



Professional Reference Directory

Chapter: 15 Supervisors

Section: 15.3

Title: Citizen Complaints

Date: 10/10/19, 05/05/20, 07/08/21

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to comply with Public Act No. 14-166 and to provide a procedure that will accept, process, investigate, take appropriate action upon and resolve complaints from a member of the public alleging abuse of authority, corruption, criminality, poor or slow service, or other misconduct or malfeasance on the part of agency personnel.

I. POLICY

This department will receive, investigate and take appropriate action as outlined in this procedure on complaints made in writing, by mail, telephone (or TDD), by facsimile, electronic mail, or in person any time of the day or night to any member of this department. This procedure will include the receipt and investigation of anonymous and third party complaints. All police personnel receiving complaints will be courteous, responsive and helpful while adhering to established procedures.

There shall be no retaliation in any form by any member of this agency directed at an individual who makes a complaint.

During the complaint intake process, no questions shall be asked of a complainant regarding their immigration status.

Officers 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.

Complainants will be provided complaint forms (refer to Appendix A) on which to lodge their complaints. Each complaint shall be assigned a Citizen Complaint Number (CCN) by the Office of the Chief of Police to track complaints and a copy of this form shall be filed in a separate Complaint File. Interpreters may, as required, be utilized. Nothing contained in these procedures will preclude the Chief of Police from enacting a proactive internal investigation without a complaint if, in his or her opinion, such action is necessary.

II. COMPLAINT CATEGORIES

All complaints will be categorized into two types as follows.

Class A Complaint: Complaints alleging serious abuse of authority including excessive use of force; willful and malicious illegal arrest; unreasonable deprivation of individual rights; language, conduct or behavior derogatory of a person's sex, race, religion, creed, sexual orientation or national origin; corruption; criminal activity; and serious violations of the Professional Reference Directory or Rules and Procedures of this department will be classified as Class A complaint. Class A complaints will normally be investigated by the Professional Standards Unit, unless the Chief of Police determines that the investigation should be handled by a different supervisor or a different organization.

Class B Complaint: Complaints of a service response nature (such as rudeness, poor or slow service, poor attitude...) are Class B complaints and may be referred to Professional Standards Unit or to the involved employee's supervisor through the Office of the Chief of Police for investigation. In all cases, the complaint will be addressed and the complainant notified in writing of the outcome. The supervisor conducting the investigation will be responsible for reporting his or her findings and recommendations to the Chief of Police.

III. PROCEDURES

A. 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 a Citizen Complaint Number (CCN) to properly track the investigation and assigned to the appropriate division, unit, person or designated supervisor for investigation through the appropriate chain of command.

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 a supervisor up to and including the Chief of Police, if warranted, the results of the investigation, any recommendations and the resolution of that investigation.
4. Identifying and recommending for appropriate investigation and prosecution criminal misconduct discovered on the part of any individual during the course of an internal affairs investigation.
5. Preparing suggested revisions of Agency 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.

Employees will explain the Department's complaint procedures and provide complaint form(s) and/or complaint filing information and/or give instructions as to where the complaint forms may be obtained. (Refer to Appendix A of this PRD for a copy of the West Hartford Police Department Civilian Complaint Report)

C. By Mail

All correspondence received containing complaints will be forwarded to the Chief of Police or his or her designee where they will be officially received. The Chief of Police or his or her designee will:

1. Assure that the complaint is officially logged and assigned a Citizen Complaint Number (CCN).
2. Prepare a letter of acknowledgment assuring the complainant the case is being investigated and that an investigator will contact them.
3. Arrange for a written, sworn statement, to be taken from the complainant.

D. Walk-in Complaints

All walk-in complaints will be referred first to the highest-ranking supervisor available who supervises the officer in question. If that supervisor is not available, the complaint will be referred to the highest-ranking Patrol Supervisor who is available. Under no circumstances will a complainant be told to come back to make a complaint. The following procedure will be followed:

1. After the complaint is received and properly documented, the complainant will be placed under oath and requested to sign the complaint after reading (or having been read) the warning for perjury or false statements.
2. Such warning will appear on the complaint form. If the complainant refuses to sign the complaint, the complaint will still be received and the refusal to sign will be noted.
3. The complaint investigation procedure will be explained to the complainant and he or she will be given a copy of the complaint as a receipt.
4. The complaint will be forwarded to the Office of the Chief of Police to be officially logged, assigned a Citizen Complaint Number, and referred for investigation.

E. By Telephone

Complaints received by telephone will be forwarded to the highest-ranking supervisor available who supervises the officer in question. If that supervisor is not available, the telephone call will be forwarded to the highest-ranking Patrol Supervisor who is available. Under no circumstances will a complainant be told to call back to make a complaint. The party responsible for receiving the complaint will ask the complainant to come to Police Headquarters so that a signed, sworn statement may be obtained. The following procedure will also be followed:

1. A supervisor may be sent to the complainant's location to receive the complaint unless the complainant declines such a visit or circumstances exist which make it unfeasible for a supervisor to make such a visit (e.g. a major incident is underway which requires immediate attention by all supervisory personnel).
2. If the complainant refuses to come to Headquarters and a supervisor is not sent to the complainant's location, a memo must be generated by the supervisor taking the phone call containing as much information as possible. This memo must be forwarded to the Chief's Office and will be used to initiate the investigation process. As a last resort, a complaint form may be sent to the complainant. However, the supervisor must still complete a memo with all available information and forward it to the Chief's Office.
3. The complainant will not be required to submit a written statement if they so choose.

F. In the field

Any police department member approached in the field by a complainant expressing allegations of police misconduct, will immediately notify a field supervisor and request that the complainant await the supervisor's arrival.

1. The field supervisor will ask the complainant go to Police Headquarters to make his or her complaint in written form that can be notarized. If the individual refuses to come to Headquarters to make a complaint, the supervisor will attempt to take a statement from the individual in the field. If that is impossible then a memo will be generated and forwarded to the Chief's Office.
2. If a supervisor is not readily available, the officer will inform the complainant that they will be contacted by a supervisor or the Professional Standards Unit by the next business day.

3. Sworn and civilian employees who receive a complaint about their own conduct shall immediately refer the complaint to a supervisor.
4. The withdrawal of a complaint does not prohibit the agency from completing an investigation.
5. In all instances, employees will ensure that complainants, who are unable to read, write or understand the English 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.

G. Validity and Timeliness of 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 investigator(s) of the complaint should re-interview the person after he or she has regained sobriety.

H. 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 may be considered 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.

I. 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 investigator(s) of the complaint to be aware of these fears and develop reasonable strategies to assist the complainant in dispelling those fears.

IV. **INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS**

- A. The Chief of Police or his designee will assure that all complaints received are processed and investigated appropriately as set forth in this policy. Class A complaints will normally be investigated by the Professional Standards Unit unless the Chief of Police determines that the investigation should be handled by a different supervisor or a different organization. Class B complaints may also be investigated by the Professional Standards Unit at the discretion of the Chief of Police. Investigations shall be completed within 45 calendar days once the investigation is initiated. In limited situations extensions may be 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 department 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 provision in a 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.
- D. 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.

V. REVIEW OF INVESTIGATION

- A. This department will provide an internal review process separate and apart from the investigator to determine the thoroughness, completeness, accuracy and objectivity of the investigation of all Class A and B complaints. This internal review process shall be accomplished by the Civilian Police Review Board. The Civilian Police Review Board shall recommend to either sustain or remand such completed internal affairs investigation. In the event the Civilian Police Review Board recommends remand, the Civilian Police Review Board shall make findings as to the thoroughness, completeness, accuracy, and objectivity of the investigation.
- B. The Civilian Police Review Board shall recommend to sustain or remand within sixty days after a referred complaint first appears on an agenda. Any recommendation made by the Civilian Police Review Board under this section shall be advisory only. Any final decision of discipline shall be made by the Police Chief.
- C. The Chief of Police shall consider the Civilian Police Review Board's recommendations. The Chief of Police will review each investigation for thoroughness, completeness, accuracy and objectivity and shall have final authority relative to determining the proper disposition of the case. Upon determination of the disposition of the investigation, a letter shall be forwarded to the complainant, the involved officer(s) and the Division Commander detailing the outcome of the investigation.
- D. Nothing in this procedure will preclude the Chief of Police from calling in an outside investigative agency such as the State Police, Federal Bureau of Investigation or other federal or state agency if such action would be in the best interest of the jurisdiction and of justice.

VI. DISPOSITIONS

Exonerated: The investigation determined by a preponderance of evidence that the actions of the officer(s) were justified, lawful and proper or that any misconduct or malfeasance which occurred did not involve the officer(s) who are the subject of the complaint.

Unfounded: The investigation determined by a preponderance of evidence that the act or acts complained did not occur or did not involve police personnel.

Not Sustained: The investigation was unable to determine by a preponderance of evidence whether or not the acts complained of occurred, or whether or not it was committed by the subject of the investigation.

Partially Sustained: The investigation disclosed sufficient evidence to clearly prove at least one of the allegations made is not sustained. However, other allegations are sustained and/ or officer(s) action(s) are found to be in violation of Department Rules and Procedures.

Sustained: The investigation determined by a preponderance of evidence that the misconduct or malfeasance alleged in the complaint did occur and that the officer(s) identified in the complaint committed that misconduct or malfeasance.

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(s) of the investigation.

Withdrawn: At some point prior to the completion of the investigation, the complainant notifies the department that he/she wishes the investigation discontinued and concurrence for this action is obtained by the reviewers.

Summary Action: Disciplinary action in the form of a verbal 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.

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 Class B complaints of a minor nature that do not reflect:

- Discredit upon the agency.
- Discredit upon the involved employee.
- Commission of a criminal offense; or
- 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.

VII. 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.

VIII. PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ACCESS

- A. The Chief of Police will 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 agency, the internet, libraries, community groups, community centers and at other designated public facilities.

- B. The Chief of Police will ensure that copies of this policy and complaint forms are available at the town hall or another municipal buildings 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 online where the agency, or the municipality served by the law enforcement agency, has an Internet website.

IX. ALLEGATIONS OF BIASED BASED POLICING / GENERAL STATUTES §54-1m

When a complaint alleges that a person has been subjected to a motor vehicle stop by a police officer solely on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion, a copy of each such complaint and a written notification of the review and disposition of such complaint shall be provided to the Chief State's Attorney and the Office of Policy and Management Criminal Justice Division. No copy of such complaint shall include any other identifying information about the complainant such as the complainant's operator's license number, name or address.

(Also, reference PRD 8.18 Fair and Impartial Policing)

APPENDIX A



**West Hartford Police Department
CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REPORT**



Please give this completed document to a Police Supervisor or send it to the Chief of Police at the following address or email: Chief Vernon Riddick, West Hartford Police Department, 103 Raymond Road, West Hartford, CT 06107 or Email: Police@WestHartfordCT.gov

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------|----------------------|--|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Date of Incident | | Time of Incident | | Date Reported | | Time Reported | | |
| Location of Incident | | | | | | | | |
| Complainant's Name | | | | Complainant's Address (Street, City, State, ZIP) | | | | |
| Complainant's DOB | | Complainant's Home Phone# | | Complainant's Work Phone# | | | | |
| Complainant's Cell Phone# | | | Complainant's E-mail | | | | | |
| Employer | | | | Occupation | | | | |
| Employer's Address | | | | | Employer's Telephone | | | |
| Name of Person Assisting Complainant | | | Address | | | Telephone | | |
| Employee Complained about (if known): (Name or physical description, Badge #, Car #, etc.) | | | | | | | | |
| Witness Information (Name, D.O.B., Address, Telephone #, etc.) | | | | | | | | |
| Please provide answers to the following questions: | | | | | | YES | NO | UNSURE |
| 1. To your knowledge, was all or any part of the incident complained of video or audio taped by anyone? | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Are you afraid for your safety, or that of any other person, for any reason as a result of making this complaint? | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Has anyone threatened you or otherwise tried to intimidate you in an effort to prevent you from making this complaint? | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Are you able to read, write and speak the English Language? | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. If your answer to Question #4 is "No" or "Unsure", have you been provided with adequate language assistance to help you understand and fill out this form? | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(If you answered "Yes" to any of the above questions, please provide details below.)

Details of the Incident: Please provide a full description of the circumstances that prompted your complaint. Attach supporting documentation, as appropriate; including letters, e-mails, photographs, video or audio tapes, etc.

(Attach additional pages, if necessary)

I have read, or had read to me, the above and attached complaint and statement consisting of ____ pages. All of the answers are true and accurate to my knowledge. I understand that making a false statement intended to mislead a law enforcement officer in his official function is a violation of Connecticut General Statute 53a-157b and could result in my arrest and being fined and/or imprisoned.

| | |
|---|---|
| Complainant's Signature | Date and Time Signed |
| On this the ____ day of _____, _____, before me the undersigned officer, personally appeared the complainant whose name is subscribed above and acknowledged that he/she truthfully executed this instrument for the purposes herein contained. | Notary (For Authority See C.G.S. §§1-24, 3-94a et seq.) Print Rank/Name/ID Number: |

| Person Receiving the Complaint | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------------|
| Rank/Name/ ID Number | Date Received | Time Received |
| Method of Contact (Check): <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone <input type="checkbox"/> In-Person <input type="checkbox"/> Mail <input type="checkbox"/> E-Mail <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | |
| Signature of person receiving complaint | Complaint Control Number | |