



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

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In Control: Public Safety Committee

DEPARTMENT: Police Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD: William P. McManus, Chief of Police

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Special Victims Unit (SVU) Independent Review Update

SUMMARY:

A briefing and update on the April 2018 Independent Review of the Special Victims Unit.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In November 2017, an independent review of the Special Victims Unit, and all cases assigned to it, was coordinated by the City Attorney's Office. The review was completed by Lisa Tatum, former President of the State Bar of Texas and a former Bexar County Assistant Criminal District Attorney, with assistance from a team of eight attorneys which included five former Assistant Criminal District Attorneys. The report of this review was completed on April 23, 2018. While the review concluded that there was "no discernible pattern or practice" of mishandling cases, a number of recommendations were made to enhance the investigative process which has since been implemented by the San Antonio Police Department.

Scope

The independent review consisted of a review of over 10,000 SVU felony cases and 1,500 closed SVU misdemeanor cases from 2014 to 2017 as well as certain active SVU cases under investigation and the Unit's Standard Operating Procedures. The purpose of the review was to:

- Determine the extent of case mishandling within the SVU

- Determine if any operational or process issues exist within the SVU
- Conduct an independent review of SVU cases for the period of 2014 to 2017
- Identify improvements to include SOP reviews, technology, caseload and span of control analysis

In addition to the case review, the team also conducted interviews with individuals that raised concerns with case handling within the SVU, detectives assigned to the Unit and other key personnel in order to gain insight into operations within SVU and identify potential recommendations.

Findings

Although the Tatum group ultimately concluded that the mishandling of SVU cases was the result of the individual behavior of a single detective and not attributable to the overall operations of the unit, several recommendations were made to enhance case management, supervisory oversight and investigative efficiency. The following sections outline the findings and actions taken by the SAPD to address these findings to include enhancements included as part of the FY 2019 and FY 2020 budget.

SOP Review

Findings

The report recommends Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) revisions to strengthen supervisory oversight and achieve investigative process improvements. It is acknowledged within the report that several SOPs were proactively modified by the Department to address identified issues.

Actions

Upon learning of the mishandling of SVU cases, Chief McManus immediately formed an internal review committee comprised of sworn subject matter experts to review all SOPs and to identify all opportunities to enhance the Department's investigative and supervisory processes. As a result of this effort, SOP improvements were created to achieve the following:

- Enhance supervisory review of case assignments
- Establish case audit schedule
- Establish communication guidelines with crime victims

In addition, Chief McManus also created a community group to gather input and feedback with respect to the SOP enhancements. This group included external stakeholders from advocacy agencies, local universities and neighborhood organizations.

The SAPD presented the SOP improvements to the Public Safety Committee on January 23, 2018 in coordination with Mr. Bob Stewart who was selected by the Department to complete an independent review of all investigative SOPs. Mr. Stewart confirmed that all SOP revisions identified and implemented by the SAPD achieved the objective of establishing a more defined supervisory process to improve case management and customer service.

Technology

Findings

The report identified that a lack of a dedicated case management system limits the ability of staff to efficiently and accurately document and access critical information related to individual cases.

Actions

In July 2019, the SAPD and ITSD completed an upgrade of the existing Record Management System (RMS) designed to streamline the record management system and create efficiencies for officers. The Department has released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new RMS and is in the process of interviewing respondents. It is anticipated that a vendor will be selected and presented to City Council for approval in September or October 2019.

Span of Control

Findings

The report indicated that although there is no formal national guideline with respect to span of control, it is generally accepted that the preferred supervisor to detective ration is 9:1. At the time of the release of the report, within SVU, there were approximately 11 detectives per Sergeant. Decreased span of control allows for greater oversight of case progress and interaction with detectives to enhance accountability.

Actions

In an effort to promote operational efficiency by strengthening direct line command supervision, In November 2018, the Major Crimes Division, which was previously assigned to one Captain who had oversight of both Homicide and the Special Victims Unit, was split. There is now one Captain who exclusively oversees and commands the SVU/Family Violence Unit. This action further serves to reduce the span of control at the command level.

The SAPD received funding for two additional sergeant positions for the SVU as part of the FY 2018 Mid-Year Budget Improvement. These two supervisory positions have resulted in a span of control consistent with the recommended ratio with approximately 8 detectives per Sergeant.

Caseload

Findings

The report indicated that a review of detective caseload confirmed that detectives on average handle 20 active cases. In light of the nature of the crimes investigated by the SVU, efforts should be made to decrease individual detective caseload to conform to national standards.

Actions

Assignment of Detectives to CRT

There were previously 19 patrol officers assigned to the Crisis Response Team (CRT) through the SAFFE Units in each service area. These officers perform a variety of Family Violence services to include writing the original offense report, taking photographs of injuries, obtaining victim statements, and in certain cases obtaining arrest warrants. However, their classification as patrol officers precludes them from filing the Charge and Disposition (C&D) necessary to file the complete misdemeanor case with the District Attorney's Office.

To increase efficiency and investigative capacity, since October 2018, the Department has staffed CRT with detectives which allows personnel within each respective service area to complete the entire case packet at the substation closest to the victim's home. As a result, misdemeanor caseload is now assigned to 19 decentralized detectives focused solely on, and specializing in, family violence investigations. As a result, the four SVU detectives that previously handled misdemeanor cases are now focused exclusively on the felony caseload which has reduced the monthly SVU detective caseload. This allows detectives to dedicate more time to the investigation of felony cases which are generally more complex in nature.

Additional CRT Supervisory Positions

The FY 20 budget proposes funding for six additional Sergeants that will be assigned to the CRT to provide direct supervision of the CRT detectives assigned to each substation. This will enhance the ability of the Department to ensure that every report of family violence is quickly and thoroughly investigated and that a high level of service and advocacy is provided to every victim. It is anticipated that the Sergeants will be assigned to each service area in October 2019.

Dedicated CRT SAFFE Officers

The FY 2020 budget also includes 10 additional SAFFE officers who will be assigned to CRT. SAFFE officers establish relationships with schools, churches, businesses and neighborhood organizations and individual residents within their assigned area to proactively address public safety and quality of life issues. The new SAFFE officers will be responsible for establishing relationships with these groups for the specific purpose of raising awareness of family violence to include how to recognize and report suspected crimes and information on available resources and services for victims. In addition to participating in community events and attending neighborhood meetings, the SAFFE officers will work closely with CRT to conduct site visits and follow-up on individual cases.

Next Steps

The SAPD, in collaboration with Metro Health, the Department of Human Services and numerous advocacy and community organizations, are in the process of developing a 5-year family strategic plan. The intent of the plan is to leverage available programs and resources to proactively address the factors that influence family violence. The Department has identified several strategies to be introduced in the coming year that complement the vision of the strategic plan:

Community Engagement Program

Leverage the existing two personnel assigned to the Community Engagement Program to proactively focus on areas with high concentration of family violence. This team will collaborate with other city departments including Metro Health and Human Services and non-profit partners. The Focus of this program is to provide information on available resources to residents and provide informational sessions

focusing on recognizing signs of family violence.

Handle with Care

Expand existing program to focus on recognizing signs of family violence and providing specialized assistance to school personnel. Incorporate training on family violence into curriculum for participating schools. Promote the creation of a committee at each school comprised of counselor, administrator and school nurse to work closely with SAPD and advocacy groups to investigate suspected family violence.

Family Violence Prevention: SAFFE/COP Training

SAFFE Officers and COP volunteers have the most interaction with residents through community policing and participation in special events and projects with neighborhoods, schools and community organizations. SAPD will develop training curriculum to recognize family violence and provide overview of available resources and services. SAFFE officers will then provide informational sessions throughout the community.

Enhanced CRT Follow-up

SAPD will enhance Crisis Response Team Follow-up with victims 30 days, 60 days and 90 days following an incident to minimize the likelihood of re-victimization.

The SAPD remains committed to working with City Departments, advocacy organizations and the community to strengthen its response to family violence and to implement policies and programs that enhance victim services and the investigative process.

RECOMMENDATION:

This briefing is for information purposes only