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## **OIG CALLS FOR INCREASED EFFORTS TO SUPPLEMENT NOPD RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

As detailed in the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) Staffing, Recruitment, and Retention public letter released today, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) examined the NOPD's staffing trends and their recruitment and retention efforts. 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.

The NOPD is a key part of the City's critical infrastructure, and insufficient staffing of police officers is a significant threat to public safety. The current on-board level of NOPD officers is the smallest force size in decades. The NOPD's workforce has decreased significantly in the past few years, prompting Louisiana's Municipal Police Employees' Retirement System (MPERS), the pension plan for police officers across the state, to require the City of New Orleans to pay a fine of \$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 over \$38 million over the next 15 years.

Considering this threat to the City's budget and citizen safety, the OIG sought to determine what steps the NOPD had taken to rectify the shortage of police officers. The OIG found that since 2021, the NOPD has made several changes to their policies and practices related to officer recruitment and retention. The City has adjusted the police officer compensation plan so that it is now competitive with that of other jurisdictions, and the NOPD and Civil Service have streamlined the police recruit applicants process so that it takes less time from initial application to hiring to process applicants. The NOPD has also increased its hiring for civilian positions, which will allow police officers to spend more time on law enforcement tasks. The process for hiring civilians and new officers, however, remains lengthy.

In addition to difficulties with recruitment, in the last few years the NOPD has regularly lost more officers to retirement, termination, or separation than it has replaced with new hires. Although retention rates have increased in the last few months, OIG analysis of NOPD exit interview forms identified several common themes contributing to the officer shortfall. 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.

In response to the issues identified in the letter, the OIG recommends the NOPD should use existing data to monitor the effectiveness of new recruitment initiatives, solicit feedback from recruits regarding the hiring process, and work with Civil Service to anticipate civilian staffing needs. The OIG also recommends the department use every available resource to improve officer retention, including supplementing exit interview data with mechanisms for current officers to provide honest feedback, and using the resulting information to develop impactful policies. Finally, the NOPD should work collaboratively with external police organizations to address the concerns of their members.

Inspector General Ed Michel stated:

*“The lack of sufficient police officers to ensure public safety is a significant threat facing the City and requires an urgent response to improve officer recruitment and retention. The City of New Orleans has a responsibility to provide citizens with a police force that is able to keep them safe.”*

In addition to today’s public letter, the OIG released a brief with highlights. The NOPD also provided the OIG with a response to this letter, which is also posted on the OIG’s website. Go to [www.nolaoig.gov](http://www.nolaoig.gov) to view all OIG reports and letters.