

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS



SUSAN HUTSON
INDEPENDENT POLICE MONITOR

October 5, 2015

Superintendent Michael Harrison
New Orleans Police Department
715 S. Broad
New Orleans, LA 70119

Re: De-Escalation Training

Dear Superintendent Harrison:

The New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) is ahead of the national curve by instituting certain reforms, such as body worn cameras and creating the Force Investigation Team (FIT), a separate discrete unit that investigates all officer involved shootings. The OIPM urges the NOPD to follow that same trend and join other departments in requiring mandatory de-escalation training.

As you are aware on June 11, 2015, the Deputy Police Monitor made a recommendation to the Department that all officers be required to attend de-escalation training. We are writing to urge you to mandate such a requirement both for new recruits as well as for more seasoned officers through in-service training.

OIPM recommended mandatory de-escalation training in conjunction with the OIPM's monitoring of Officer Terrance Saulny's disciplinary hearing for his battery upon a sixteen year old girl. In this case, the transporting officer's body worn camera showed a young girl, upset and speaking with profanity and in an elevated tone asking why she was arrested. The body-worn camera showed Officer Saulny becoming increasingly agitated and using profanity in yelling at the young girl. Later, after the young girl was locked in a cell at the Youth Studies Center, she began to kick the cell door. Officer Saulny came into the cell allegedly to stop the young girl from kicking the door. Officer Saulny ended up hitting the young girl in her face and body with the 4-point metal restraints - despite a lack of active physical resistance on the part of the young girl. According to the mother of the young girl, she has sustained a cataract to her eye as a result of Officer Saulny's actions. While there is no justification for Officer Saulny's actions and the Department was correct in dismissing him from the force, Saulny admitted to little to no training in both use of force as well as the handling of juveniles.¹ Other officers, including a supervisor in the Juvenile Division had similar complaints over the lack of training.²

OIPM notes an increased number of officer involved shootings leading to civilian fatalities this year. Three civilians have been killed in officer involved shootings, compared to last year at this

¹ Office Saulny interview, Page 15, Page 22-24

² Sgt. Cutno interview, Page 15.



same time, when there was only one fatality. The number of officer involved shootings leading to injury this year has also increased compared to last year. This year there has been one civilian shot and injured by officers, compared to last year at the same time when there had been none. This year we one civilian was injured through an officer restraint around the neck, colloquially known as a choke hold, as compared to last year when there were no such incidents.

The OIPM is not disputing that certain officer-involved shootings or civilian injuries caused by officers are legally justified. However, the broader question is whether better tactics can lead to increased public and officer safety. Individual officer involved shootings could be prevented through a different approach.

De-escalation is an emerging national best practice. President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century policing has emphasized de-escalation tactics. The Task Force recommended that, "law enforcement agency policies for training on use of force should emphasize de-escalation and alternatives to arrest or summons in situations where appropriate."³ We have also noted that some police departments have already begun to institute de-escalation programs. These police departments include but are not limited to:

- The Seattle Police Department,⁴
- The Las Vegas Police Department,⁵
- The New York Police Department.⁶

There are a number of de-escalation trainers and training programs specifically geared toward police that have been recommended to the OIPM. These instructors are willing to come to New Orleans to train NOPD officers or alternatively NOPD can send officers from the NOPD Training Academy to be trained remotely in order to teach the de-escalation training here in New Orleans. These trainings include but are not limited to:

- The Las Vegas Police Department (contact: Training Academy Officer Pete Krause)
- The Public Agency Training Council (instructor: Harry Dolan, Former Chief of the Raleigh Police Department)

In the same way that NOPD has led the country in instituting body worn cameras, the NOPD can join other departments in taking pro-active measures to prevent officer involved shootings and major use of force incidents.

Please feel free to contact me directly to talk more on this subject. I would also appreciate a

³ Interim Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Page 91.

http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/Interim_TF_Report.pdf

⁴ New York Times, Long Taught to Use Force, Police Warily Learn to De-Escalate, 6/27/15.

⁵ <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/las-vegas-police-hold-de-escalation-training-drills/>

⁶ New York Times, Mayor de Blasio Announces Retraining of New York Police, 12/4/14.



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written response to my request for this type of training.

Respectfully,



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Independent Police Monitor

