

# THERE IS NO POLICE STAFFING CRISIS



How the Oakland Police Department Wastes Resources on Noncriminal and Nonviolent Interactions Instead of Focusing on Violent Crime

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Photo by Amir Saadiq

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amidst a spike in homicides and shootings over the past two years, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf is once again proposing to waste taxpayer money on more police instead of addressing the real causes of violence. Predictably, she and her conservative allies on city council, Loren Taylor and Treva Reid, as well as some moderate council members like Sheng Thao, are backtracking on the City's promise to reimagine public safety. They are urging more police spending even as the Oakland Police Department (OPD) has failed spectacularly to stem the violence despite receiving the lion's share of the City's general fund.

A new analysis of OPD call data presented here shows that, in fact, **there is no officer staffing crisis**. Rather, this report finds that the department is currently wasting significant officer time on noncriminal and nonviolent issues instead of focusing on violent crime. It is a policy choice by OPD to not focus their resources effectively on violent crime.



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## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Based on available, albeit incomplete data, **this report finds that at least 31% of officers' time responding to 911 calls is spent on noncriminal and nonviolent issues**, such as animal control, blight, welfare checks, general inquiries, mental health, and traffic. These are functions for which we do not need armed law enforcement officers — and for which OPD is often unqualified.
- ▶ OPD currently spends, at *minimum*, the equivalent of **62 officer full time employees (FTE) and 12 Sergeant FTE** responding to noncriminal and nonviolent matters.
- ▶ The cost of OPD's time responding to these calls is roughly **\$17.4 million per year**. Eliminating these responsibilities, it follows, would allow Oakland to redirect \$17.4 million per year in resources spent on noncriminal and nonviolent calls just in OPD's Field Bureaus.
- ▶ Removing these responsibilities from OPD would immediately free up more officers than funding two additional academies or hiring lateral officers — without any of their significant costs or delays. Thus the **City could save several million dollars more by avoiding unnecessary police academies and signing bonuses**.
- ▶ These figures do not include several major, cost-intensive areas,<sup>1</sup> including: performing security at special events (which OPD was illegally requiring even though it is not legally mandated that they cover such events);<sup>2</sup> displacing the unhoused when clearing encampments; and performing security at corporate chains like Walgreens.
- ▶ These figures also do not include the other three OPD bureaus. For example, by civilianizing investigations, Oakland could free up as many as 71 officers in the Investigations Bureau to focus on violent crime — and could potentially do so far more quickly and more cost-effectively than funding additional police academies. Similarly, there are 127 officers in the Office of the Chief of Police, for which no data is available.

1 For instance, the Libby Schaff administration spent \$2.2 million on one night of overtime policing for last year's F\*ck Your Curfew Protest on June 3, 2020.

2 See e.g. Nastia Voynovskaya, "How Expensive Police Fees Shut Down Oakland Community Events," KQED, Sep 2, 2021: <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13902006/oakland-police-security-fees-community-events-canceled>.

These new data were obtained by the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force, OPD Budget/Staffing Workgroup. Together with previous analyses, they paint a picture of gross mismanagement, waste and incompetence within the Oakland Police Department.

Oakland police are being dispatched to do work that does not require armed and potentially violent intervention (such as towing cars or animal control), as well as situations that they are totally unqualified to handle and often make worse (such as mental health calls). OPD has more than enough officers; far

too many as a matter of fact. What it lacks is effective leadership, accountability, and transparency. Our analysis shows that we can safely redirect millions of dollars currently spent on nonviolent, noncriminal matters and use them to fund less expensive solutions that are more effective at meeting the needs of Oakland's communities. This will also free up OPD resources to respond to violent crime.

This report concludes with recommendations that go beyond merely reassigning officers or shifting responsibilities to other departments. We must double down on investing in violence *prevention*. Police do not prevent violence. They only respond to it. We want to get to the gun before the bullet flies. The only way to do that is to start to rebuild, refund, and heal our communities that have been systematically defunded, neglected, and terrorized.

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## **OAKLAND'S REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY TASK FORCE (RPSTF): PURPOSE, DATA ANALYSIS & METHODOLOGY**

Formed during the uprising after the police murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, Oakland's Reimagining Public Safety Task Force (RPSTF) was tasked with reducing OPD's bloated budget; tackling the internal corruption, waste, and harmful behaviors of OPD; and transforming public safety by addressing underlying causes like poverty and trauma.

More specifically, the purpose of the Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce (active from September 2020 through March 2021) is to rapidly reimagine and reconstruct the public safety system in Oakland by developing recommendations for City Council to increase community safety through alternative responses to calls for assistance, and investments in programs that address the root causes of violence and crime (such as health services, housing,



jobs, etc), with a goal of a 50% reduction in the OPD General Purpose Fund (GFP) budget allocation.

The RPSTF is composed of four Advisory Boards, one of which is the Budget Data and Analysis Advisory Board. The Budget Data and Analysis Advisory Board was responsible for bringing transparency to OPD’s use (or misuse) of resources and staffing. The OPD Budget/Staffing Workgroup is a subgroup of this Advisory Board and obtained and analyzed the data presented in this report.

They sought to answer the question: What is possible if we actually engage the RPSTF recommendations of removing OPD from noncriminal/nonviolent interactions?

To answer this question, the advisory board began to drill down into how we can reallocate to non-police alternatives by analyzing OPD call for service data for the following interactions:

Noncriminal	Nonviolent
Animal	Traffic Accident
Blight	Alarm
Welfare Check	Blight
General Inquiry	Security Check
Mental Health	Traffic Stop
Traffic related	*Security (e.g. Walgreens)
*Unhoused	
*Special Events	

\* Data Pending: Available data are incomplete and do not permit a final calculation of how many FTE’s are spent in these areas.

## KEY FINDINGS

**AT LEAST 31% of officers' time responding to 911 calls is spent on these noncriminal and nonviolent issues.**

**This represents 62.25 (out of a total of 199 FTE) of officers' time responding to calls.**

Note: This does not include follow up paperwork and/or court time. Specifically of interest is the amount of officer time in court for traffic, which is the overwhelming majority of time spent on traffic enforcement.

### **Breaking this down further, we find:**

62.25 Officer FTE are being used on noncriminal/nonviolent issues. At an average cost of \$222,542 per officer, this represents **\$13,853,248.00 per year.**

Additionally, an estimated 12.16 Sergeant FTE are being used on noncriminal/nonviolent issues. At an average cost of \$288,087 per Sgt., this amounts to **\$3,503,138.88 per year.**

## **OPD spends a total of \$17,356,386 per year on noncriminal and nonviolent calls just in the Field Bureaus.**

Redeploying these FTE resources would put more officers on the streets far more quickly than the proposals by Mayor Schaaf to fund two additional police academies, and by Councilmember Sheng Thao to fund another police academy and give \$50,000 signing bonuses for lateral officer recruits from other cities. These proposals are costly, unnecessary, and will take years to produce new officers. Each academy will cost almost \$3.9 million and will graduate just 26-30 graduates per academy.<sup>3</sup> 62 officers receiving a signing bonus of \$50k would total \$3.1 million.

We estimate, therefore, that the City could save millions more by redeploying FTE resources wasted on noncriminal and nonviolent interactions instead of funding more police academies or lateral hire signing bonuses.

### **As noted earlier, this analysis does not include:**

- ▶ Lieutenants in Field Operations
- ▶ Internal Affairs (19 sworn officers that rotate in and out of the ranks)
- ▶ The categories of noncriminal and nonviolent interactions for which we don't have complete data
- ▶ The other three areas of OPD:

<sup>3</sup> See reporting from Jaime Omar Yassin, Hyphenated Republic, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/explainer-opd-fy-59557126>.

- » Office of the Chief (33 Sgt's and 127 officers)
- » Bureau Of Investigations (16 Sgt's and 71 officers)
- » Bureau of Services (4 Sgt's and 28 officers)

*Given these data limitations, the figures presented in this report are almost certainly an underestimate. A previous analysis by AH Datalytics found that only 4% of OPD calls for service were for violent crime and just 7% for property crimes in 2019.<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of their time was spent on things not related to crime at all, like traffic or false alarms or stray dogs or unhoused people.*

Taken together, the two analyses suggest there are literally dozens if not hundreds of officers responding to matters that we could handle much more effectively and less costly by shifting to other departments.

### What about Measure Z?

Measure Z, a ballot measure enacted by the people of Oakland, provides tax-generated funding for both law enforcement and violence prevention programs. It also sets an OPD “staffing floor” — a minimum number of officers required for the City of Oakland to use that funding — of 678 officers. Libby Schaaf and OPD recently announced that the department just fell below that number. However, in September City Administrator Ed Reiskin announced that the city can likely qualify for an exemption to the Measure Z staffing floor.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Measure Z has three exemption clauses — and the current moment qualifies for two of them.<sup>6</sup>

Thus far, neither the mayor nor city council have pursued such an exemption, although the unique nature of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis obviously merits it. Like the so-called officer staffing crisis itself, it appears the Measure Z issue is largely artificial. It's a political choice — and a bad one. The city needs only declare an exemption to Measure Z based on current circumstances to avoid the manufactured panic from the mayor about losing Measure Z funding.

4 AH Datalytics, Assessment of Oakland Police Department Calls for Service, March 2021, available at: <https://www.antipoliceterrorproject.org/defund-opd>.

5 Oakland City Council Public Safety Committee Meeting, September 14, 2021, <https://oakland.legistar.com/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=883994&GUID=5A3BE60E-C243-4129-8508-3D3FADE96760&Options=infoj&Search=>

6 One exemption is triggered “If a severe and unanticipated financial or other event occurs that so adversely impacts the General Purpose Fund as to prevent the City from budgeting for, hiring and maintaining the minimum number of sworn police personnel required by this Ordinance.” COVID-19’s severe budget impacts certainly qualify. OPD’s own staffing report mentions that COVID impacted their ability to test recruits in 2020, reducing graduation rates. In addition, there have been widespread reports of vaccine hesitancy and refusal among law enforcement, including in Oakland, which no doubt has played a role. There was a spike in officer attrition in October, when the city’s new vaccine mandate was announced, for example. A second exception is triggered “If the number of sworn police personnel required by this Ordinance unexpectedly falls below the level required despite the City’s adoption of and implementation of the hiring plan,” which is exactly what is happening right now due to an unexpectedly high number of resignations. See Oakland City Council, <https://oakland.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=10320692&GUID=D7A4CA0F-9BD1-4D34-86F9-5C3ED0DA0389>.





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## **POLICE DO NOT PREVENT VIOLENCE — AND AREN'T VERY GOOD AT SOLVING IT EITHER**

Throwing more cops at the problem, after OPD has proven utterly incompetent at reducing homicides, is the same as doing nothing at all.

OPD received a \$38 million budget increase this year. Still they lie to us that we need to hire more cops — even as the city has done little to ease the desperate poverty caused by the pandemic that's at the root of gun violence.

Oakland police only cleared 17% of violent crimes last year. That's just 1 out of every 6 violent crimes in the Town.<sup>7</sup> Yet they receive almost \$350 million every year — by far the biggest item in the budget, which includes *almost half* of the General Purpose Fund.

Now they want even more. Why should we reward OPD for such a colossal failure? What are we getting in return for all that money?

Reimagining Public Safety invites us to envision what could be done with the funds spent on noncriminal and nonviolent issues that currently go through OPD.

First we must admit that police don't actually prevent violence. They respond after the fact — and often cause it themselves. Studies on public safety and violent crime consistently show that investments in policing do not have a significant impact on violent crime rates.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> California Department of Justice, <https://openjustice.doj.ca.gov/exploration/crime-statistics/crimes-clearances>.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. a 2020 *Washington Post* analysis found that for 60 years, more police spending has not resulted in less crime. See also recent reporting by the *Marshall Project*, *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, and *USA Today* (showing that, prior to the pandemic, both numbers and rates of police officers declined while the violent crime rate also dropped); and *Brookings Institute* (finding minimal evidence that police surveillance *prevents crime*).

On the contrary, we know from decades of experience and research that the safest communities don't have the most police, they have the most resources. There are mountains of evidence supporting methods of reducing violence that don't involve law enforcement, which make clear what we already know: we

need to invest in housing and vital services — not more cops.<sup>9</sup>

OPD Chief LeRonne Armstrong knows this too. After a shooting at Lake Merritt on Juneteenth, he said, "I don't believe that you can police your way out of a problem like this. If you put 100 or 200 officers, it doesn't mean that somebody won't do something dumb, it doesn't mean that somebody won't pull out a firearm and use it." Yet he has continuously claimed the opposite to the public and the press.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

OPD must immediately reassign these FTE or eliminate these noncriminal and nonviolent responsibilities entirely. These are low-hanging

fruit and would free up more resources far more quickly than any proposals offered by the mayor or city council to date.

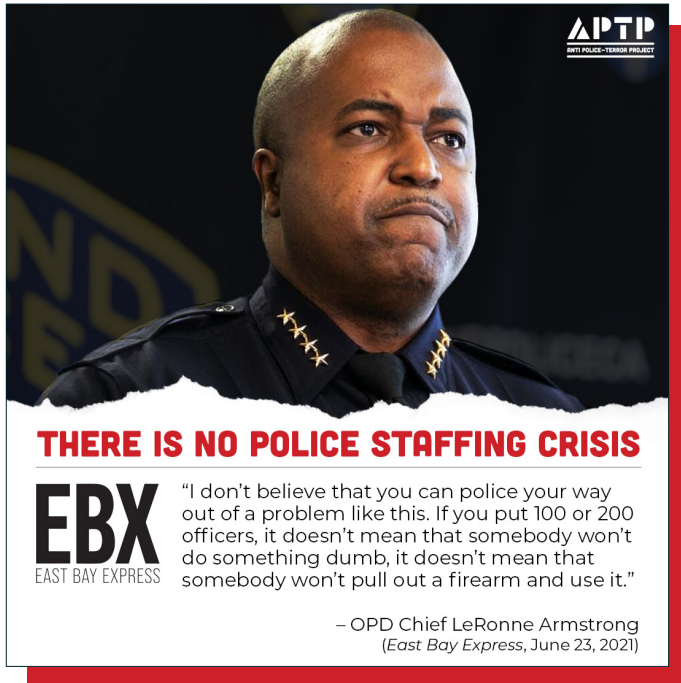
OPD must also provide data for the other areas and categories of interactions not included in this report, so the City can identify additional places to cut and reallocate resources.

The city must go further and implement the recommendations of the RPSTF, one of which is a top to bottom audit of the OPD, so the City and the public can finally know the full extent of OPD waste and mismanagement — and rein in Oakland's out-of-control police spending once and for all.<sup>10</sup>

More importantly, the People of Oakland want real, root-cause solutions that actually prevent violence by getting to the gun before the bullet flies. We know what keeps us safe: meeting the needs of our most vulnerable community members. That means housing, jobs, schools, mental health care, and violence prevention.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the [John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#) has compiled studies across disciplines showing more effective ways to reduce violence without police.

<sup>10</sup> An audit of OPD was also included as a policy directive in Oakland's Adopted 2021-23 Budget.



## CONCLUSION

We've been lied to, Oakland. For more than a year, the Oakland mayor, police chief and conservatives on city council have been lying that the Oakland Police Department was "defunded" when their budget actually increased by \$38 million. They've also been claiming that OPD is severely understaffed — which this report proves is likewise untrue.

Their antics are not about creating safety. They are about doubling down on a failed strategy that will continue to get people killed.

There is no officer staffing crisis. This is not a question of police staffing shortages — it's about the waste, mismanagement, corruption and incompetence of the Oakland Police Department.

Our report — based on data that the city council and mayor have had access to for months — shows that the City of Oakland could TODAY eliminate or reallocate the equivalent of more than 60 officer and a dozen sergeant FTE which are currently draining millions of taxpayer dollars on noncriminal,

nonviolent interactions. The Administration and OPD are choosing not to. If eliminated, those FTE could save the City more than \$17 million.

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The People of Oakland won't be so easily fooled. We see that Mayor Libby Schaaf and the conservatives on city council have zero solutions to actually prevent violence except more of the same, which might as well be nothing at all. We want the City to recommit to reimagining public safety by building strong and healthy communities, not by funding more police.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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