Audit at a glance

Police and Sheriff Civilian Oversight

SEPTEMBER 2025

ABOUT

We performed this audit due to concerns over the timeliness of the Police and Sheriff Departments' misconduct investigations and the reporting of the Monitor's Office's activities.

KEY FACTS

- The Office of the Independent Monitor is the civilian oversight agency for the Denver Police Department and the Denver Sheriff Department.
- The Monitor's Office provides recommendations to improve the thoroughness of sworn personnel investigations and appropriateness of disciplinary actions, as well as to improve the departments' policies and practices.
- The departments are not required to implement the recommendations of the Monitor's Office.

In the report

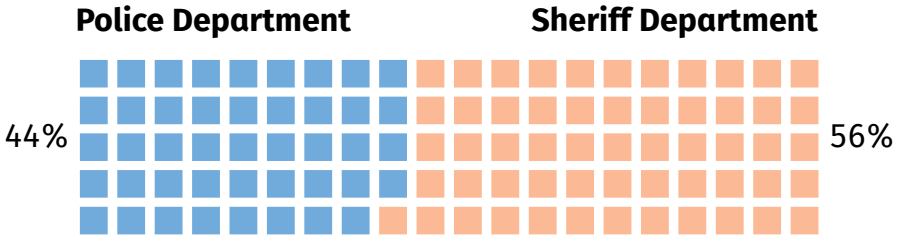
FINDING: Conflicting mandates and a perceived conflict of interest limits transparency and accountability

- Denver Charter and city ordinance direct the Monitor's Office to publicly report on recommendations it makes on investigations of officer and deputy misconduct cases, disciplinary actions, and policy reviews. However, a conflicting mandate prevents the Monitor's Office from including those recommendations in its public reports. It also significantly limited what we could audit.
- Another responsibility of the Monitor's Office is to provide recommendations for improving the Police and Sheriff Departments' policies and practices. However, most of the office's work in this area has not been shared with the public as expected by city charter and city ordinance.
- The Monitor's Office provides its reports to other city agencies for review and input creating a perceived lack of independence and transparency in its oversight of the Police and Sheriff Departments.

WHY IT MATTERS

For decades, tension has existed between the public and the Police and Sheriff Departments — fracturing the trust placed in the departments that are intended to protect and serve the public. The Monitor's Office has a responsibility to ensure sworn personnel are appropriately investigated and addressed when misconduct occurs to ensure accountability and to increase community trust.

PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY DEPARTMENT, 2023-2024



Note: *This figure is based on closed cases.*

Source: *Auditor's Office analysis of data from the Department of Public Safety.*

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CONTINUED FROM OTHER SIDE

FINDING: The Monitor's Office is not comprehensively reporting on the timeliness of misconduct investigations

- Police and Sheriff Departments misconduct investigations are made up of multiple phases that contribute to the timeliness of an investigation. The Monitor's Office is only reporting on a portion of the discipline review process.
- Because the office's annual report only reports on a portion of the overall timeliness of investigations, it leaves out other areas of the process that contribute to the overall timeliness. Without this information, it is unclear how long the whole process takes from start to finish.

FINDING: The Monitor's Office's record keeping does not differentiate between mandatory and discretionary case reviews

- There are certain cases the Monitor's Office is required to review. But without tracking this information, the office cannot demonstrate its compliance with city ordinance and this may be affecting the office's ability to effectively prioritize its workload.

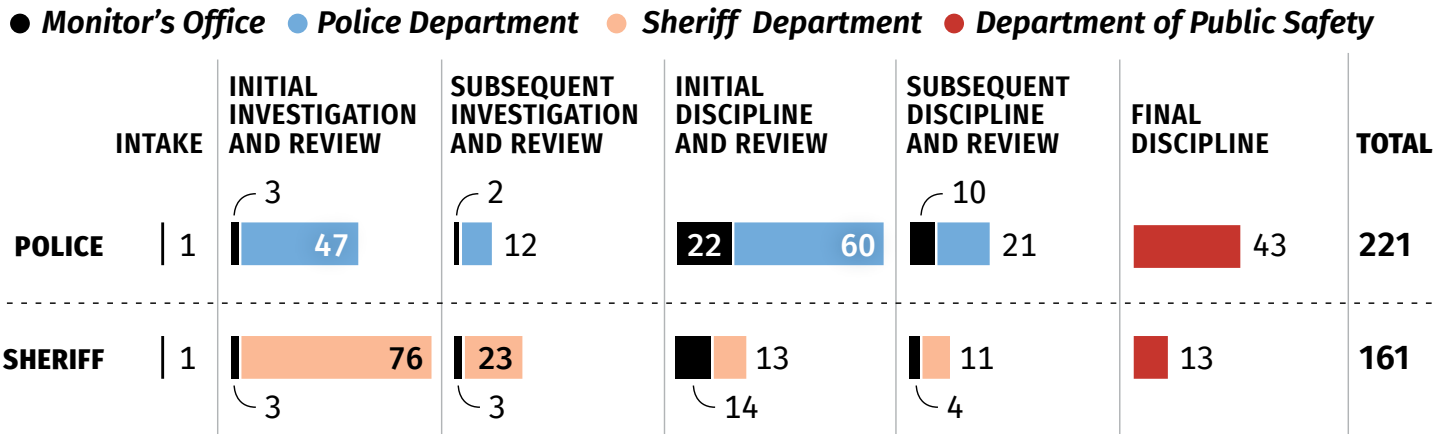
The office agreed with all 6 recommendations.

- Despite not being required to, the Monitor's Office currently reviews all mandatory and discretionary misconduct cases. This case review workload exceeds its mandated obligations.

FINDING: The Monitor's Office's does not have a formalized strategic plan

- Without a formalized strategic plan, it is unclear how the Monitor's Office will efficiently and effectively meet its oversight responsibilities.
- The city's foreseeable budget constraints and Police Department's proposal to adopt the "Education-Based Discipline" policy should make strategic planning for the Monitor's Office a priority. A strategic plan will also serve as a valuable tool to communicate with the public about the office's vision and ensure alignment with voter intention.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS TO COMPLETE THE DISCIPLINE PROCESS, BY PHASE AND RESPONSIBLE PARTY



Note: *A case may be suspended if it is under a criminal investigation, or if the subject officer is unavailable for an extended leave (i.e., family, medical, or military leave). A case can be suspended at any point throughout the process. When the suspended days are removed from the total time reported, the total time decreases to 132 days for the Police Department and 92 days for the Sheriff Department.*

Source: *Auditor's Office analysis of Department of Public Safety data.*

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