



Watertown Police Department

General Order



General Order: 1.9

Category: Management

Subject: Complaints of Alleged Misconduct by law Enforcement Agency Personnel

Effective Date: 05/14/2015

Revision Date: 01/03/2022

Issuing Authority: Joshua Bernegger, Chief of Police

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to comply with Public Act No. 14-166 and to provide a uniform policy to accept, process, investigate, take appropriate action upon and resolve complaints from a member of the public relating to alleged misconduct or malfeasance committed by Watertown Police Department personnel in the State of Connecticut. Complaints may allege abuse of authority, corruption, criminality, poor or slow service, or other misconduct or malfeasance on the part of the agency personnel.

II. POLICY:

The Watertown Police Department shall respond to allegations of misconduct or malfeasance against its employees consistent with this policy and fairly and impartially investigate all complaints or allegations of such conduct to determine their validity. The Department shall impose any disciplinary or non-disciplinary corrective actions that may be warranted in a timely manner. The Department shall accept and document all complaints against any employee regardless of whether the filed complaint is in writing, verbal, in person, by mail, by telephone (or TDD), by facsimile, electronic, or anonymous.

1. There shall be no retaliation in any form by any member of this agency directed at and individual who makes a complaint.
2. During the complaint intake process, no questions shall be asked of a complainant regarding their immigration status.
3. Employees who withhold information, fail to cooperate with department investigations or who fail to report alleged misconduct or malfeasance of employees to a supervisor shall be subject to disciplinary action.

III. DEFINITIONS:

1. **Complaint:** An allegation of employee misconduct or malfeasance.



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2. **Complainant:** Any person who files a complaint regarding misconduct or malfeasance on the part of an agency employee.
3. **Complaint Control Number:** A unique numerical code used to identify and track citizen complaints and calls for service.
4. **Discipline:** Adverse action taken by the agency against any employee as the result of a sustained internal affairs investigation including, but not limited to, a written reprimand, suspension, demotion or dismissal.
5. **Employee:** Any person employed by the agency, whether sworn or non-sworn.
6. **Internal Affairs Division or Unit:** The designated division, unit or person with primary responsibility to conduct investigations of administrative or citizen complaints of misconduct or malfeasance.
7. **Malfeasance:** Illegal or dishonest activity especially by a public official.
8. **Misconduct:** Any act or omission by an employee that is illegal or which violates established policy.
9. **Supervisor:** Includes those holding the rank of Sergeant or higher.

IV. PROCEDURES:

Internal Affairs Responsibility

The Office of the Chief of Police has primary oversight and authority over investigation of complaints made against employees. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Chief of Police will assure that the complaint is assigned to the appropriate division, unit, person or designated supervisor for investigation through the appropriate chain of command.

A. The designated division, unit, person or supervisor shall be responsible for:

1. Conducting a thorough, fair and impartial investigation of every complaint received regardless of the method of receipt.
2. Investigating and determining the nature, facts and circumstances of every complaint.
3. Reporting to the Chief of Police the results of the investigation, any recommendations and the resolution of that investigation.
4. Identifying and recommending for appropriate investigation and prosecution, criminal



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misconduct discovered on the part of any individual during the course of any internal affairs investigation.

5. Preparing suggested revisions of Watertown Police Department Policies and Procedures where existing deficiencies have been a contributing factor to misconduct.

B. Acceptance, Filing and Intake of Complaints:

All persons are encouraged to bring forward legitimate complaints regarding possible misconduct or malfeasance of employees of this agency. All sworn and civilian employees shall be required to accept a complaint alleging misconduct or malfeasance by agency personnel. All employees must courteously inform an individual of his or her right to make a complaint if the individual objects to an employee's conduct.

Employees have a duty to assist any person who wishes to file a citizen's complaint by documenting the information and allegations they provide, advising the individual how to proceed, and by promptly putting the complainant in contact with a supervisor who can assist them with filing their complaint. No employee shall refuse to assist any person who wishes to file a citizen complaint or discourage, interfere with, hinder, delay, or obstruct a person from making a citizen complaint.

1. Acceptance of Complaint:

- a. The Watertown Police Department has adopted a complaint form based on the POSTC model. Complainants should be encouraged to complete the form but are not required to do so. Each complaint shall be assigned a Complaint Control Number (CCN) to track complaints and a copy of this form shall be filed in a separate Complaint File.
- b. Complaints may be accepted in writing, verbally, in person, by mail, telephone (TDD), facsimile, and electronically, or by any other means. Anonymous and third-party complaints will be accepted.
- c. All employees will assist those who express a desire to lodge complaints against any member of the Watertown Police Department. This includes:
 1. Calling a supervisor to the scene to conduct a preliminary inquiry and document the complaint.
 2. Explaining the Department's complaint procedures.
 3. Providing complaint form(s) and/or complaint filing information and/or giving instructions as to where the complaint forms may be obtained.
 4. Ensuring that complainants who are unable to read, write or understand the English



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language with sufficient proficiency to fill out the complaint form, or to be interviewed regarding their knowledge of the incident complained of, receive adequate language assistance to permit them to file their complaint and assist, as needed, in the investigation thereof. The name and identifying information of any person providing such language assistance to a complainant shall be recorded on the complaint form or in the body of the report.

- d. All personnel who are approached by a person seeking to make a complaint will, when possible, call a supervisor, obtain a brief description of the allegation, record contact information from the complainant if provided and obtain a Complaint Control Number (CCN) which should be provided to the complainant.
- e. If a supervisor is not readily available, the officer will inform the complainant that they will be contacted by a supervisor or the person or unit assigned to conduct internal affairs investigations by the next business day.
- f. Sworn and civilian employees who receive a complaint about their own conduct shall immediately refer the complaint to a supervisor.
- g. All complaints shall be documented to include the date, time, location, and nature of the complaint, complainant's information (name, address, date of birth, telephone number, or other contact information, if provided, date and time the complaint was received, and the name, rank and/or title of the person receiving the complaint.
- h. The withdrawal of a complaint does not prohibit the agency from completing an investigation.
- i. If complaints are received by mail, all correspondence received containing allegations shall be forwarded to the Chief of Police or the Chief's designee where they will be officially received. These complaints shall be assigned a Complaint Control Number. A letter of acknowledgment must be prepared advising the complainant that the matter is being investigated and that they will be contacted by the investigator assigned.
- j. Walk-in complaints, shall be referred to a Supervisor who shall then forward the complaint to the Internal Affairs designee. After the complaint is received and properly documented, the complainant may be placed under oath and requested to sign the complaint after reading or having it read to them the warning for perjury or false statement. If the complainant refuses to sign the complaint or acknowledge the oath, the complaint will still be accepted and investigated, however the refusal to sign or acknowledge shall be noted. In any event, the complaint will be assigned a Complaint Control Number and forwarded as above.
- k. Telephone complaints shall be referred to a Supervisor or the internal affairs designee. The party who receives the complaint shall obtain the details of the complaint as soon as



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practicable, dispatch a supervisor to the complainant's location, and proceed as described in the foregoing paragraph.

- I. Complaints from the field in which any member of the Watertown Police Department is approached by a complainant expressing allegations of misconduct or malfeasance shall immediately be reported to a supervisor. The complainant shall be requested to await the arrival of the supervisor. If a supervisor is unavailable, or the complainant is unable to await the arrival of a supervisor, the complainant should be informed that he/she may respond to the agency headquarters to make his/her complaint.

2. Validity and Timeliness of Complaints:

- a. Complaints by persons Under the Influence of Alcohol or Drugs: When a person who is noticeably intoxicated or impaired wishes to make a complaint, he or she shall be encouraged to wait until the earliest opportunity after he or she has regained sobriety to do so. When the Supervisor determines the circumstances require immediate action, preliminary details of a complaint should be taken by a Supervisor, when available, regardless of the person's sobriety. In that event, the internal affairs designee should re-interview the person after he or she has regained sobriety
- b. Delayed or Untimely Complaints: Complaints of misconduct or malfeasance shall be accepted regardless of when the alleged misconduct or malfeasance is alleged to have occurred. However, the timing of a complaint is one of the circumstances that the agency may consider in determining whether misconduct or malfeasance can be reliably substantiated and, if so, the nature and extent of discipline to be imposed. Where a delay in reporting alleged misconduct may call into question the veracity of the complainant, or has resulted in the loss or destruction of evidence or the inability to locate witnesses due to the passage of time, the facts and circumstances should be detailed in the report.

Although allegations of criminal behavior may be made past the expiration of the applicable statute of limitations and criminal prosecution may no longer be possible, a criminal violator may still be held accountable administratively.

3. Complainant Who Fears Retaliation Associated with Filing a Complaint:

If a complainant expresses fears of retaliation as a result of filing a complaint, they must be assured that those fears will be taken seriously. Complainants should be asked to provide the basis for their concerns, if possible, and the information provided should be noted in the complaint. This will allow the unit, supervisor or internal affairs designee to be aware of these fears and develop reasonable strategies to assist the complainant in dispelling those fears.

V. INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS:



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- A. The Chief of Police or the Chiefs designee shall assure that all complaints received are processed and investigated appropriately as set forth in this policy. Internal Affairs investigations shall be completed in a timely manner within the time limits determined by the Chief of Police, including extensions granted by the Chief of Police or designee for good cause.
- B. Complainants shall be notified in writing within five (5) business days of receipt that;
1. Their complaint has been received by the agency and is currently pending;
 2. That a complaint number has been assigned (including the assigned number);
 3. That they will be informed in writing of the outcome of the complaint promptly following conclusion of the investigation, and
 4. That they may contact the designated investigator (identify by name, telephone and/or email) at any time for further information while the investigation is pending.
- C. The subject of the investigation shall be promptly notified of the complaint in accordance with the provisions of applicable labor agreements. In the absence of an applicable labor agreement, an employee who is the subject of a complaint shall be notified in writing within five (5) business days of the receipt of such complaint of;
1. The fact that a complaint has been made,
 2. The identity of the complainant, if known,
 3. The substance of the complaint,
 4. The law or policy that is alleged to have been violated, and
 5. The date upon which the investigation is expected to be completed.
- Employees who become the subject of an official internal affairs investigation shall be advised of the investigation and shall be given a written notice of allegations. Such notice shall include the employee's rights and responsibilities relative to the investigation. This notice shall not be given if the allegations are for continuing conduct.
- Where prior notification of the subject of a complaint is reasonably likely to impede the progress of an investigation, result in the loss or destruction of evidence, or jeopardize the safety of any individual, the Chief of Police may direct in writing that such notification be delayed, stating the reasons therefore and the anticipated extent of the delay.
- D. Nothing in this policy precludes the Chief of Police from referring an internal affairs



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investigation to an outside agency if such action would be in the best interest of the municipality and of justice.

VI. REVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION:

- A. The designated internal affairs investigator's supervisor shall review the investigation to determine the thoroughness, completeness, accuracy and objectivity of the investigation.
- B. The completed report of investigation, disciplinary recommendation if any and the recommended disposition shall be reviewed by the Chief of Police or the designee of the Chief of Police.
- C. The complainant shall be promptly notified in writing of the status and/or disposition of his or her complaint at the conclusion of the investigation by the Chief of Police or his designee.
- D. Findings of completed investigations and disciplinary recommendations if any, shall be promptly conveyed, in writing, to the employee through his or her chain of command.

VII. CASE DISPOSITIONS – STANDARDS:

For each charge or allegation of misconduct or malfeasance which forms the basis for an internal affairs investigation, such charge or allegation shall be classified upon closing of the investigation in one of the following manners:

- A. **Exonerated:** The investigation determined by a preponderance of the evidence that misconduct or malfeasance was committed, but not by the subject of the investigation.
- B. **Unfounded:** The investigation determined by a preponderance of the evidence that the misconduct or malfeasance complained of did not occur.
- C. **Not Sustained:** The investigation was unable to determine by a preponderance of the evidence whether or not the misconduct or malfeasance complained of occurred, or whether or not it was committed by the subject of the investigation.
- D. **Sustained:** The investigation determined by a preponderance of the evidence that the misconduct or malfeasance complained of occurred and that it was committed by the subject of the investigation.
- E. **Misconduct Not Based on Original Complaint:** The investigation determined by a preponderance of the evidence that other misconduct or malfeasance which was not the basis for the original investigation occurred, was discovered during the course of the original investigation, and was committed by the subject of the investigation.
- F. **Withdrawn:** At some point prior to the completion of the investigation, the complainant notified the



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agency that he/she wished the investigation to be discontinued and concurrence for this action was obtained from the Chief of Police.

- G. **Summary Action:** Disciplinary action in the form of an oral reprimand, or counseling documented in writing, was taken by an employee's supervisor or commander for minor violations of department rules, policies or procedures as defined by this agency. Summary actions are the lowest level of disciplinary action or remediation.
- H. **Reconciled:** At the discretion of the Chief of Police, the process of reconciliation may be encouraged in lieu of any of the above dispositions. When authorized by the Chief of Police, supervisors receiving complaints shall to the extent possible, bring together the complainant and the officer or employee involved in minor violations and attempt reconciliation. This may be used where the complaint is from a misunderstanding on the part of the affected officer, employee or the complainant. Reconciliation may be employed for complaints of a minor nature that do not reflect:

1. Discredit upon the agency.
2. Discredit upon the involved employee.
3. Commission of a criminal offense; or
4. Allegations of racism, bigotry or prejudice against any race, religion, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, or circumstances beyond the individual's control.

Reconciliation must be documented through the chain of command to the Chief of Police or his or her designee. Reconciliation does not preclude further corrective action on the part of the agency.

VIII. TRAINING:

All supervisory personnel will be required to attend training on the department's Complaint Policy and the responsibilities of supervisors conducting internal investigations upon the implementation of this policy.

All supervisory personnel will be required to attend periodic refresher training, as determined by the department, regarding the policies and procedures contained herein and professionally accepted practices related to conducting internal investigation.

IX. PUBLIC INFORMATION and ACCESS:

The Chief of Police will:

- A. Ensure informational materials are made available to the public through police personnel, the police department facility, the police agency web site, the general government web site of the



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agency, the internet, libraries, community groups, community centers and at other designated public facilities.

- B.** Ensure that copies of this policy and complaint forms are available at the town hall or another municipal building located within the municipality served by the law enforcement agency, other than a municipal building in which the law enforcement agency is located. This information should include relevant phone numbers and any addresses where complaints can be made. This information must explain the complaint process in English and Spanish.
- C.** The complaint policy and forms should be made available on the Watertown Police Department website.

X. GENERAL INFORMATION:

- A.** Supervisors may relieve from duty an employee who is unfit for duty because of physical or psychological fitness. When such action is taken, the employee shall be directed to report to the Chief's office immediately. If the Chief is not present, the supervisor shall make immediate contact with the Chief and Deputy Chief as well as, the employee's Lieutenant. The supervisor shall prepare a detailed report about the incident prior to leaving at the end of duty
- B.** Files pertaining to internal investigations will be considered confidential and not left where unauthorized contact may be made. Files will be stored in a locked cabinet in the administrative office area. Keys for the cabinets will be accessible only to those authorized by the Chief of Police.
- C.** Any member or employee who is the subject of an internal affairs investigation may be required to provide or submit to any or all the following, if materially related to the investigation:
- D.** Medical, laboratory/chemical examinations; Lineups; Photographs; Submit a financial disclosure statement; and Search of Town of Watertown property including lockers.