

August 26, 2025

Chief Shon F. Barnes  
Seattle Police Department  
PO Box 34986  
Seattle, WA 98124-4986

Dear Chief Barnes:

Please see the Management Action Recommendation below.

**Case Number**

- 2024OPA-0057 / 2025COMP-0013

**Topic**

- Death Investigations

**Summary**

- It was alleged that a named employee did not properly investigate and document a death, prematurely categorizing it as a suicide.

**Analysis**

- A 911 caller reported their roommate “just committed suicide.” Call remarks noted the 911 caller said the roommate “shot himself.” The Primary Patrol Officer arrived on scene alone where they found the roommate still alive. The roommate died on scene. The 911 caller, his girlfriend, and a downstairs resident were in the home. The 911 caller and the downstairs resident both had firearms in the house. Other officers and the Primary Patrol Sergeant also arrived on scene.
- [SPD Policy 15.055](#) sets policy and assigns tasks for “all employees who investigate the death of a person.” SPD Policy 15.055-TSK-1 states the primary patrol officer at a death investigation “secures the scene, protects the evidence, insulates witnesses, and identifies suspects.” SPD Policy 15.055-TSK-2 requires the primary patrol sergeant to respond in person, assume command of patrol activities at the scene, assist the primary patrol officer and, together, determine the likely manner of death: “natural, accidental, suicide, homicide, or possible homicide/undetermined.”
- OPA’s investigation found the Primary Patrol Officer did not isolate witnesses, restrict access to the scene, or secure multiple firearms at the scene. OPA also observed the Primary Patrol Officer initially questioned the 911 caller and his girlfriend together, asked leading questions, and did not ask questions to clarify their recollections. OPA found these investigative issues played a role in the death being prematurely categorized as a suicide rather than an accidental death or possible homicide/undetermined.
- A significant topic of conversation at the discipline meeting concerned the importance of regularly training patrol officers on how to properly conduct a death investigation according to policy and best practice. Also, discussed was the need for and importance of providing in-service training to patrol officers on the importance of using cognitive interviewing principles in death investigation.



- OPA reviewed policies from comparable cities. San Francisco<sup>1</sup>, Chicago<sup>2</sup>, and Denver<sup>3</sup> each emphasize the importance of protecting evidence found at the scene and considerations when categorizing the cause of death. Their policies do not offer specific guidance for interviews in death investigations.

#### **Recommendations**

- SPD should work with Seattle's Community Assisted Response & Engagement to address dispatch procedures applying an initial call classification of suicide.<sup>4</sup>
- SPD should develop a training module on SPD Policy 15.055 – Death Investigations and provide this training Departmentwide. Among other things, the training module should include:
  - Respective responsibilities of the officers and sergeants responding to a death investigation;
  - The appropriate categorization of the death as a natural death, death of a person under hospice care, natural death at a hospital, accidental death or suicide, and possible homicide or death with suspicious circumstances; and
  - The importance of using cognitive interviewing concepts, such as open-ended questions, in these investigations.

I appreciate your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bonnie D. Glenn".

Bonnie Glenn  
Interim Director, Office of Police Accountability

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<sup>1</sup> San Francisco Police Department [General Order DGO 6.05, Death Cases](#).

<sup>2</sup> Chicago Police Department [General Order GO4-02, Crime Scene Protection and Processing](#).

<sup>3</sup> Denver Police Department [Policy 106.00, Evidence and Personal Property and Policy 301.00 – Criminal Investigations](#).

<sup>4</sup> When calls are dispatched as suicides it potentially undermines the perceived need for an objective and thorough investigation, to secure the scene, and the importance of asking open questions.