidates, since it provides an opportunity to increase the hiring pool significantly.*

We invite the OIG to meet with our recruitment team leadership and learn about the technology being utilized to do just this. This data is transmitted to the federal monitoring team monthly and is used to measure not only our productivity, but to identify bottlenecks in the system with the goal of streamlining the process. The example provided within the recommendation demonstrates how we have removed a number of barriers and made it as streamlined possible to sign up for the written exam. As you pointed out our team continues to find ways to improve this process such as online written exams for out of town applicants.

2. *The NOPD should solicit feedback from applicants and new recruits about both the application process and the instruction received during the training academy, in order to identify any potential weaknesses within the recruitment process and any issues with behaviors exhibited by training academy staff. Prioritizing feedback to ensure recruits have a positive experience with their instructors could assist in ensuring the NOPD retains promising new officers after investing the time and effort to hire and train them.*

The Police Academy curriculum director currently personally meets with the recruits towards the end of their training period to listen to their concerns as well as their suggestions for improving the curriculum. Valid observations are then applied to future training curriculum to ensure deficiencies do not replicate themselves in subsequent academy classes. Additionally, prior to dismissing any recruits a five-captain panel is convened where the recruit's performance is reviewed in depth. The employee is also questioned by the panel regarding their experiences and whether they felt they were afforded the opportunity to be successful. The panel's recommendation is then forwarded to the Superintendent of Police through the Professional Services and Accountability Bureau for a final decision. This review process has allowed the department to weed out problematic employees prior to their being assigned to a district as well as retain good candidates who exhibited a need for remedial training.

3. *The NOPD should plan ahead for future civilian staffing needs by working with Civil Service as early as possible to further expedite the process of creating new civilian positions. The NOPD should also assess any civilian positions that it historically struggles to fill and identify the source of the problem, in order to focus on creating positions that attract more qualified applicants.*

The Department does this on an ongoing basis and is currently hiring civilian staff to supplement the work of commissioned officers. The hiring and maintaining of large staffing numbers will be a constant endeavor as it is in any large organization. As the public has seen, the Department is committed to ensuring residents receive the level of service they deserve despite the nationwide challenges all departments are facing regarding hiring.

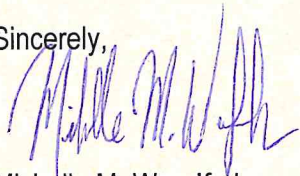
4. *The NOPD should use every available resource to improve officer retention. This includes following the recommendation of federal consent decree monitors in consulting with human resources professionals to ensure the usefulness and accuracy of the information acquired through the exit interview process. Additionally, the department should supplement the information from exit interviews with feedback from current officers and from retired officers who rejoin the force. These feedback mechanisms should be designed so that officers can comfortably give honest feedback, without fear of retribution. The OIG further recommends that the NOPD analyze its exit interview data in aggregate and use the resulting information to identify issues and develop policies that have the greatest impact on officer retention. Finally, the NOPD should consult with external partners, such as the Police Association of New Orleans and the New Orleans Black Organization of Police, in determining issues important to their members in an effort to improve morale and the working environment of officers.*

Under my administration, I have made retention a top priority of this department. Every exiting employee meets with a human resources professional to provide feedback on their reasons for leaving. Members of my executive team and I use a variety of ways to solicit feedback from current members. For example, I attend roll calls on a regular basis to hear officers' concern and provide feedback on the department's path forward. Additionally, recognizing there were several concerns with the Public Integrity Bureau in previous feedback sessions, the Deputy Superintendent of this bureau also attends roll calls on a regular basis. He does not do so to placate the officers, but rather to gain insight into how his bureau can be improved.

My executive team and I also meet with the external partners cited in your report on a regular basis to solicit formal feedback from their representatives. This feedback has been put into action on several occasions and we are currently working on ways to implement more of their ideas within the current constraints of the environment in which we find ourselves.

Thank you once again for your input, it is appreciated. I look forward to collaborating with your office in the future.

Sincerely,



Michelle M. Woodfork
Superintendent of Police