

# REPORT OF THE KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S BLUE RIBBON PANEL



King County



KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON  
SEPTEMBER 11, 2006

# KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S BLUE RIBBON PANEL MEMBERS

Randy Revelle, Chair

Faith Ireland, Vice Chair

Anthony Anderson

David Boerner

Michael O'Mahony

Wilson Edward Reed

Jennifer Shaw

Richard K. Smith

Patricia H. Stell

David Eugene Wilson

*"The police are the public and the public are the police."*

- Sir Robert Peel, upon establishment of the Metropolitan London Police, 1829

**For more information or copies of the report, visit the King County Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel website:**

<http://www.metrokc.gov/sheriff/sheriff/blueribbon/>

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**September 11, 2006**

**To:** King County Executive Ron Sims  
Metropolitan King County Councilmembers  
King County Prosecuting Attorney Norm Maleng  
King County Sheriff Sue Rahr

**From:** Members, King County Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel

**RE: Report of the Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel**

Enclosed for your consideration and action is the report of the King County Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel. Our charge was to review and research management systems for addressing employee misconduct and discipline in the Sheriff's Office; to gain an understanding of best management practices in other police departments and their applicability to the office; and to make recommendations for improvements to the accountability system for misconduct and discipline. The panel's efforts complement other Sheriff's Office reforms already underway.

The Blue Ribbon Panel members approached the charge with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives. Our report was adopted unanimously after much research and constructive discussion. We received information and advice from a variety of sources, including public presentations to the panel, public comment at three community meetings, numerous police departments and national organizations, and confidential interviews with 18 former and current employees of the Sheriff's Office.

The report presents 43 findings, six major recommendations, and 36 implementing actions that address accountability of the King County Sheriff's Office. Our recommendations specify improvements to the internal management and organization systems for addressing employee misconduct and discipline. The implementation of these recommendations will take considerable cooperation and resources from the Sheriff's Office and King County government.

With these recommendations, our charge has been fulfilled. We are ready to provide any assistance we can in support of your efforts to understand and take timely action on our recommendations. We also respectfully urge you to reconvene our panel in December 2007 to review and evaluate your progress in implementing our recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and the people of King County.

**KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S BLUE RIBBON PANEL**



**Randy Revelle, Chair**



**Faith Ireland, Vice Chair**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report presents the findings and recommendations of the King County Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel, charged with making recommendations to the Metropolitan King County Council, Executive, Prosecuting Attorney, and Sheriff on needed improvements to the misconduct/discipline policies, procedures, and practices of the King County Sheriff's Office. The ten-member Blue Ribbon Panel met ten times over six months, held three public hearings, interviewed 18 current and retired Sheriff employees, performed research into police "best practices," and engaged in many hours of thoughtful discussion about the current condition of the Sheriff's Office, its many challenges and opportunities, and how it might be improved.

The Blue Ribbon Panel's examination of the Sheriff's Office reveals no evidence of corruption, excessive use of force, systemic racial profiling, or widespread misbehavior by deputies. The panel believes the large majority of Sheriff's Office employees act ethically and with integrity, and they are motivated by a genuine desire to serve the public and uphold the law.

The problems described in this report emanate from long-standing organizational challenges, including inadequate attention to individual employee performance by leaders and managers within the Sheriff's Office. The Blue Ribbon Panel's review of the office identified the following problems:

- The Sheriff's Office leadership has inconsistently held managers, supervisors, and other employees accountable for their performance and conduct;
- Front-line supervision of employees is inadequate in both quantity and quality;
- Performance expectations are unclear, and systematic evaluations of job performance have not been conducted for most employees for more than seven years;
- An insufficient number of staff are assigned to the Internal Investigations Unit, and there is a lack of clear guidelines for taking, processing, classifying, investigating, tracking, and resolving citizen and employee complaints;
- The Sheriff's Office is structured so the supervision of employees and oversight of policies and procedures governing conduct, discipline, and accountability cannot be adequately addressed;
- There is inadequate internal and external oversight of policies, procedures, performance, and misconduct investigations; and
- Ongoing efforts should be continued to maintain and improve public confidence in the integrity and professionalism of Sheriff's Office employees.

The panel identified nine major factors influencing the quality and effectiveness of the misconduct and discipline processes of the Sheriff's Office. These influential factors provide the framework for the panel's findings and recommendations: department leadership and culture, management and supervision, human resource systems, the labor environment, the complaint processes, internal oversight, external oversight, transparency, and external factors.

The Blue Ribbon Panel's report presents 43 findings, six major recommendations, and 36 implementing actions that address accountability in the Sheriff's Office. The recommendations specify improvements to the internal management and organizational systems for addressing employee misconduct and discipline. The implementation of these recommendations will take considerable cooperation and resources from the Sheriff's Office and King County government.

By October 2006, the Sheriff's Blue Ribbon Panel requests that the King County Sheriff respond in detail to the panel regarding all findings, recommendations, and implementing actions issued in this report. Additionally, the panel requests the King County Executive, Council, Prosecuting Attorney, and Sheriff reconvene the panel no later than December 2007 for a progress report on implementation of the panel's recommendations.

The following is a summary of the Blue Ribbon Panel's six recommendations and 36 implementing actions described in more detail in this report.

***1 Executive leadership of the Sheriff's Office should take primary responsibility for creating, implementing, modeling, and sustaining reforms that improve accountability.***

**Implementing Actions:**

- Articulate clear expectations that all employees are to be held accountable for job performance and conduct, and how that will occur.
- State clearly that poor performance and behavior will no longer be tolerated.
- Create and prominently post a code of values, ethics, and conduct that all employees are expected to follow.
- Establish a professional and collaborative relationship with the labor organizations that represent Sheriff's Office employees.
- Retain qualified professionals to perform an institutional audit of the office's culture and its influence on employee behavior.

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## **2** *The Sheriff's Office should examine and implement methods for increasing the level of public trust and transparency of the office.*

### **Implementing Actions:**

- Create a robust culture of valuing citizen complaints, including a mandate that all employees be trained to take, file, and courteously process all complaints.
- Make the Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual available on its website and in other public spaces such as libraries, county offices, and police precincts.
- Create precinct-level citizen advisory committees that would meet regularly to discuss current community problems and issues related to policing and public safety.
- With the help of the citizen advisory committees, hold regular public meetings throughout the county to provide information and receive advice about policies, procedures, and citizens' rights with respect to the Sheriff's Office.

## **3** *The Sheriff's Office management and supervision systems should be improved to support supervisors in making the office more accountable.*

### **Implementing Actions:**

- Provide meaningful performance evaluations for all employees once adequate span of control ratios and supervisory training are in place.
- Create a clear and consistent approach to the discipline of misconduct and other performance issues.
- Improve the variety, amount, consistency, and quality of training available for all employees, including recruits, sworn personnel, civilian personnel, and executive leadership.
- Create an Early Intervention System. The system should aid the Sheriff's Office in collecting and analyzing data on employee performance and identifying interventions as appropriate.
- Evaluate the Car Per Officer program for its impact on overall department performance and public safety.
- Create a program to assist employees in their professional development and attainment of career goals.

- Assess the demographic distribution of officers relative to the communities they serve. The Sheriff's Office should continue and strengthen its efforts to recruit, hire, train, and promote qualified employees that reflect the ethnic, racial, and gender diversity of its service area.
- Examine the Field Training Officer program to identify any systemic problems that contribute to the low retention rate of academy recruits.

#### **4** *The Sheriff's Office should improve the processes and guidelines for taking, classifying, investigating, and responding to all citizen and employee complaints.*

##### **Implementing Actions:**

- Develop a tracking system for all levels of the complaint process.
- Increase public accessibility to and understanding of the complaint process.
- Develop policies that allow for receiving and processing all complaints.
- Develop clear and publicly accessible guidelines for complaint screening and classification.

#### **5** *The Sheriff's Office should create and strengthen organizational structures that support leadership, management, supervision, and accountability.*

##### **Implementing Actions:**

- Create an Inspectional Services Unit to evaluate and oversee policies, procedures, practices, and performance.
- Pursue the Sheriff's Office's goal of accreditation at a future time when it has successfully implemented the major recommendations of this report.
- Attain an acceptable ratio of field supervisors (sergeants) to employees (deputies) to achieve effective supervision.
- Provide commanders on duty at all the precincts at least 18-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week.
- Increase the number of staff in the Internal Investigations Unit to levels that ensure the thorough and timely completion of investigations and the timely publishing of relevant internal management and public reports.
- Move the Internal Investigations Unit to another facility or area in the King County Courthouse that does not have other Sheriff's Office functions.

## **6** *The King County Executive and the King County Council should create and fund an Office of Independent Oversight.*

### **Implementing Actions:**

- Create an Office of Independent Oversight with four full-time staff: a director, an investigator, and two support staff.
- Give the director of the Office of Independent Oversight authority and independence through nomination by the King County Executive and confirmation by the King County Council.
- The King County Executive should conduct a professional search for the director.
- The Office of Independent Oversight should have:
  - The authority and responsibility to monitor, check for completeness, and require additional investigation as necessary of all formal Internal Investigations Unit activities;
  - The discretionary authority to monitor, check for completeness, and require additional investigation as necessary of all other complaints assigned to supervisors; and
  - The discretionary authority to review and make recommendations to the Internal Investigations Unit about the screening and classification of complaints, as well as to make recommendations to the Sheriff about screening/classification policies and procedures.
- In addition, the Office of Independent Oversight should have the following authorities and responsibilities:
  - Unimpeded and real-time access to unredacted case information and all information related to ongoing investigation files, treating all documents and information regarding specific investigations or officers as confidential;
  - The ability to respond to the scene of certain critical incidents;
  - Approve formal complaint investigations for completeness before a finding can be issued;
  - The option to consult with command staff as to their own review and recommendations regarding a particular investigation;
  - The option to submit recommendations regarding findings and discipline directly to the Sheriff prior to a final decision on misconduct cases;
  - Monitor the investigation and resolution of all complaints to ensure they are handled in a timely fashion and complainants are notified of the final disposition of their complaint;

- Coordinate with the Sheriff's Office to select an appropriate technology application for tracking and information sharing;
  - Publish annual reports available to the public that provide a statistical analysis of complaints, investigative findings, and final discipline for sustained complaints;
  - Make recommendations for action by the Sheriff on needed improvements in trainings, policies, procedures, and practices; and
  - In collaboration with the Sheriff's Office, explore the establishment and administration of a voluntary officer-citizen mediation program.
- The King County Executive should appoint, subject to King County Council confirmation, a citizens' committee to advise the director of the Office of Independent Oversight on policies, procedures, and practices relating to officer misconduct, discipline, and other responsibilities of the director.
  - The King County Office of Citizen Complaints-Ombudsman should no longer have oversight responsibilities of the King County Sheriff's Office.

## JURISDICTION OF THE KING COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

