

Complaints and Administrative Investigations

811.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the reporting, investigation, and disposition of complaints regarding the conduct of members of the Sonoma County Probation Department. This policy shall not apply to any questioning, counseling, instruction, informal verbal admonishment, or other routine or unplanned contact of a member in the normal course of duty, by a supervisor or any other member, nor shall this policy apply to a criminal investigation.

811.2 POLICY

The Sonoma County Probation Department takes seriously all complaints regarding the service provided by the Department and the conduct of its members.

The Department will accept and address all complaints of misconduct in accordance with this policy and applicable federal, state, and local law, municipal and county rules, and the requirements of any collective bargaining agreements.

It is also the policy of this department to ensure that the community can report misconduct without concern for reprisal or retaliation.

811.3 PERSONNEL COMPLAINTS

Personnel complaints include any allegation of misconduct or improper job performance that, if true, would constitute a violation of department policy or federal, state, or local law, policy, or rule. Personnel complaints may be generated internally or by the public.

Inquiries about conduct or performance that, if true, would not violate department policy or federal, state, or local law, policy, or rule may be handled informally by a supervisor and shall not be considered a personnel complaint. Such inquiries generally include clarification regarding policy, procedures, or the response to specific incidents by the Department.

811.3.1 COMPLAINT CLASSIFICATIONS

Personnel complaints shall be classified in one of the following categories:

Informal - A matter in which the Division Director is satisfied that appropriate action has been taken by a supervisor of rank greater than the accused member.

Formal - A matter in which a supervisor determines that further action is warranted. Such complaints may be investigated by a supervisor of rank greater than the accused member or referred to the Division Director, depending on the seriousness and complexity of the investigation.

Incomplete - A matter in which the complaining party either refuses to cooperate or becomes unavailable after diligent follow-up investigation. At the discretion of the assigned supervisor or the Deputy Chief, such matters may be further investigated depending on the seriousness of the complaint and the availability of sufficient information.

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811.3.2 SOURCES OF COMPLAINTS

The following applies to the source of complaints:

- (a) Individuals from the public may make complaints in any form, including in writing, by email, in person, or by telephone.
- (b) Any department member becoming aware of alleged misconduct shall immediately notify a supervisor.
- (c) Anonymous and third-party complaints should be accepted and investigated to the extent that sufficient information is provided.
- (d) Tort claims and lawsuits may generate a personnel complaint and should be coordinated with County Counsel and HR Risk Management.
- (e) Complaints that involve conduct potentially in violation of the County's EEO policy should be coordinated with the County's EEO Manager.

811.4 AVAILABILITY AND ACCEPTANCE OF COMPLAINTS

811.4.1 COMPLAINT FORMS

Complaint forms will be maintained in a clearly visible location in the public area of the department facility and be accessible through the department website. Forms may also be available at other County facilities.

Complaint forms shall be in both English and Spanish. The form may be provided in additional languages, as determined to be warranted.

811.4.2 ACCEPTANCE

All complaints will be courteously accepted by any department member and promptly given to the appropriate supervisor. Although written complaints are preferred, a complaint may also be filed orally, either in person or by telephone. Such complaints will be directed to a supervisor. If a supervisor is not immediately available to take an oral complaint, the receiving member shall obtain contact information sufficient for the supervisor to contact the complainant. The supervisor, upon contact with the complainant, shall complete and submit a complaint form as appropriate.

Although not required, complainants should be encouraged to file complaints in person so that proper identification, signatures, photographs, or physical evidence may be obtained as necessary.

A complainant shall be provided with a copy of the statement at the time it is filed with the Department (Penal Code § 832.7).

811.4.3 HATE COMPLAINTS AGAINST PEACE OFFICERS

The Department shall accept and investigate internal complaints or complaints from the public that allege an officer has, in the previous seven years and since age 18, was a member of a hate group, participated in a hate group activity, or advocated any public expression of hate (Penal Code § 13682).

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811.4.4 AVAILABILITY OF WRITTEN PROCEDURES

The Department shall make available to the public a written description of the investigation procedures for complaints (Penal Code § 832.5).

811.5 DOCUMENTATION

Supervisors shall ensure that all formal and informal complaints are documented on a complaint form. The supervisor shall ensure that the nature of the complaint is defined as clearly as possible.

All complaints and inquiries should also be documented in a log that records and tracks complaints. The log shall include the nature of the complaint and the actions taken to address the complaint. On an annual basis, the Department should audit the log and send an audit report to the Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee. All completed complaints shall be forwarded to the Executive Secretary who is the repository and reporting official for the Probation Department. Complaints and related documents should be retained in accordance with Records Retention policies.

811.6 ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

Allegations of misconduct will be administratively investigated as follows.

811.6.1 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

In general, the primary responsibility for the investigation of a personnel complaint shall rest with the member's immediate supervisor, unless the supervisor is the complainant, or the supervisor is the ultimate decision-maker regarding potential disciplinary action or has any personal involvement regarding the alleged misconduct. The Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee may direct that another supervisor investigate any complaint.

A supervisor who becomes aware of alleged misconduct shall take reasonable steps to prevent aggravation of the situation.

The responsibilities of supervisors include but are not limited to:

- (a) Ensuring that upon receiving or initiating any formal complaint, a complaint form is completed.
 - 1. The original complaint form will be directed to the Division Director of the accused member, via the chain of command, who will promptly take appropriate action and/or determine who will have responsibility for the investigation.
 - 2. In circumstances where the integrity of the investigation could be jeopardized by reducing the complaint to writing or where the confidentiality of a complainant is at issue, a supervisor shall orally report the matter to the member's Division Director or the Deputy Chief Probation Officer, who will initiate appropriate action.
- (b) Responding to all complainants in a courteous and professional manner.
- (c) Resolving those personnel complaints that can be resolved immediately.

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1. Follow-up contact with the complainant should ideally be made within 24 hours of the Department receiving the complaint.
 2. If the matter is resolved and no further action is required, the supervisor will note the resolution on a complaint form and forward the form to the Executive Secretary following the chain of command.
- (d) Ensuring that upon receipt of a complaint involving allegations of a potentially serious nature, the Division Director and the Chief Probation Officer are notified via the chain of command as soon as practicable.
- (e) Promptly contacting the Department of Human Resources Manager and the Division Director for direction regarding the supervisor's role in addressing a complaint that potentially constitutes a violation of the County's EEO policy, including but not limited to sexual, racial, ethnic, or other forms of prohibited harassment, discrimination, and/or retaliation based on a protected category.
- (f) Forwarding unresolved personnel complaints to the Division Director, who will determine whether to contact the complainant or assign the complaint for investigation.
- (g) Informing the complainant of the investigator's name and the complaint number within three days after assignment.
- (h) Investigating a complaint as follows:
1. Making reasonable efforts to obtain names, addresses, and telephone numbers of witnesses.
 2. When appropriate, ensuring immediate medical attention is provided and photographs of alleged injuries and accessible uninjured areas are taken.
- (i) Ensuring that the procedural rights of the accused member are followed (Government Code § 3303 et seq.).
- (j) Ensuring interviews of the complainant are generally conducted during reasonable hours.

811.6.2 ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES

Whether conducted by a supervisor or a Division Director, the following applies to members covered by the Public Safety Officers Procedural Bill of Rights (POBR) (Government Code § 3303):

- (a) Interviews of an accused member shall be conducted during reasonable hours and preferably when the member is on-duty. If off-duty, the member shall be compensated.
- (b) Unless waived by the member, interviews of an accused member shall be at the Sonoma County Probation Department or other reasonable and appropriate place.
- (c) No more than two interviewers can ask questions of an accused member.
- (d) Prior to any interview, a member should be informed of the nature of the investigation, the name, rank, and command of the officer in charge of the investigation, the interviewing officers, and all other persons to be present during the interview.

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- (e) All interviews shall be for a reasonable period, and the member's personal needs should be accommodated.
- (f) No member should be subjected to offensive or threatening language, nor shall any promises, rewards, or other inducements be used to obtain answers.
- (g) Any member refusing to answer questions directly related to the investigation may be ordered to answer questions administratively and may be subject to discipline for failing to do so.
 - 1. If it is assessed that a member may be charged with a criminal offense, the member shall be immediately informed of his or her constitutional rights against self-incrimination. A member should be given an order to answer questions in an administrative investigation that might incriminate the member in a criminal matter only after the member has been given a *Lybarger* advisement apprising the member that his or her statements cannot be used against them in a subsequent criminal proceeding. Administrative investigators should consider the impact that compelling a statement from the member may have on any related criminal investigation and should take reasonable steps to avoid creating any foreseeable conflicts between the two related investigations. This may include conferring with the person in charge of the criminal investigation (e.g., discussion of processes, timing, implications).
 - 2. No information or evidence administratively coerced from a member may be provided to anyone involved in conducting the criminal investigation or to any prosecutor.
- (h) The interviewer should record all interviews of members and witnesses. The member may also record the interview. If the member has been previously interviewed, a copy of that recorded interview shall be provided to the member prior to any subsequent interview.
- (i) All members subjected to interviews that could result in punitive action or discipline have the right to have an uninvolved representative present during the interview. However, to maintain the integrity of each individual's statement, involved members shall not consult or meet with a representative or attorney collectively or in groups prior to being interviewed.
- (j) All members shall provide complete and truthful responses to questions posed during interviews.
- (k) No member may be compelled to submit to a polygraph examination, nor shall any refusal to submit to such examination be mentioned in any investigation (Government Code § 3307).

No investigation shall be undertaken against any officer solely because the officer has been placed on a prosecutor's *Brady* list or because the name of the officer may otherwise be subject to disclosure pursuant to *Brady v. Maryland*. However, an investigation may be based on the underlying acts or omissions for which the officer has been placed on a *Brady* list or may otherwise be subject to disclosure pursuant to *Brady v. Maryland* (Government Code § 3305.5).

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811.6.3 ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATION FORMAT

Formal investigations of personnel complaints shall be thorough, complete, and essentially follow this format:

Introduction - Include the identity of the members, the identity of the assigned investigators, the initial date and source of the complaint.

Synopsis - Provide a brief summary of the facts giving rise to the investigation.

Summary - List the allegations separately, including applicable policy sections, with a brief summary of the evidence relevant to each allegation. A separate recommended finding should be provided for each allegation.

Evidence - Each allegation should be set forth with the details of the evidence applicable to each allegation provided, including comprehensive summaries of member and witness statements. Other evidence related to each allegation should also be detailed in this section.

Conclusion - A recommendation regarding further action or disposition should be provided.

Exhibits - A separate list of exhibits (e.g., recordings, photos, documents) should be attached to the report.

811.6.4 DISPOSITIONS

Each personnel complaint shall be classified with one of the following dispositions:

Unfounded - When the investigation discloses that the alleged acts did not occur or did not involve department members. Complaints that are determined to be frivolous will fall within the classification of unfounded (Penal Code § 832.8).

Exonerated - When the investigation discloses that the alleged act occurred but that the act was justified, lawful, and/or proper, and not in violation of department policies.

Not sustained - When the investigation discloses that there is insufficient evidence to either sustain the complaint or fully exonerate the member.

Sustained - A final determination by an investigating agency, commission, board, hearing officer, or arbitrator, as applicable, following an investigation and opportunity for an administrative appeal pursuant to Government Code § 3304 and Government Code § 3304.5 that the actions of an officer were found to violate law or department policy (Penal Code § 832.8).

If an investigation discloses misconduct or improper job performance that was not alleged in the original complaint, the investigator shall take appropriate action with regard to any additional allegations.

811.6.5 COMPLETION OF INVESTIGATIONS

Every investigator or supervisor assigned to investigate a personnel complaint or other alleged misconduct shall proceed with due diligence in an effort to complete the investigation within one year from the date of discovery by an individual authorized to initiate an investigation (Government Code § 3304).

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In the event that an investigation cannot be completed within one year of discovery, the assigned investigator or supervisor shall ensure that an extension or delay is warranted within the exceptions set forth in Government Code § 3304(d) or Government Code § 3508.1.

811.6.6 NOTICE TO COMPLAINANT OF INVESTIGATION STATUS

The member conducting the investigation should provide the complainant with periodic updates on the status of the investigation, as appropriate.

811.7 ADMINISTRATIVE SEARCHES

Assigned lockers, storage spaces, and other areas, including desks, offices, and vehicles, may be searched as part of an administrative investigation upon a reasonable suspicion of misconduct, in accordance with protections afforded employees under POBR.

Such areas may also be searched any time by a supervisor for non-investigative purposes, such as obtaining a needed report, radio, or other document or equipment.

Lockers and storage spaces may only be administratively searched in the member's presence; with the member's consent; with a valid search warrant; or where the member has been given reasonable notice that the search will take place (Government Code § 3309).

811.7.1 DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION

An officer may be compelled to disclose personal financial information under the following circumstances (Government Code § 3308):

- (a) Pursuant to a state law or proper legal process
- (b) Information exists that tends to indicate a conflict of interest with official duties
- (c) If the officer is assigned to or being considered for a special assignment with a potential for bribes or other improper inducements

811.8 ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE

When a complaint of misconduct is of a serious nature, or when circumstances indicate that allowing the accused to continue to work would adversely affect the mission of the Department, the Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee may temporarily assign an accused employee to paid administrative leave. Any employee placed on administrative leave:

- (a) May be required to relinquish any department badge, identification, assigned weapons, and any other department equipment.
- (b) Shall be required to continue to comply with all policies and lawful orders of a supervisor.
- (c) May be temporarily reassigned to a different shift, generally a normal business-hours shift, during the investigation. The employee may be required to remain available for contact at all times during such shift, and will report as ordered.

811.9 CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

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The Chief Probation Officer shall be notified as soon as practicable when a member is accused of criminal conduct. The Chief Probation Officer or authorized designee may request a criminal investigation by an outside law enforcement agency.

A member accused of criminal conduct shall be advised of the member's constitutional rights (See section 811.6.2(g) above and Government Code § 3303(h)). The member should not be administratively ordered to provide any information in the criminal investigation.

The Sonoma County Probation Department may release information concerning the arrest or detention of any member, including an officer, that has not led to a conviction. No disciplinary action should be taken until an independent administrative investigation is conducted.

811.10 POST-ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES

Upon completion of a formal investigation, an investigation report should be forwarded to the Chief Probation Officer through the chain of command. The Chief Probation Officer may accept or modify any classification or recommendation for disciplinary action.

811.10.1 CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon receipt of any written recommendation for disciplinary action, the Chief Probation Officer shall review the recommendation and all accompanying materials. The Chief Probation Officer may modify any recommendation and/or may return the file to the Division Director for further investigation or action.

Once the Chief Probation Officer is satisfied that no further investigation or action is required by staff, the Chief Probation Officer shall determine the level of discipline, if any, that should be imposed. If disciplinary action is proposed, the Chief Probation Officer shall provide the member with a pre-disciplinary procedural due process hearing (*Skelly*) by providing written notices of the charges, proposed action, and reasons for the proposed action. Written notice shall be provided within one year from the date of discovery of the misconduct (Government Code § 3304(d)).

The Chief Probation Officer shall also provide the member with:

- (a) Access to all the materials considered by the Chief Probation Officer in recommending the proposed discipline.
- (b) An opportunity to respond orally or in writing to the Chief Probation Officer within five days of receiving the notice.
 - 1. Upon a showing of good cause by the member, the Chief Probation Officer may grant a reasonable extension of time for the member to respond.
 - 2. If the member elects to respond orally, the presentation shall be recorded by the Department. Upon request, the member shall be provided with a copy of the recording.

Once the member has completed a response, or if the member has elected to waive any such response, the Chief Probation Officer shall consider all information received regarding the intended discipline. The Chief Probation Officer shall render a timely written decision to the

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member and specify the grounds and reasons for discipline and the effective date of the discipline. Once the Chief Probation Officer has issued a written decision, an Order of Discipline shall ensue.

811.10.2 NOTICE OF FINAL DISPOSITION TO THE COMPLAINANT

The Chief Probation Officer or the authorized designee shall ensure that the complainant is notified of the disposition (i.e., sustained, not sustained, exonerated, unfounded) of the complaint (Penal Code § 832.7(f)).

811.10.3 NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

The disposition of any civilian's complaint shall be released to the complaining party within 30 days of the final disposition. This release shall not include what discipline, if any, was imposed (Penal Code § 832.7(f)).

811.11 PRE-DISCIPLINE EMPLOYEE RESPONSE

The pre-discipline process (*Skelly* hearing) is intended to provide the accused employee with an opportunity to present a written or oral response to the Chief Probation Officer after having had an opportunity to review the supporting materials and before any final disciplinary action. The employee may consider the following:

- (a) The response is not intended to be an adversarial or formal hearing.
- (b) Although the employee may be represented by an uninvolved representative or legal counsel, the response is not designed to accommodate the presentation of testimony or witnesses.
- (c) The employee may suggest that further investigation could be conducted, or the employee may offer any additional information or mitigating factors for the Chief Probation Officer to consider.
- (d) In the event that the Chief Probation Officer elects, at his or her discretion, to conduct further investigation, the employee shall be provided with the results before any discipline is imposed.
- (e) The employee may thereafter have the opportunity to further respond orally or in writing to the Chief Probation Officer on the limited issues of information raised in any subsequent materials.

811.12 RESIGNATIONS/RETIREMENTS PRIOR TO DISCIPLINE

In the event that a member tenders a written resignation or notice of retirement before the discipline is imposed, it shall be noted in the file. The tender of a resignation or retirement by itself shall not serve as grounds for the termination of any pending investigation or discipline.

811.13 POST-DISCIPLINE APPEAL RIGHTS

Non-probationary employees have the right to appeal a suspension without pay, punitive transfer, demotion, reduction in pay or step, or termination from employment. The employee has the right to appeal using the procedures established by any collective bargaining agreement, memorandum of understanding, and/or the County of Sonoma Civil Service Rules.

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In the event of punitive action against an officer covered by the POBR, the appeal process shall be in compliance with Government Code § 3304 and Government Code § 3304.5.

During any administrative appeal, evidence that an officer has been placed on a *Brady* list or is otherwise subject to *Brady* restrictions may not be introduced unless the underlying allegations of misconduct have been independently established. Thereafter, such *Brady* evidence shall be limited to determining the appropriate level of disciplinary action (Government Code § 3305.5).

811.14 PROBATIONARY EMPLOYEES AND OTHER MEMBERS

At-will and probationary employees and those members other than non-probationary employees may be released from employment for any non-discriminatory reason(s) without adherence to the procedures set forth in this policy, and such employees do not have any appeal or hearing rights in such circumstances. However, any probationary officer subjected to an investigation into allegations of misconduct shall be entitled to those procedural rights, as applicable, set forth in the POBR (Government Code § 3303; Government Code § 3304).

At-will, probationary employees and those other than non-probationary employees subjected to discipline or termination as a result of allegations of misconduct shall not be deemed to have acquired a property interest in their position, but shall be given the opportunity to appear before the Chief Probation Officer or authorized designee for a non-evidentiary hearing for the sole purpose of attempting to clear their name or liberty interest. There shall be no further opportunity for appeal beyond the liberty interest hearing and the decision of the Chief Probation Officer shall be final.

811.15 RETENTION OF PERSONNEL INVESTIGATION FILES

All personnel complaints shall be maintained in accordance with the established records retention schedule.