



# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual



## 5.140 – Bias-Free Policing

Effective Date: 08/01/2019

### 5.140-POL

The Seattle Police Department is committed to providing services and enforcing laws in a professional, nondiscriminatory, fair, and equitable manner.

The Department recognizes that bias can occur at both an individual and an institutional level and is committed to eradicating both.

Our objective is to provide equitable police services based upon the needs of the people we encounter.

The intent of this policy is to increase the Department's effectiveness as a law enforcement agency and to build mutual trust and respect with Seattle's diverse groups and communities.

Bias-based policing is the different treatment of any person by officers motivated by any characteristic of protected classes under state, federal, and local laws as well as other discernible personal characteristics of an individual. Such "discernible personal characteristics" include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Age
- Disability status
- Economic status
- Familial status
- Gender
- Gender Identity
- Homelessness
- Mental illness
- National origin
- Political ideology

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

- Race, ethnicity, or color
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Use of a motorcycle or motorcycle-related paraphernalia – [RCW 43.101.419](#)
- Veteran status

## **1. Every Employee is Responsible for Knowing and Complying With This Policy**

The Chief of Police will reinforce that bias-based policing is unacceptable through specific yearly training, regular updates, and such other means as may be appropriate.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring all personnel in their command are operating in compliance with this policy.

## **2. Officers Will Not Engage in Bias-Based Policing**

Employees shall not make decisions or take actions that are influenced by bias, prejudice, or discriminatory intent. Law enforcement and investigative decisions must be based upon observable behavior or specific intelligence.

Officers may not use discernible personal characteristics in determining reasonable suspicion or probable cause, except as part of a suspect description.

Employees shall not express—verbally, in writing, or by other gesture—any prejudice or derogatory comments concerning discernible personal characteristics.

No employee shall retaliate against any person who initiates or provides information or testimony related to an investigation, prosecution, Office of Police Accountability (OPA) complaint, litigation or hearings related to the Department or Departmental employees, regardless of the context in which the allegation is made, or because of such person's participation in the complaint process as a victim, witness, investigator, decision-maker, or reviewer.

Employees who engage in, ignore, or condone bias-based policing will be subject to discipline.

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

Supervisors and commanders who fail to respond to, document, and review allegations of bias-based policing will be subject to discipline.

### **3. The Characteristics of an Individual May Be Appropriately Considered in Limited Circumstances**

Officers may take into account the discernible personal characteristics of an individual in establishing reasonable suspicion or probable cause, only when the characteristic is part of a specific suspect description based on trustworthy and relevant information that links a specific person to a particular unlawful incident.

Officers must articulate specific facts and circumstances that support their use of such characteristics in establishing reasonable suspicion or probable cause.

Officers are expected to consider relevant personal characteristics of an individual when determining whether to provide services designed for individuals with those characteristics (e.g., behavioral crisis, homelessness, addictions, etc.).

### **4. All Employees Share Responsibility for Preventing Bias-Based Policing**

Employees who have observed or are aware of others who have engaged in bias-based policing shall specifically report such incidents to a supervisor, providing all information known to them before the end of the shift during which they make the observation or become aware of the incident.

Supervisors, commanders, and civilian managers have an individual obligation to ensure the timely and complete review and documentation of all allegations of violation of this policy that are referred to them or of which they should reasonably be aware.

### **5. Employees Will Call a Supervisor in Response to Allegations of Bias-Based Policing**

If a person alleges bias-based policing, the employee shall call a supervisor to the scene to review the circumstances and determine an appropriate course of action. For purposes of this policy, an allegation of bias-based policing occurs whenever, from the perspective of a reasonable officer, a person complains that they have received different treatment from an officer because of any discernible personal characteristic listed above.

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

If the person declines to speak with a supervisor or wishes to leave before the supervisor arrives, the employee will attempt to obtain the person's contact information voluntarily.

- The employee will also offer the person the supervisor's contact information and information on how to file a complaint with the OPA.

Officers may not extend a detention solely to await the arrival of a supervisor.

If officers have completed their business with the person making the allegation, and the supervisor has not yet arrived, the officer will wait at the location for the supervisor to arrive.

## **6. Supervisors Conduct Preliminary Inquiry into Bias-Based Policing**

If the person making the allegation wishes to speak with the supervisor about the bias-based policing concerns, the supervisor will discuss the incident with the person making the allegation (See 5.140-PRO-1 Handling a Bias-Based Policing Allegation).

- If the person making the allegation has left the scene, the supervisor shall make meaningful attempts to contact the person making the allegation by phone or letter.
- The supervisor will document the attempts in the Blue Team entry. If after meaningful attempts the person making the allegation is unavailable or unresponsive to phone calls or letter, the supervisor will review BWV/ICV of the incident.
- The supervisor will document any issues found on the BWV/ICV.

The reviewing supervisor shall explain to the person making the allegation the option to refer the complaint to OPA. If the person making the allegation asks that the matter be referred to OPA then the reviewing supervisor shall refer it using the Complaint Blue Team entry, instead of the Bias Review Blue Team entry.

If the reviewing or approving supervisor determines that there may have been misconduct, that supervisor shall refer the matter to OPA using the Complaint Blue Team entry for further investigation. When a supervisor sends a complaint to OPA, a Bias Review Blue Team entry will not be used.

Bias Review Blue Team entries are used when all of the following apply:

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

- The supervisor has conducted a preliminary investigation into the allegation of bias-based policing,
- The supervisor believes that no misconduct occurred,
- The supervisor has explained to the person making the allegation the option to refer the complaint to OPA,
- The supervisor provides the person OPA's contact information, and
- The person does not ask that the matter be referred to OPA.

## **7. Employees Will Document All Allegations of Bias-Based Policing**

If the use of a Bias Review Blue Team entry is permitted under the circumstances (see 5.140-POL-6), the investigating supervisor will complete the entry to document the circumstances of the allegations and steps that were taken to investigate and resolve it. This review must include the following information, if the person is willing to provide it:

- The person's name,
- Address,
- Phone number, or email address, and
- Contact information for witnesses who observed the events.

The investigating supervisor must submit all documentation of an allegation of bias-based policing by the end of their shift.

The supervisor will then forward the Blue Team entry, via the chain of command, to the bureau chief.

## **8. The Chief Legal Officer Prepares an Annual Report for the Chief of Police and the Public**

The Chief Legal Officer will prepare a report that describes and analyzes the year's bias-based policing allegations and the status of the Department's effort to prevent bias-based policing, and any disparate impacts of policing.

After review by the SPD command staff, and after names of individual officers have been removed, this report will be made available to the community.

## **9. Disparate Impacts**

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

The Seattle Police Department is committed to eliminating policies and practices that have an unwarranted disparate impact on certain protected classes. It is possible that the long-term impacts of historical inequality and institutional bias could result in disproportionate enforcement, even in the absence of intentional bias. The Department's policy is to identify ways to protect public safety and public order without engaging in unwarranted or unnecessary disproportionate enforcement.

In consultation with the Community Police Commission, and the Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety, the Department shall periodically analyze data which will assist in identification of SPD practices – including stops, citations, and arrests – that may have a disparate impact on particular protected classes relative to the general population.

Alternatively, the Department may rely in whole or in part on the Community Police Commission and the Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety for analysis of this data.

When unwarranted disparate impacts are identified and verified, the Department will consult with neighborhoods, businesses, community groups, and/or the Community Police Commission, and the Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety, to explore equally effective alternative practices that would result in less disproportionate impact. Alternative enforcement practices may include addressing the targeted behavior in a different way, de-emphasizing the practice in question, or other measures. Initially, disparate impact analysis will focus on race, color, and national origin. The Department will consult with neighborhoods, businesses, community groups, and/or the Community Police Commission, and the Office of the Inspector General for Public Safety, about whether to examine disparity with respect to other classifications.

The Disparate Impacts section of the policy is not a basis to impose discipline upon any employee of the Department, nor is it intended to create a private right of action to enforce its terms.

## **a. The Chief of Police or Designee Will Enforce Policy**

The Chief or designee will ensure that this policy is in effect and carried out.

## **b. Officers Document Enforcement Activity**

See [Seattle Police Manual Section 6.220 – Voluntary Contacts, Terry Stops & Detentions](#).

## **c. The Department Analyzes Officer-Initiated Activity**

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

The analysis focuses on enforcement practices (stops, citations, and arrests) that are not primarily driven by reports from crime victims. These include, but are not limited to:

- Violation of the Uniform Controlled Substance Act (VUCSA)
- Prostitution
- Obstructing
- Resisting arrest
- Driving crimes/infractions
- Pedestrian interference
- Illegal camping
- Pedestrian violations (e.g., "Jaywalking")
- Drinking in public
- Public consumption of marijuana
- Public urination/defecation

## 5.140–PRO-1 Handling a Bias-Based Policing Allegation

### Employee

1. **Receives** an allegation of bias-based policing
2. **Calls** a supervisor to the scene
  - 2a. If the officer's sergeant is not available, the officer **notifies** a sergeant from the officer's precinct.
  - 2b. If no sergeant is available, the officer **notifies** a lieutenant who may assign a specific sergeant or who will personally respond to conduct the same review as would have been required of a sergeant had one been available.
3. If the person making the allegation wishes to leave the scene, the officer **attempts** to obtain the person's contact information voluntarily.

### Next-Level Supervisor

# Seattle Police Department Policy Manual

4. **Responds** to the scene
5. **Gathers** all relevant information from the person making the allegation and any witnesses, if they are willing to provide it
  - Relevant information is defined as any information that may tend to explain, prove, or disprove the allegations being made.
6. **Provides** specific information to the person on how to file a complaint or, if warranted, **refers** the matter to OPA for further investigation

See [Seattle Police Manual Section 5.002 - Responsibilities of Employees Concerning Complaints of Possible Misconduct](#)

7. **Completes** a Blue Team entry
  - 7a. **Uses** the Complaint Blue Team entry for cases that are being referred to OPA for further investigation
  - 7b. **Uses** the Bias Review Blue Team entry for cases that are not being referred to OPA for further investigation
8. **Forwards** the Blue Team entry to the bureau chief via the chain of command

## Bureau Chief

9. **Reviews** and **forwards** the Blue Team entry to OPA