



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

Biannual Review of SPD Compliance with Chapter 14.12 of Seattle Municipal Code

March 2025

Objective and Scope

The objective of this review is to determine whether the Seattle Police Department (SPD) complied with applicable regulations for the collection of private sexual information and restricted information, per the requirements in Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 14.12 for the 6-month period from July 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024.

Introduction

OIG conducted this review pursuant to Seattle Municipal Code 14.12 - ‘Collection of Information for Law Enforcement Purposes.’¹ Prior OIG audits and reviews found that while SPD was generally in compliance with Chapter 14.12, the Chapter itself was significantly outdated and rarely applicable in the context of modern policing. OIG made recommendations to City Council to revise Chapter 14.12 and those recommendations are open at this time.² Additionally, OIG issued a recommendation in the 2024 review to amend SPD Policy 6.060 to require that SPD provide OIG notice of 14.12 authorization and purges of expired authorizations. That recommendation remains open at this time.³

Chapter 14.12 Overview

Origin of Chapter 14.12

In 1979, the Seattle City Council unanimously passed Ordinance 10833, restricting how the Seattle Police Department could collect, receive, transmit, and use information related to sexual orientation, political affiliation, and religion. The ordinance became Chapter 14.12 of Seattle Municipal Code, Collection of Information for Law Enforcement Purposes. When it was passed, Ordinance 10833 was recognized as one of the first local ordinances to restrict certain information collected by police departments. Chapter 14.12 has not been substantially altered since 1982.

Information Protected by Chapter 14.12

Chapter 14.12 covers two main categories of information: private sexual information and restricted information. Private sexual information includes information on an individual’s sexual orientation or sexual practices. Restricted information covers a wide range of information on the political and religious beliefs of individuals and organizations (see figure 1 below). This report uses the term “protected information” to refer to all information covered by the Chapter.

1 This report will refer to the SMC as “Chapter 14.12” or “the Chapter”.

2 See Recommendations 1 and 2 in OIG’s 2023 audit: https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OIG/Audits/2023_Chapter_14.12_Audit.pdf

3 See Recommendation 1 in OIG’s 2024 review: https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OIG/Audits/14.12_Biannual_Review_Q32024.pdf

Figure 1: Categories of Information Protected by Chapter 14.12

Information protected under Chapter 14.12	
Private sexual information	Information about an individual’s sexual practices or orientation.
Restricted Information	Information about: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An individual’s political or religious associations, activities, beliefs, or opinions; 2. The political or religious activities, beliefs or opinions, and the membership, mailing, subscription, or contributor lists of certain types of organizations, including political and religious organizations; or 3. An individual’s membership or participation in such an organization, in a political or religious demonstration, or in a demonstration for community purposes.

Source: Seattle Municipal Code Ch. 14.030

SPD Did Not Create Any Authorizations Within the Period of Review

Chapter 14.12 requires that SPD notify OIG of each authorization for the collection of protected information, and that OIG review these authorizations along with any related investigative files.⁴

During the review period of July through December 2024, the Criminal Intelligence Unit reported that they did not create any authorizations for the collection of restricted information.

Review of Photo/Video Log Found No Violations of SMC 14.12

SPD Policy requires the Criminal Intelligence Section to manage all videos and photographs taken by the Department, of demonstrations protected by Chapter 14.12. This includes receiving original copies, determining whether to retain or purge in accordance with the Chapter, and maintaining a log of all materials.⁵

OIG reviewed the log and found that SPD did not improperly retain any photographs or videos of demonstrations on SPD’s digital evidence management system.⁶

Sample of Department Files Found No Violations of SMC 14.12

Chapter 14.12 requires that OIG conduct a random check of department files as part of its review. OIG reviewed a judgmental sample of SPD intelligence unit records and general SPD reports, and did not find any violations of Chapter 14.12.

4 SMC 14.12.150(E) and SMC 14.12.330(B)(1)(A). The responsibilities of ‘the Auditor’ identified in the Chapter 14.12 were transferred to OIG in the 2017 Accountability Ordinance (Ordinance 125315).

5 SPD Policy 6.060.10 and 6.060.11

6 OIG is unable to determine whether any photographs or videos were maintained outside of the digital evidence management system, such as on a personal device or a separate shared drive.