

New Orleans Police Department Staffing, Recruitment, and Retention

(IE-23-0002) • August 17, 2023

Purpose of This Report

The OIG examined trends in the New Orleans Police Department's (NOPD) staffing levels, as well as the efforts the Department and other stakeholders have undertaken to improve recruitment and retention. The purpose of this review was to determine whether the NOPD's current initiatives are effectively designed and consistent with best practices for recruitment and retention. The OIG is authorized to comment on rules, regulations, policies, and transactions for the purpose of preventing fraud, waste, and abuse in order to promote effective and efficient government.

What the OIG Found

The number of NOPD officers has decreased significantly over the last few years, to a level that raises concerns for public safety. Due to the large number of officers separating from the NOPD, Louisiana's Municipal Police Employees' Retirement System (MPERS), the pension plan for police officers across the state, requires the City of New Orleans to pay \$50,314.10 per month for up to 15 years, increasing to \$214,112.67 per month in July 2024. If the NOPD fails to improve its staffing levels, these fines could cost the City more than \$38 million over the next 15 years.

The OIG found that the NOPD made several changes to their policies and practices related to officer recruitment in response to the shrinking size of the force. In the last few years, only a small number of police recruits successfully completed the hiring process, which often takes several months. Therefore, the NOPD and Civil Service have taken steps to increase the number of applicants and streamline the application process. These efforts included personal outreach to prospective applicants, modifying the automatic disqualification criteria for new recruits, bundling in-person application steps into a single day, and conducting virtual or off-site medical and psychological examinations. Further, the City has offered pay increases and bonuses to ensure that its compensation plan is competitive with that of other jurisdictions. The NOPD has also increased its use of civilian personnel to handle some responsibilities, giving officers more time to focus on law enforcement duties, although the process of adding new civilian positions took considerable time.

In terms of retention, the OIG found that, since 2021, the NOPD has regularly lost more officers to retirement, termination, or separation than it has replaced with new hires. The OIG analyzed NOPD exit interview forms and identified several common themes. Cultural factors such as office politics, nepotism/corruption, or perceived lack of support for officers were most commonly cited as aspects of the job that officers disliked, followed by concerns about resources and equipment (with both the lack of take-home vehicles and the condition of existing vehicles mentioned frequently), followed by NOPD policies. Attrition data did show, however, that retention rates have improved in recent months.

What the OIG Recommended

To improve the effectiveness of the NOPD's recruitment and retention practices, the OIG recommended the department take the following actions:

- Strengthen recruitment initiatives by carefully monitoring and analyzing data to identify bottlenecks and points at which applicants frequently fall out of the application process;
- 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;
- 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; and
- Use every available resource to improve officer retention, including supplementing exit interview data with mechanisms for current officers to provide honest feedback, using the resulting information to develop impactful policies, and working with external police organizations to address the concerns of their members.