

Bethlehem PD Releases Report on Citizen and Police Interactions

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd killing, Police](#) August 26, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

A Report on Citizen and Police Interactions August 12, 2020.

from Christina Tatu, “Bethlehem Police release report on five years of citizen complaints.” Morning Call, August 25, 2020.

Bethlehem police released a report Tuesday on resident complaints over a five-year period, showing only 7% of the 125 filings were substantiated by the department.

Topping the list was rude and unprofessional behavior, followed by disputes with police and then complaints about force, which accounted for 16 of the incidents from 2015 through 2019. Allegations ranged from an officer damaging someone’s property, to inappropriate use of force, to people saying they were targeted by police, and racial profiling. Nine of the complaints were substantiated by the department.

“When you look at the report, look at it with an open mind. We are providing the number of complaints and what happened with those complaints, who filed those complaints,” police Chief Mark DiLuzio said. “I think they are very good statistics considering the number of calls and arrests made per year. Would I like to see them lower? Yes, but we are being honest and transparent and putting the numbers out there.”

The report also noted the gender and race of those filing complaints in the city of 76,370 residents, where nearly 60% are white, 29% are Hispanic and 7.5% are Black. Whites filed 65% of complaints; 17.6% were filed by Black complainants; and 15.2% were filed by Hispanics.

Although the information has always been available to the public, Tuesday was the first time the department issued a report on it, DiLuzio said.

During the time frame covered by the report, police responded to 216,489 calls to 911 and made 13,650 arrests.

The report doesn't detail what discipline officers faced in cases where it was determined they violated department rules. In the report, DiLuzio says 11 officers either resigned or were discharged in the past seven years.

DiLuzio said two of those officers were arrested, though in both instances the behavior occurred off duty and wasn't related to the officers' job performance. For lesser violations, such as an officer acting rudely, they may be sent for retraining. If the behavior happens multiple times, they could be suspended without pay, DiLuzio said.

The majority of complaints were for rude and unprofessional behavior, with 70 such complaints logged. The second highest category was for disputes with the police, which had 21 complaints. A dispute can be any situation where the resident wants the officer to do something and the officer does not do it, the report says. For example, the resident may want a neighbor arrested.

As for use-of-force complaints, body cameras can be analyzed to verify if an officer's actions were in compliance with the department's directives on force. The report showed six use-of-force complaints last year, up from only one complaint in both 2018 and 2017. There were five such complaints in 2016 and three in 2015.

There was only one complaint about racial profiling noted in the report. That complaint was made in 2015. In 2016 there were five complaints about being targeted or harassed by police. Such complaints usually involved an allegation that an officer gave a ticket or made an arrest because the officer and the person had prior contact and the officer didn't like the person.

"The majority of complaints filed against officers failed to show that the officer acted or performed contrary to department regulations or state law. Police body cameras, city surveillance cameras, in-car dash cameras and even videos from citizens were very important in the investigation of these complaints and allegations," the report says.

When a complaint is received, it is reviewed by the department's Professional Standards Division which is comprised of several Bethlehem police officers. The division is responsible for overseeing training and works with the state and national accreditation agencies on policies and directives.

If the complaint is minor, the officer's immediate supervisor investigates. Such allegations could include that the officer was rude or failed to take action.

Serious allegations, like gross misconduct, excessive force, death or injury and violations of law are investigated by supervisors in the Professional Standards Division. Because of the serious nature of these violations, the district attorney's office is usually involved.

When an allegation is filed against a supervisor, the police chief will assign the deputy chief, a captain or lieutenant to investigate, the report says.

"I want people to understand that we hold police officers responsible and accountable when they do something," DiLuzio said. "If they break a rule or are upset with someone and are rude, they get disciplined."

Esther Lee, longtime president of the Bethlehem NAACP, said she has yet to see the report on complaints but believes it will be discussed at the group's meeting next week. She said she has not heard many complaints about the police department.

"Over here in Bethlehem we have a pretty good relationship with the officers. I think our police are very mindful of what they do," she said.