

CLIENT:	City of Aurora- Police Records Staffing Study
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Subject:	Interim project update
DISCUSSION	

PRI completed an onsite visit the week of March 7 and has identified an issue of significant concern regarding backlogged police records. As of March 11, there were 2512 reports pending processing by the Records Section. While the police department is aware of this, it has not assigned the level of urgency that it should and has taken insufficient steps to correct this high-liability matter.

Transcription Process

After a police officer authors a report, it is first reviewed and approved by a police supervisor. Reports are then submitted for a second-level review (as is industry standard) by Records personnel. This is the point at which reports are in "transcription" and must be processed and approved by Records. The term "transcription", in this context, does not refer to transcribing a record, as typically defined, but rather is a vendor-specific term which, simply put, refers to the process of reviewing reports for quality control purposes. At this stage, reports are in a transcription queue until approved by Records personnel. Of particular importance is the fact that reports do not get routed by the system for follow-up action or investigation until the transcription process is complete. The fact that 2512 reports are in the transcription queue is alarming. In addition to the delays in the administration of justice and poor customer service which this backlog creates, the City of Aurora is facing significant liability as a result.

Risks

- Perpetration of Additional Crime by Suspects At Large: As a result of the delays in processing police reports, violent crimes reported to the Aurora Police Department may not be investigated for months, enabling suspects who might otherwise have been investigated and taken into custody, to re-offend. PRI obtained a listing of all cases pending transcription (attached herein). This list includes 2512 cases, 1054 of which are from 2021, some of which involve the following crimes:
 - Forcible fondling of a child
 - Child abuse
 - Cruelty to a child
 - Murder
 - Carjacking

In some situations, detectives are directly advised of serious crimes and specifically request to have reports transcribed/approved so they can be printed or filed for prosecution. The case is then processed and removed from the transcription queue. However, we asked the employees in our interviews if it was possible serious criminal offenses could be in the queue which have been overlooked and not investigated, and all said yes. It is a near certainty that violent offenses are being reported without timely investigation. The transcription queue should have a minimal amount of cases at any given time (less than 50).

The Aurora Police Department would face significant scrutiny and liability in the event a suspect commits a murder or other violent crime who otherwise would have been taken into custody were it not for the transcription queue. It is administrative errors and failures such as this that lead to cases like the Charleston, SC church mass murder and the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, both of which would not have happened had law enforcement not erred in the processing of prior cases involving the suspects.

- Delayed Colorado Criminal Information Center Data (CCIC): Cases involving stolen or recovered vehicles, weapons, or other property, or missing or recovered persons, contain information which is required to be entered or updated in CCIC. This allows law enforcement to locate such entities on a national level. Delays in the transcription process can lead to officers having incorrect information in the field. Case in point: a stolen vehicle which has been recovered and returned to its rightful owner must be removed from CCIC, lest the owner risk being pulled over by an officer and detained at gunpoint based upon a computer query which indicates the car is still stolen.

As a matter of officer safety, incorrect data stemming from delayed reports can lead to officers unknowingly encountering dangerous or wanted persons, and not employing measures that would otherwise protect them in such situations.

- Police-Community Relations, Customer Service and CCJRA: Records personnel indicated they are receiving calls from irate citizens who are frustrated with the extensive delays in obtaining copies of reports. Extensive delays in obtaining copies of a basic report would not be considered reasonable, a likely violation of the CCJRA. Furthermore, at a time when police-community relations are strained across the country, law enforcement should be making a concerted effort to provide superior service and to quickly resolve backlogs and delays.

Mitigation by the Police Department

The police department has failed to take the correct measures needed to resolve this problem. It has attempted to do so by mandating records employees work on overtime, specifically on the transcription process. This will not resolve the matter. While working on overtime, cases continue to be generated and added to the queue. Without further efforts as described herein, the backlog will continue.

Causation

Ultimately, such failures are the result of a lack of leadership and accountability, the existence of which could have prevented the following contributing factors from occurring in the first place:

- As a result of the agency-wide assumption that the backlog is strictly due to a staffing shortage, the police department has neglected to consider and evaluate whether there are other contributing factors which could be corrected. In fact, our preliminary findings indicate the organizational structure and work schedule in Records are the primary causes of all of the backlogs, of which there are several which also present significant liability to the department:
 - Several thousand court ordered record seals and expungements that have not been fully processed;
 - Over one-thousand public records requests which have not been fulfilled;
 - Several thousand CCIC second-party quality control checks;

The level of risk facing the police department is astounding.

Within the last two years, the structure of the Records Section was changed, resulting in two "sides", as they are referred to internally, including a law enforcement/operations side, and a public window side. The operation has been improperly split into two separate functions. Our final report will detail the problems with, and needed corrections to, organizational structure and work schedules. While staffing may also be a contributing factor, it is likely not the primary, or even secondary, cause of any backlogs.

- The chain-of-command includes non-law enforcement supervisors and managers, followed by police command staff who are largely removed from the Records Section's operations. The apparent lack of urgency regarding the transcription queue at all levels, as evidenced by the lacking response and failure to assign all available resources to its resolution, is alarming. PRI believes having a police lieutenant, someone with an understanding of the significant risks associated with delayed police reports and data, would have helped prevent the various backlogs. Civilian personnel, without law enforcement backgrounds and training, generally lack the perspective that is needed to correctly prioritize work in this area.

Resolution

In the interim, until the necessary structural and operational changes are made which will be suggested in our final report, all available resources should be immediately assigned to the transcription queue. The majority of employees in the Records Section should be entirely focused on and assigned accordingly until it is resolved. Resolving this backlog should immediately become the primary, overarching mission. While this backlog requires immediate resolution, approval of the reports should not be rushed.

Each report still requires thorough review and should be checked for accuracy, completeness, and absence of erroneous information which can lead to improper law enforcement action.

Additional measures must be taken immediately to relieve the workload on the Records Section, given the urgency of the backlogs. These include:

- Reduce the number of mistakes in police reports which are not caught by police supervisors. Inform police sergeants of the immediate need to more closely scrutinize reports to ensure the absence of mistakes which subsequently have to be corrected by the Records Section.
- The Municipal Court should be immediately directed to utilize the Versaterm system to its fullest extent and lessen the burden on the Record Section stemming from the requirement to print records, provide duplicate copies, and send records on paper.
- Officers should be immediately trained in daily briefings how to locate reports which are in the transcription queue using the Versadex system. Most officers are unaware of this functionality and rely on Records personnel to pull this information on their behalf.
- All officers should be given the ability to run criminal histories from their mobile computers and not have to contact records for this information.