

August 17, 2023

Michelle Woodfork, Interim Superintendent of Police
New Orleans Police Department
715 South Broad St
New Orleans, LA 70119

Re: NOPD Staffing, Recruitment, and Retention

Dear Superintendent Woodfork:

This letter concerns the staffing crisis currently faced by the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD). As you are aware, the number of NOPD officers has declined significantly over the last few years. The size of the force declined to 917 officers as of April 30, 2023, a 24 percent decrease in the number of officers from approximately 1,200 officers in 2018.¹ The current on-board level of NOPD officers is the smallest force size in decades. Furthermore, at any given time, some of the remaining officers are unavailable for law enforcement duties due to administrative requirements and training, light duty status, leave due to injuries, or other issues. As of May 19, 2023, 72 officers were either unavailable for duty or on limited duty.²

The NOPD is a key part of the City's critical infrastructure sector's emergency services sub-sector. Insufficient staffing of police officers is a significant threat to public safety. In previous years, staffing analyses have been conducted to determine the optimal staffing level for the NOPD. While these analyses may differ on the exact number, they consistently recommended a police force considerably larger than what currently exists.³ NOPD executive leadership has recently indicated they would be satisfied with a force size of 1200 officers.⁴

¹ These numbers were obtained from the New Orleans City Council's Police Staffing dashboard, which includes data on the total number of police officers and recruits over time, both in absolute numbers and per capita. "Dashboards," New Orleans City Council, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiYTIIMzlyZTMtY2JiYS00YTQyLWFKyY2EtZTVkYjRiMDFhMmQ4IiwidCI6IjFkYzNiZmNmLTVMlTQ0tNGRkNS1iMjE3LWE3NTBjNWlxMzlyZCIsImMiOiN9&pageName=ReportSection21e91234a747587e452f>.

² This number includes officers injured on duty, collecting workman's compensation, on extended sick leave or leave without pay, performing military duty, and employed in a limited duty capacity within the NOPD.

³ A 2016 report by a consultant hired by the NOPD recommended a staffing level increase of 328 employees above the number of officers/civilians employed at that time, based on the NOPD's workload and desired outcomes. An OIG report released in 2014 also determined that the NOPD did not have enough officers responding to calls for service to meet citizen demand. See New Orleans Office of Inspector General, *New Orleans Police Department Staffing and Deployment: Meeting the Demand of Citizen Calls for Service with Existing Resources* (New Orleans: Office of Inspector General, 2014), accessed March 24, 2022, http://nola.oig.gov/index.php?option=com_mtree&task=att_download&link_id=25&cf_id=37.

⁴ City of New Orleans City Council Criminal Justice Committee Meeting, May 10, 2023 at 3:08:49, accessed May 30, 2023, https://cityofno.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=42&clip_id=4544; City of New Orleans City Council

A reduced police force may result in longer response times for calls for service or lower clearance rates, as officers have a higher volume of calls and cases to handle. It may also decrease proactive policing efforts if officers need to devote a greater percentage of their time responding to calls for service. In fact, police response times to both non-emergency and emergency calls for service have lengthened considerably in the last few years as the number of officers has decreased.⁵ Major crimes against persons also climbed rapidly in mid-2020 and remains higher than in previous years, creating an increased public safety concern.⁶ While there are many potential drivers of this increase in crime, the lack of sufficient staffing limits the ability of the NOPD's command structure to respond effectively to this challenge.

The NOPD's staffing issues have also negatively impacted its ability to meet the requirements imposed by the consent decree it has been under since 2012. In the report for the first quarter of 2023, the consent decree monitor found the NOPD was not yet in compliance with a provision requiring it to "staff the Recruitment Unit sufficiently to permit the Unit to fulfill its responsibilities as set out in this Agreement, NOPD policy, and applicable law."⁷ The monitor also found the NOPD did not train all recruitment staff on hiring a qualified and diverse workforce, including training on employment law; nor did the NOPD establish specific recruitment-related performance measures.⁸ The lack of sufficient personnel also jeopardizes the NOPD's ability to comply with other elements of the consent decree.

In addition to the increase in caseloads and longer response times, there are financial impacts related to the significant decrease in the number of police officers. The NOPD is a member of the statewide Municipal Police Employees Retirement System (MPERS). By state law, if the number of participating employees decreases by 50 officers over the course of a fiscal year, the municipality is considered to have "partially dissolved" its police department and is responsible for paying (amortized over 15 years) a pro rata portion of the system's unfunded accrued liability.⁹ In this case, the MPERS actuary is responsible for calculating the amount owed by the municipality.

Hearings on 2023 Proposed Budget, November 1, 2022, at 3:25:27, accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExEVH568bBs>.

⁵ The New Orleans City Council's Response Times Dashboard tracks trends in response times for emergency and non-emergency police calls. See "Response Times Dashboard," New Orleans City Council, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiNTg1NzAxNmEtOTU4OC00MGE1LTlhOTYtODZlZjcyZjQwM2Q4liwidCI6IjFkYzNlZmNmLTVMlTQ4tNGRkNS1iMjE3LWE3NTBjNWlxMzlyZCIsImMiOiJN9&pageName=ReportSection>.

⁶ "Crime Dashboard – Main," New Orleans City Council, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiNjhhMjYyZjYtYTYlOTZS00MmQxLWl3MDgtM2JkNTQ4NjZiZGM2liwidCI6IjFkYzNlZmNmLTVMlTQ4tNGRkNS1iMjE3LWE3NTBjNWlxMzlyZCIsImMiOiJN9>.

⁷ Amended and Restated Consent Decree Regarding the New Orleans Police Department, *United States v. New Orleans* (Civil Action No. 12-CV-01924), 64, accessed June 2, 2022, <https://nola.gov/getattachment/NOPD/NOPD-Consent-Decree/Consent-Decree.pdf/>; Report of the Consent Decree Monitor for the New Orleans Police Department Consent Decree Covering the First Quarter of 2023 (May 17, 2023), 64, accessed July 25, 2023, <http://nopdconsent.azurewebsites.net/Media/Default/Documents/Reports/Monitor's%20First%20Quarter%20of%202023%20Report.pdf>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ La. R.S. 11:2225.4(A)(2).

In a March 2023 communication, the MPERS actuary determined the NOPD lost more than 50 police employees between 2020 and 2021, and then again between 2021 and 2022.¹⁰ As a result of these two partial dissolutions, the City of New Orleans is required to pay a fine of \$50,314.10 each month beginning July 1, 2023, increasing to \$214,112.67 per month starting on July 1, 2024. Each of these fines will be imposed monthly for up to 15 years, leading to a total cost to the City of over \$38 million. The NOPD is the only large police force required to pay for a partial dissolution for losing more than 50 employees. The other affected police departments, which only employ a small number of officers such that the loss of one to two officers reduced the force to less than 70 percent of the previous year, were considered partially dissolved under a separate provision of the law.

City officials were notified of the first partial dissolution in March 2022. Despite this notice, the number of police officers continued to decline and the City was ultimately notified of an additional partial dissolution for the 2022 year. The persistent failure to hire and retain enough police officers therefore created an ongoing financial burden on taxpayers, as well as a heightened public safety risk. Further, although MPERS informed the Mayor and the Chief Financial Officer about the obligations, the Cantrell administration neglected to notify the City Council, the governing board which approves the City's budget, of this accruing and unbudgeted financial obligation.

If the NOPD is able to increase its force size back to June 2020 levels (1189 officers), the law allows the City to stop making these payments. Because the number of officers has declined so precipitously over the past three years, however, it may take a considerable amount of time to build back to this level even with an effective hiring process. Alternatively, if the force size continues to decline in the future, the City will need to pay additional fines. This makes it critical that the NOPD work to build back its force size as quickly as possible, so it can both improve public safety outcomes and redirect these funds toward other City initiatives.

In order to assess the NOPD's efforts to rectify their staffing issues, the OIG reviewed the NOPD's initiatives related to recruitment of new officers and retention of those already on the force.

OFFICER RECRUITMENT

Since 2021, the NOPD has made several changes to their policies related to officer recruitment and retention. The most significant of these changes included salary increases and bonuses, a streamlined application and hiring process, and an increase in civilian positions. Each change is further discussed beneath the paragraph headings that appear below. Resolving the NOPD's severe staffing shortages will require that these efforts are designed and implemented in a manner that is both effective and timely, especially in the current environment where police departments are struggling to hire nationwide.¹¹

¹⁰ See also Duplantier, Hrapmann, Hogan & Maher, L.L.P., Municipal Police Employees' Retirement System, State of Louisiana, Financial Statements, June 30, 2022, 127, accessed May 4, 2023, https://www.lampers.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/general/page/771/municipal_employees_retirement_system_acfr_for_the_fiscal_year_ended_june_30_2022.pdf.

¹¹ Police Executive Research Forum, *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It* (Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum, 2019), 7-8, accessed July 18, 2022, <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

1. Pay Increases and Bonuses

The compensation plan that the City developed to attract police officers is complex. It includes different schedules of bonuses for new recruits, lateral hires, and current officers. The plan also includes other benefits, such as guaranteed 5-percent raises for 2024 and 2025, and additional pay increases for education attainment, special skills, and bilingual officers.¹²

In July 2022, the New Orleans City Council (City Council) approved a retention pay plan for NOPD officers.¹³ Under this plan, officers are entitled to a \$5,000 bonus after every five years of service, up to 20 years (\$20,000 total). The first round of these bonus payments was made in March 2023. New police recruits also received additional bonuses, including a pay supplement equal to State Supplemental Pay until they are eligible to start receiving State Supplemental Pay.¹⁴

The compensation plan now offered by the NOPD is competitive with that of other jurisdictions, and provides for more generous salaries and bonus incentives than the Baton Rouge Police Department and the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office.¹⁵ While the starting salary for new recruits is higher at the Kenner Police Department, the NOPD's recruit salaries are competitive once bonuses are factored in.¹⁶

2. The NOPD's Recruitment Process

In New Orleans, the hiring process is the shared responsibility of the Civil Service Department (Civil Service) and the NOPD, with the two departments handling different stages of the process. The NOPD has worked with the non-profit New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation (NOPJF) to initiate recruitment efforts designed to increase interest in joining the police force. This includes efforts such as billboards, online ads, radio spots, and job fairs, as well as specific outreach to prospective applicants who had previously begun the application process or otherwise expressed interest.¹⁷ Next, Civil Service reviews the initial application to verify whether the applicant meets the minimum requirements and subsequently administers a written test.

¹² "Salary and Benefits," JoinNOPD, accessed May 5, 2023, [https://joinnopd.org/career-paths-and-benefits/#:~:text=OFFICER%20Recruitment%20%26%20RETENTION%20incentives&text=%245%2C000%20paid%20at%20the%20end,\(up%20to%20%2420%2C000%20max\)](https://joinnopd.org/career-paths-and-benefits/#:~:text=OFFICER%20Recruitment%20%26%20RETENTION%20incentives&text=%245%2C000%20paid%20at%20the%20end,(up%20to%20%2420%2C000%20max))

¹³ Matt Sledge, "Bonus Payments Coming for Cops, Other Workers as New Orleans City Council Approves Retention Plan," *Nola.com*, July 21, 2022, accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.nola.com/news/politics/article_49c0c158-0939-11ed-90fd-f316ae905696.html.

¹⁴ The State of Louisiana supplements the salary of law enforcement officers who have served on any force for at least one year. La. R.S. 40:1667.1.

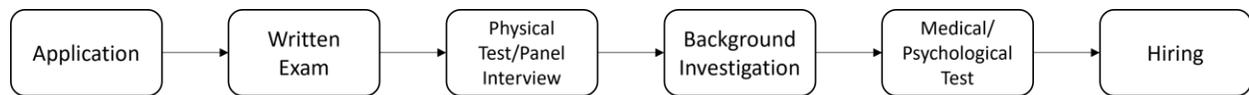
¹⁵ "Salary and Benefits," JoinNOPD; "Police Officer," Baton Rouge Police Department Recruiting Division, accessed May 5, 2023, <http://geauxbrpd.com/police-officer/>; "Salary Schedule," Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://jpsso.com/283/Salary-Schedule>.

¹⁶ "Begin Your Career as a Police Officer," Kenner Police Department, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://kennerpd.com/police-officer/>.

¹⁷ For a discussion of recent recruitment efforts, see City of New Orleans City Council Criminal Justice Committee Meeting, May 10, 2023, accessed May 30, 2023, https://cityofno.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=42&clip_id=4544.

Applicants who pass the test are then referred to the NOPD for a panel interview, physical agility test, and background interview. Successful candidates then receive a conditional offer of employment, and Civil Service communicates with them to schedule both medical and psychological screenings. Finally, the NOPD coordinates with the applicant to determine their start date at the police academy. **Figure 1** below shows a summary of the process for hiring a police recruit.

Figure 1: NOPD Recruit Hiring Process



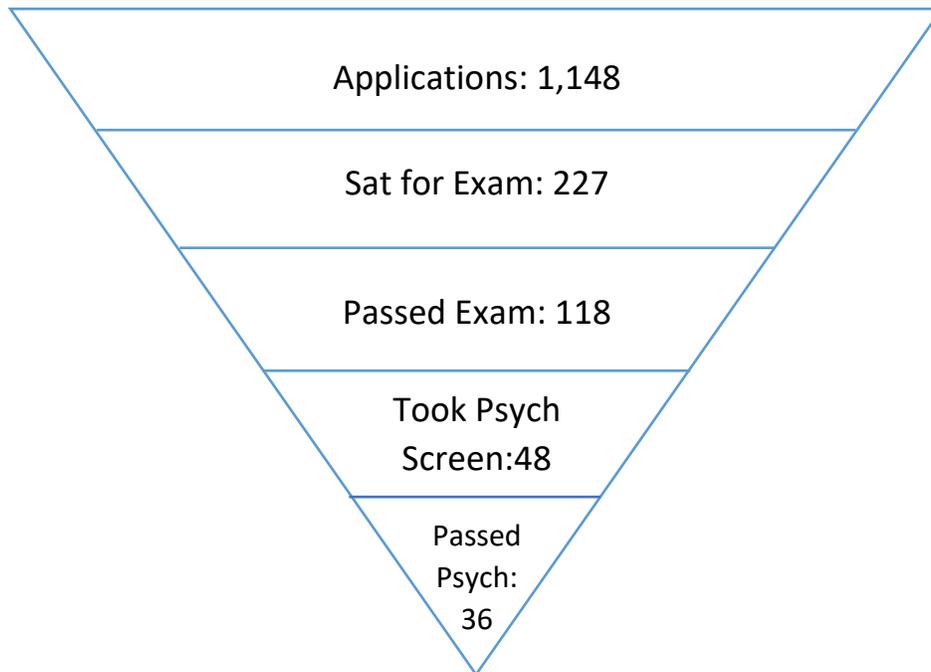
The NOPD tracks and reports demographic information on its recruits and other staff, as well as information on the number of applicants.¹⁸ There were 38 recruits in the most recent academy class. Of these, 19 were aged 20-29, 16 were aged 30-39, two were aged 40-49, and one was aged 50-59. NOPD data also showed that 28 new recruits were male and 10 were female, and that 35 out of the 38 had less than one year of service. As far as ethnicity, the data identified 19 recruits as black, 10 as white, six as Hispanic, two as Asian or Pacific Islander, and one as American Indian or Alaskan Native.

After reviewing Civil Service data on NOPD hiring, the OIG learned that only a small percentage of initial applicants were ultimately hired. For instance, from January 1, 2023 through April 30, 2023, the number of applicants hired was 3.4 percent of the total number of applicants, which was an improvement from the previous year. The data showed that applicants withdrew or were removed from the application process at various stages. Data from Civil Service did not specify the number of applicants who were disqualified based on their applications alone, but fewer than 20 percent of initial applicants eventually took the written exam.¹⁹ Of the applicants who took the exam, slightly more than half passed. Amongst those who passed the exam, more than half were never hired because they failed the background investigation, failed the panel interview, failed the physical agility test, or voluntarily withdrew from the process prior to the psychological screening. **Figure 2** below shows the number of applicants who completed each stage of the process for the period January 1, 2023 through April 30, 2023.

¹⁸ “New Orleans Police Department Demographics – Counts,” NOPDNews.com, accessed June 3, 2023, <https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoib2N2I1ZDQ0tN2JkYi00NTE1LWE3MDItYzE4MjU4NTY4ZTliiwiidCI6IjA4Y2JmNDg1LTJmYjctNGEwMi05YTlxLTBkZDliNDViOWZmNyJ9>.

¹⁹ These percentages are approximate, since the data reflects the number of applicants who completed each stage of the process within a certain timeframe. Since some applicants may apply in one year and then complete other stages in the next year, the real numbers may be slightly different.

Figure 2: Police Officer Applicants January-April 2023



Source: OIG analysis of Civil Service data

Ultimately, the NOPD hired 39 new recruits in the first four months of 2023, which was a significant improvement over 2022, in which only 25 recruits were hired throughout the entire year. For clarity, the number of recruits hired in 2023 differs from the number who passed the psychological screening because some applicants completed the application process in 2022 but were not hired until 2023. NOPD management explained that, due to the nature of the police officer role, a significant number of applicants are disqualified as unsuitable for the challenges of the job.

In an attempt to get more applicants into the initial application pool, the NOPD has taken steps to modify its disqualification criteria for new recruits. For instance, the NOPD no longer automatically disqualifies applicants for bad credit or prior marijuana use, though applicants must test negative for drugs during the application process. Additionally, the disqualifying period for other drug use was recently lowered from ten years to five years. Admitting candidates with bad credit could lead to issues after they are hired; however, NOPD management feels the department's applicant criteria remain the most restrictive of any law enforcement agency in the State.

The OIG also looked at Civil Service data to assess the length of time needed to hire a new police recruit. Based on data for recruits hired in 2023, the average time from application to starting at the Academy was over six months. It took the successful candidates 109 days on average from passing the written test to successfully clearing the background investigation, the most time-consuming stage of the process.

In the last few years, the NOPD and Civil Service have undertaken various steps to make the application process less burdensome for applicants. Most notably, the City now holds regular “bundled” exam dates in which applicants can complete the written exam, physical agility test, and the panel interview all on the same day, as well as start the background check. The City has also shifted toward conducting psychological examinations virtually and allowing applicants to get their medical screenings from one of many facilities located across the country. These changes allow out-of-state applicants to only make one trip to New Orleans before they start training. As of May 1, 2023, applicants are also able to pay a fee to take the written exam online instead of in-person.

At the same time, recruiters from the NOPD’s recruitment division and those from the NOPJF worked together to conduct outreach to potential applicants in order to answer their questions and encourage them throughout the application process. The NOPD’s recruitment staff receive bonuses of \$500 for each 25 applicants they recruit that are converted to test takers, \$500 for each applicant they recruit who is hired, and \$500 for each of their recruits that graduates from the Police Academy. Many steps of the process are applicant-driven, including scheduling and taking exams, and submitting the required information for the background investigation. Therefore, outreach from recruiters to stalled applicants increases the number of applicants who complete the process and decreases the time within which it is completed.

The NOPD also modified the panel interview and physical agility tests so that applicants who are otherwise qualified but fail by a small margin may be given extra consideration and allowed to retake the component of the test they failed. Since the beginning of 2023, they have implemented internal benchmarks to expedite the background investigation process as much as possible, while attempting to develop workarounds for dealing with entities that are slow to provide needed records, such as some branches of the military. Between January and April of 2023, 41 percent of applicants who passed the written test made it through the interview, physical agility test, and background investigation, as compared to 17 percent in 2022, which suggests that these improvements have likely had a positive effect on the number of applicants moving through this stage of the process.

The OIG found that many of the NOPD’s recent recruitment practices comply with those recommended by the US Department of Justice (DOJ), including developing a recruitment strategy, partnering with other stakeholders and being creative about reaching out to potential recruits, streamlining the application process, communicating proactively with applicants, using online recruitment websites, using a validated testing instrument, and outsourcing testing to a third-party vendor when appropriate.²⁰ Most encouragingly, the NOPD, Civil Service, and other stakeholders are communicating regularly and using data to analyze the different stages of the process, including identifying and addressing obstacles and bottlenecks.

The OIG also looked at whether the number of applicants and recruits who ultimately became police officers was affected by the training academy and training academy staff. The NOPD has policies defining the required qualifications for recruitment staff and training staff, as required by the consent decree.²¹

²⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, *Law Enforcement Best Practices: Lessons Learned from the Field* (Washington DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2019), 101-05, accessed June 27, 2022, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/ric/Publications/cops-w0875-pub.pdf>

²¹ New Orleans Police Department, Operations Manual, Chapter 31.1: Recruitment, 1-2, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://nola.gov/getattachment/NOPD/Policies/Chapter-31-1-Recruitment-EFFECTIVE-4-28-19.pdf/>; New Orleans

For full-time staff instructors specifically, the NOPD requires either a Baccalaureate Degree or exceptional practical or subject matter expertise with at least six years of combined NOPD service; completion of the Law Enforcement Instructor’s School or an approved equivalent; and no open PIB investigations or a “sustained investigation” within 24 months of applying. As with internal hiring for other specialized units within the NOPD, the job opening is posted across the department with a set of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) required for the position. Interested officers who meet the identified criteria apply, and a selection committee conducts a panel interview and selects the best applicant. It is critical, however, that the effectiveness of academy staff be verified in practice. In the two recruit classes onboarded in 2021, only 26 of the 41 initial recruits completed the Academy. Fortunately, in 2022 only one recruit failed to complete the Academy, but a high number of people dropping out in one year may suggest an issue with the Academy or instructors that the NOPD may need to address.

Given the time constraints inherent in the hiring process, it is critical to plan ahead for police staffing needs. The consent decree requires that recruits complete training in a variety of subjects, totaling a minimum of 880 hours of academy instruction, followed by a field training program of at least 16 weeks.²² Furthermore, the consent decree caps the number of recruits per class at 30 candidates.²³ With only four academy classes per year, this limits the number of new recruits to 120 per year. NOPD policy currently provides that classes of larger than 30 are possible; however, this must be approved by the Police Superintendent.²⁴ These quality control measures limit how quickly the NOPD can replenish and ultimately grow their force with new recruits. Lateral hires are also a finite pool, and only a small number have been hired in the past. As a result, it is critical that all recruitment efforts be as efficient and effective as possible to maximize the number of officers hired.

3. Civilianization

Increased use of civilian personnel within police departments, often called civilianization, has been widely recognized as a successful alternative to police officers when applicable. The US Department of Justice has noted the potential benefits of civilianization, which include cost effectiveness, specialized expertise, and a decreased burden on police officers.²⁵ In light of this, many law enforcement entities have increased their use of civilian employees in recent years.²⁶ In the context of nationwide police staffing shortages, civilianization can be a suitable way to decrease the number of officers needed while providing the same level of service to citizens.

Police Department, Operations Manual, Chapter 33.1: Training and Career Development, 2, accessed May 8, 2023, <https://nola.gov/getattachment/NOPD/Policies/Chapter-33-1-Training-and-Career-Development-EFFECTIVE-6-18-17.pdf>.

²² The existing academy program takes 26 weeks.

²³ Amended and Restated Consent Decree Regarding the New Orleans Police Department, United States v. New Orleans (Civil Action No. 12-CV-01924), 75-77.

²⁴ New Orleans Police Department, Operations Manual, Chapter 33.1: Training and Career Development, 11.

²⁵ William R. King and Jeremy M. Wilson, *Integrating Civilian Staff Into Police Agencies* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2014), 8, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-p290-pub.pdf>.

²⁶ Police Executive Research Forum, *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*, 11.

A guide created by the DOJ and Michigan State University recommended areas in which civilian police employees may provide a useful service, including administrative tasks, responding to non-violent calls for service, crime scene processing, victim service providers, analysis and research, community liaisons, and public information positions.²⁷ The report noted that a key risk of creating new civilian positions is resistance from sworn officers, so building support among stakeholders within the department is critical.²⁸

In an effort to address the shortage of officers, the NOPD took steps to remove nonessential tasks from the workload of commissioned officers when appropriate. In addition to outsourcing officer response to traffic accidents to an outside vendor, the department also increased its civilian workforce. According to the OIG's 2014 report on NOPD staffing, the department had only 270 non-sworn staff in May 2013. In comparison to other large police departments, this represented a higher than the average ratio of sworn to non-sworn staff.²⁹ As of May 2023, the NOPD had 268 civilian employees, despite the significant decrease in commissioned officers over this period.³⁰ The NOPD developed, posted, and hired persons for civilian positions that addressed many of the categories recommended by the DOJ guidelines, including DNA and forensics experts, crime scene analysts, intake specialists to handle non-emergency and online calls for service, investigative specialists to assist with law enforcement investigations, office administration, recruiting, training, and manual work (i.e. stable attendant). A full list of open positions is available on the Civil Service's application portal.³¹

Between May 1, 2021 and April 30, 2023, 167 civilians were hired for positions within the NOPD; however, half of these hires were added in the last six months of the two-year period. See **Figure 3**. These data suggest there were delays in both implementing and hiring for new civilian positions. Creating new civilian positions requires the NOPD to work with Civil Service to either redefine an existing job classification or to create a new class using a job study. The latter approach requires significantly more time, since the new class must be approved by the Civil Service Commission and the City Council.

²⁷ King and Wilson, *Integrating Civilian Staff Into Police Agencies*, 4-7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

²⁹ New Orleans Office of Inspector General, *New Orleans Police Department Staffing and Deployment*, 8, 52.

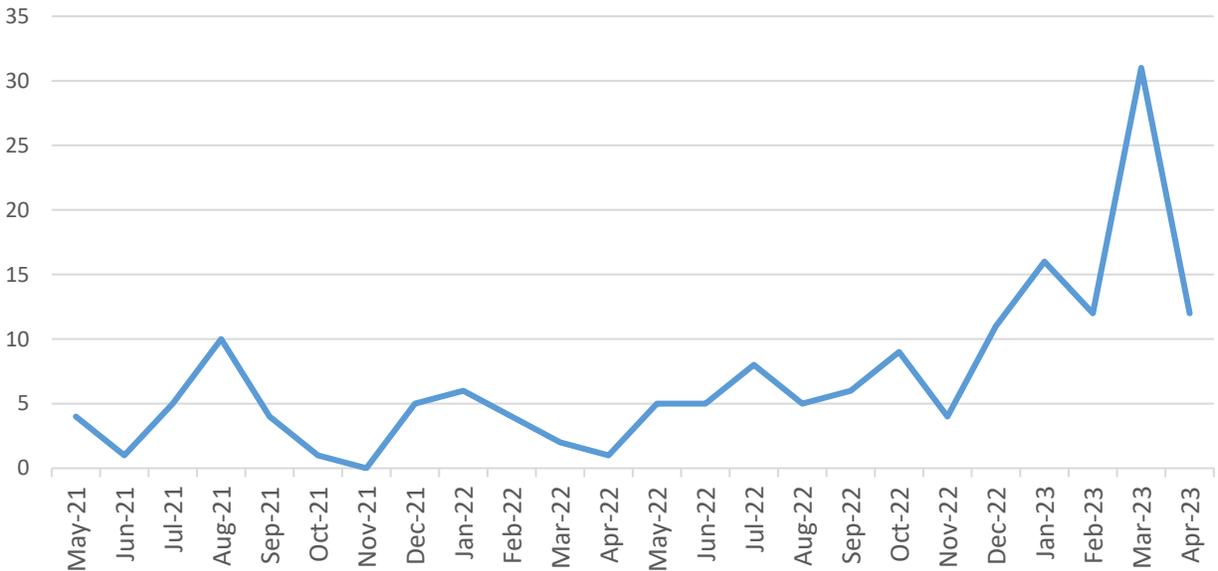
³⁰ This information can be found in the NOPD's demographic dashboard. See "New Orleans Police Department Demographics – Counts," NOPDNews.com, accessed May 5, 2023,

<https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiaNzk2N2I1ZDQ0tN2JkYi00NTE1LWE3MDItYzE4MDU4NTY4ZTIiIiwidCI6IjA4Y2JmNDg1LTJmYjctNGEwMi05YTlxLTBkZDliNDViOWZmNyJ9>.

³¹ "City of New Orleans Jobs Portal," City of New Orleans, accessed June 3, 2023,

[https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/neworleans?department\[0\]=Police%20Department&department\[1\]=NOPD&sort=PostingDate%7CDescending](https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/neworleans?department[0]=Police%20Department&department[1]=NOPD&sort=PostingDate%7CDescending).

Figure 3: Civilian Hires



Source: *OIG analysis of hiring data provided by Civil Service*

While the NOPD’s civilian hiring process can be quicker than the process for hiring police officers, it is still more time-consuming than the hiring process for many other jobs. NOPD staff indicated that they were working to streamline this process by transferring responsibility for scheduling interviews from police supervisors to civilian staff, using less stringent background investigations for applicants who would not have access to sensitive information, and determining whether information requested from applicants was excessively burdensome.

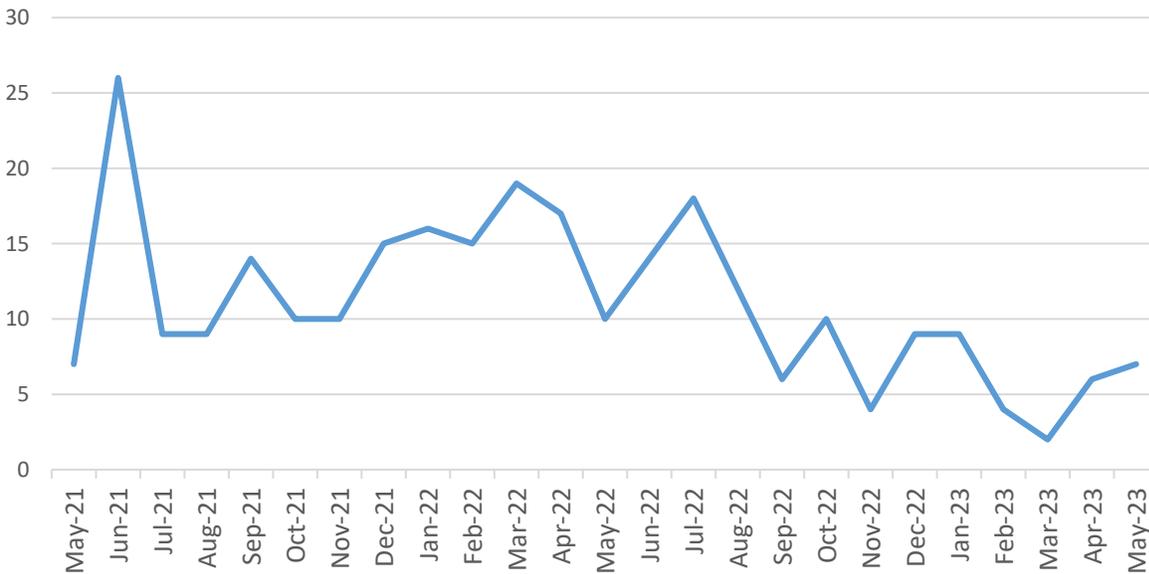
Effective hiring for civilian positions can help address long-term staffing trends, especially if the NOPD is diligent about monitoring which positions can be effectively civilianized, which may include learning from other jurisdictions that are taking similar steps. Civilian employees are also a critical stopgap measure for the near future, since there are limits to how many recruits the NOPD can hire and train within a short amount of time. Civilians can usually be both hired and trained more quickly which allows existing and incoming police officers to focus more of their time on essential law enforcement functions.³²

ATTRITION AND RETENTION

Since 2021, the NOPD has regularly lost more officers to retirement, termination, or separation than it has replaced with new hires. Between May 1, 2021 and April 30, 2023, the NOPD lost 287 officers. NOPD recruitment efforts cannot realistically alleviate this problem, indicating that the NOPD needs to analyze the factors driving officer retention in addition to focusing on recruitment. Fortunately, the number of officers leaving has declined considerably since 2021 as shown in **Figure 4** below.

³² King and Wilson, *Integrating Civilian Staff Into Police Agencies*, 8.

Figure 4: Separations by Month



Source: OIG analysis of exit interview forms received from the NOPD

Retention has been a challenge across police departments and, as with other staffing challenges, the causes and possible solutions are many and varied. The DOJ and the Police Executive Research Forum have stressed the importance of factoring retention into a department’s staffing plan, noting that the expense of training new officers can be costly and time consuming in comparison to resources spent on retention efforts.³³ In line with best practices, the NOPD conducts exit interviews with departing officers as part of its off-boarding process.³⁴ However, there are areas in which the department can supplement current efforts to increase retention.

The federal consent decree monitor assigned to the NOPD recognized that exit interview processes are difficult to design due to issues related to the willingness of officers to speak candidly and the inherent bias of the separating officer against the police department.³⁵ However, the monitor found that the NOPD’s exit interview process was not as meaningful as it could be and recommended the department consult experts in the field to design a process that would be more helpful to the NOPD in understanding what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. In reviewing the data, the OIG found that the NOPD does not comprehensively analyze or make the best use of the data it collects to design retention efforts.

³³ U.S. Department of Justice, *Law Enforcement Best Practices*, 106; Police Executive Research Forum, *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*, 15.

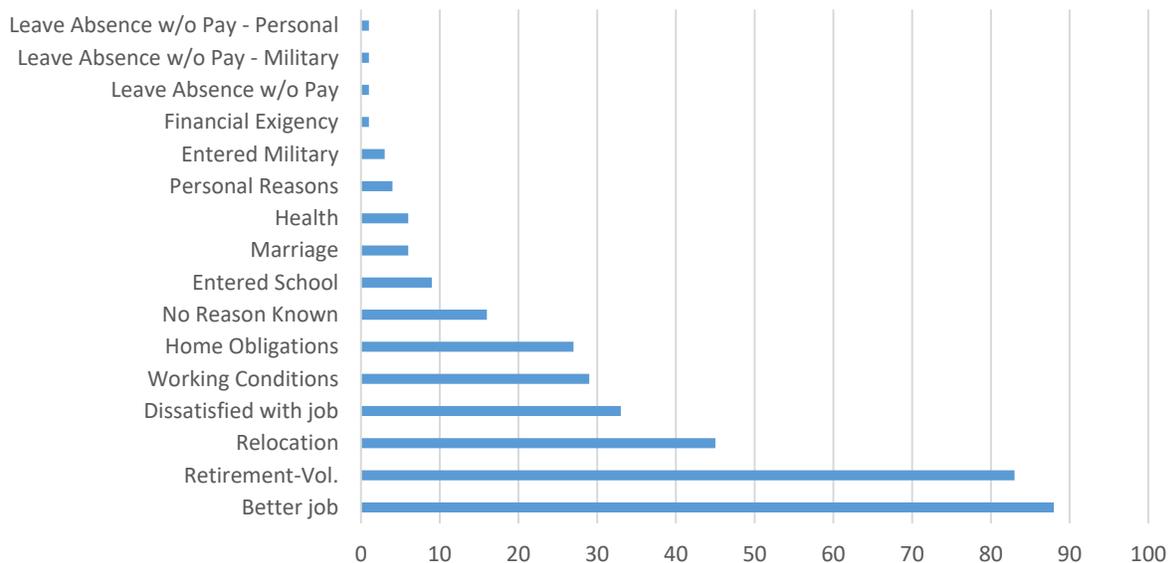
³⁴ See Police Executive Research Forum, *The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It*, 15.

³⁵ Letter from Federal Monitor Jonathan S. Aronie to United States District Court Judge Susie Morgan (September 12, 2022), 20, accessed June 3, 2023, <http://nopdconsent.azurewebsites.net/Media/Default/Documents/Reports/0640%202022-09-12%20Monitor's%20Technical%20Assistance%20Report-1.pdf>.

The NOPD’s exit interview process involves the separating employee meeting with a human resources employee, completing an exit interview form, and being given the opportunity to discuss issues with the Superintendent if they choose to do so.³⁶ The exit interview form included a series of checkboxes where officers indicated the reasons for termination, as well as space to provide additional information, a series of questions rating different aspects of the NOPD from “unsatisfactory” to “excellent”, and several open-ended questions about the officer’s experience with the NOPD and reasons for leaving.

The NOPD provided the OIG with 283 exit interview forms, which represented officers who separated from the department from January 2021 through April 2023.³⁷ The NOPD had a response rate for its exit interview forms of over 80 percent and per discussion with NOPD staff, management has taken an interest in understanding the reasons for officer separations.³⁸ Upon review of the data, the OIG learned that separating officers most often completed the form by checking boxes next to getting a better job, retirement, and relocation followed by job dissatisfaction, working conditions, and home obligations as their reason for leaving. See **Figure 5** below for the exit interview form results.

Figure 5: Reasons for Leaving (Checkboxes)



Source: OIG analysis of exit interview forms provided by the NOPD³⁹

³⁶ Exit interview forms were primarily completed by the separating employee, with human resources personnel completing some of the standard fields and answering any questions the officer had while completing the form.

³⁷ The OIG requested exit interview forms from May 1, 2021 through April 30, 2023, but the forms provided included two employees who left in January 2021 and two who left in March 2021.

³⁸ NOPD policy also requires the Employee Relations Unit to provide summaries of the exit interviews to the Superintendent, Deputy Chiefs, and Captains, including the reasons for departure, interview conclusion, and recommendations. New Orleans Police Department, Operations Manual, Chapter 22.6: Exit Interviews, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://nola.gov/getattachment/NOPD/Policies/Chapter-22-6-Exit-Interviews-EFFECTIVE-11-15-19.pdf/?lang=en-US>.

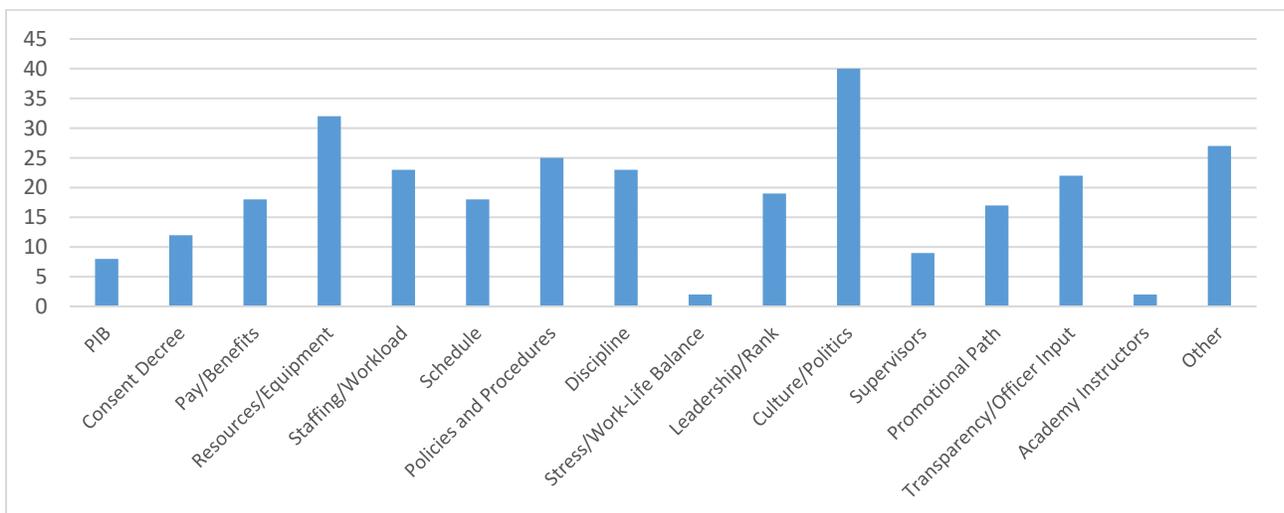
³⁹ Departing employees checked boxes for the most appropriate answer. Note that some employees provided more than one reason for leaving. When no boxes were checked, OIG evaluators attempted to determine the reason for leaving from the officer’s answers to open-ended survey questions.

The exit interview forms included questions with a sliding scale of response choices from unsatisfactory to excellent. The categories most commonly rated as unsatisfactory or fair were working conditions (facilities and equipment), the amount of training received upon first joining the NOPD, and the effort made to address problems within the department. The categories most commonly rated good or excellent were understanding the responsibilities of the job, respect and confidence for the officer’s supervisor, and the supervisor’s willingness to listen and answer questions.

The exit interview forms also included several open-ended questions. To identify common themes, OIG evaluators reviewed the responses to questions on what officers liked least about working for the NOPD and the officers’ suggestions for improvement within the NOPD. Cultural factors such as office politics, nepotism/corruption, or perceived lack of support for officers were most commonly cited (mentioned by 40 officers), followed by concerns about resources and equipment (mentioned by 32 officers, with both the lack of take-home vehicles and the condition of existing vehicles mentioned frequently), and then NOPD policies (mentioned by 25 officers). While issues related to the culture of the force may not be easily rectified, obtaining new equipment is within the NOPD’s power and could have a positive effect on officer retention.

A considerable number of officers highlighted very specific concerns, which may provide valuable insight for improving retention. For instance, 184 employees provided substantive responses to the open-ended questions and 18 of those 184 employees specifically mentioned concerns about either their schedule in general or frequent scheduling changes on short notice. Additionally, eight responses included specific complaints about the Public Integrity Bureau (PIB), and two responses from recent recruits referenced concerns about Academy instructors. While these could be isolated incidents, they indicate that the NOPD may need to look at this issue more closely. **Figure 6** below gives a full breakdown of the reasons cited for separation in response to these open-ended questions.

Figure 6: Areas of Concern for Separating Employees



Source: OIG analysis of exit surveys provided by the NOPD⁴⁰

⁴⁰ To conduct this analysis, OIG evaluators determined how many responses to the two questions referenced above included issues relating to a variety of categories. If a response included more than one of the identified

After the NOPD collects exit interview data, it should routinely review the information and incorporate it into ongoing initiatives to improve operations, officer satisfaction, and ultimately retention. NOPD leadership currently reviews the responses from the exit interview forms and attempts to address any concerns cited by departing officers. Retention rates have improved in recent months as the department has started addressing officers' concerns, which included better equipment, vehicles, better working conditions, retention bonuses, and also reforms within PIB.⁴¹ However, the department does not currently conduct analysis of the survey responses. Doing so would provide a more complete picture of officers' concerns and priorities than merely reviewing each exit interview as it is submitted. This would also allow the NOPD to more effectively target and assess the success of their retention efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Police staffing, recruitment, and retention is a complex, multi-faceted problem but, given the state of the NOPD and current crime trends, it is also a critical, time-sensitive priority. The NOPD and other stakeholders have already taken steps to address some of the issues underlying the staffing crisis. However, the City should monitor the effectiveness of its efforts towards improved recruitment and retention to ensure that these resources are spent in the way that is most likely to attract and retain qualified officers, as well as to avoid any unintended consequences. To this end, the OIG recommends the following:

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.
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.
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.

categories, it was counted in each category. "Other" indicated responses that did not mention any of the previously specified categories.

⁴¹ City of New Orleans City Council Criminal Justice Committee Meeting, May 10, 2023 at 2:52:51, accessed May 30, 2023, https://cityofno.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=42&clip_id=4544.

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.

Moving forward, it is critical that the NOPD make effective use of its recruitment and retention data, learn from similar struggles and approaches in other jurisdictions, act in an expedited manner once promising initiatives are identified, and monitor the effectiveness of changes to ensure they are able to recruit and retain qualified officers.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Michel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the letter 'i' in "Michel".

Edward Michel, CIG
Inspector General