USE OF THE SL CODE

A REPORT OF FINDINGS

TRANSMITTAL LETTER

July 31, 2024

Mayor John Whitmire,
Members of the Houston City Council,
and my fellow Houstonians:

This report provides an update on the status and developments regarding the use of the *Suspended – Lack of Personnel* (SL) code on incident reports in our Records Management System. Since the February 2024 discovery that 264,371 incident reports had been suspended using this code, the Department has endeavored to identify what happened, to address the suspended reports, to reach out to victims, and to make improvements to our processes and procedures to prevent recurrence.

As this report explains, the SL code was implemented to provide a way to quantify how frequently the department was unable to assign cases due to understaffing in investigative divisions. Over the last eight years, the department's use of the code expanded, resulting in a large and complex problem. Our review of the matter revealed numerous systemic failures within the department, exacerbated by a prolonged period of understaffing. The current state is a culmination of these and related factors that represent failures at multiple levels.

The Houston Police Department is honored by the level of trust that our community has in us, and the men and women of this agency will continue to work tirelessly each and every day to maintain this trust. Their dedication and commitment to restoring confidence in our department is commendable. It is our highest priority to address these issues and work towards a sustainable solution that enhances the safety and security of our community.

On behalf of the Houston Police Department, I extend our gratitude for your understanding and support during these trying times. Your continued assistance and collaboration are vital as we continue our work to resolve this complex issue.

Sincerely,

Larry J. Satterwhite
Acting Chief of Police

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INTRODUCTION

This report addresses how the Houston Police Department (HPD) identified and has thus far addressed a problem involving the use of a specific disposition code *Suspended – Lack of Personnel* (SL) to table cases and remove them from active investigation queues. While the problem was not identified nor its magnitude recognized until February 2024, its origin was more than a decade prior.

In 2014, the City funded a limited work demands analysis of the HPD conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) and Justex System, Inc. Upon receiving the results of this analysis, HPD generated a response, *Proposed Operational Staffing Enhancements for the Houston Police Department*, which Chief Charles A. McClelland, Jr., subsequently presented to Houston City Council.

McClelland's presentation included a plea for additional staffing, which was desperately needed to accomplish the police mission and ensure quality service to the citizens of Houston. At the time of his 2014 presentation, HPD had 5,301 classified personnel and 1,275 civilian personnel, for a total of 6,576 employees. As of the June 30, 2024, HPD had 5,211 classified personnel and 880 civilians for a total of 6,091 employees, 485 fewer than it had when McClelland made his plea for additional personnel.

Although Table 1 shows that the number of *authorized* classified positions has remained fairly stable, increasing by only five percent (302 positions) during this period, it is critical to realize that the department has never been funded based on this number. The number of *actual* classified positions reflects the number of personnel who were employed as of the end date of each fiscal year. This decline is generally a result of attrition (retirements and other separations) outpacing academy graduations. This table also demonstrates that there has been a fairly consistent decline in the actual number of civilian employees.

Table 1: HPD Authorized and Actual Staffing by Fiscal Year						
Fiscal Year	Authorized		Total Authorized	Actual		Total Actual
	Classified	Civilian		Classified	Civilian	
2014	6,103	1,272	7,375	**5,301**	**1,275**	**6,576**
2015	6,103	1,289	7,392	5,200	1,191	6,391
2016	6,103	1,251	7,354	5,207	1,157	6,364
2017	6,106	1,234	7,340	5,112	1,146	6,258
2018	6,406	1,177	7,583	5,152	1,060	6,212
2019	6,404	1,030	7,434	5,232	915	6,147
2020	6,404	1,032	7,436	5,282	887	6,169
2021	6,405	1,033	7,438	5,185	904	6,089
2022	6,405	982	7,387	5,122	871	5,993
2023	6,405	981	7,386	5,147	878	6,025
2024	6,405	939	7,344	**5,211**	**880**	**6,091**

Source: Employee Services Division & Office of Budget & Finance

McClelland candidly advised city council that the department was unable to conduct follow-up investigations for every criminal case, in part due to insufficient staffing. At the time of the presentation, investigative divisions used a single code, *Suspended*, to identify cases that were not assigned to an investigator due to a lack of workable leads or due to a lack of adequate staffing. As is

RELEVANT TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Case: A report containing details on a criminal incident.

Case Management: The process of creating, maintaining, and updating documentation on investigations in the records management system.

Disposition: The status of an incident report, often indicating the final case outcome.

Disposition Code: A code officers select from a standardized set to notate the status of an incident report in the case management system. The disposition code is often a reflection of the final status of the case.

Incident: An event or occurrence reported to the Houston Police Department.

Incident Report: An official record generated to document individuals, locations, property, and details of an incident.

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): A standardized methodology for reporting criminal incidents to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Records Management System (RMS): A software application used to create, control, manage, and retain police records and investigative details.

Suspended: A disposition code used to note that a case has been reviewed, but not assigned for investigation or administrative follow up.

Suspended – Lack of Personnel (SL): A specific disposition code in HPD's records management system used to indicate that a case has been reviewed, but not assigned due to inadequate staffing in the investigative division.

still the case in 2024, the number of incoming cases significantly outpaced the number of available investigators in 2014.

In 2015, a project was initiated to create a common language for case management. This included the creation of specific activity and disposition codes to track activities associated with case management. Prior to creation of these codes, incident reports with leads which were unable to be assigned due to lack of adequate investigative staffing were coded as *Suspended*. This code was used for cases with no leads, cases in which patrol officers arrested the suspect, and cases with leads the division was unable to assign due to inadequate staffing. The new case management terminology divided the suspended cases into *Suspended – Lack of Personnel* (SL), *Suspended – Patrol Arrest* (SP), and *Suspended – No Leads* (SU).

In 2016, the SL code was authorized by an Assistant Chief[1] and Executive Assistant Chief for divisional use; however, no written guidance was provided on use of the code or restrictions for its use with violent crimes against persons. The Special Victims Division (SVD) and Major Assaults & Family Violence (MAFV) Division incorporated the SL code into their division Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This resulted in the suspension of violent crimes against persons, including sexual assault and physical assault cases.

In late 2023, investigators assigned to the Robbery Division discovered that a sexual assault incident from 2022, linked by DNA to a 2023 robbery investigation, had been suspended under the SL code. This discovery prompted the Investigative & Special Operations chain of command to examine the department's use of the SL code for violent crimes against persons.

In February 2024, the department assessed the use of the SL code and determined its use was widespread. When the magnitude of the issue became apparent, the department allocated additional resources on a temporary and permanent basis to review every incident report that had been suspended under the SL code since 2016, with an initial priority on violent crimes.

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[1] Throughout this report, individuals are generally referred to by their position. See Appendix 1: *Alphabetical List of Referenced Personnel with Relevant Job Classification History*. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/Appendix_1-Alphabetical_List_of_Referenced_Personnel.pdf

KEY FINDINGS

1

HPD created the SL disposition code in the Records Management System in March 2016 to provide a mechanism to quantify cases not being investigated due to lack of staffing.

As outlined in the introduction section of this report, the code's creation followed a 2014 appeal by Chief Charles McClelland, Jr., to the Houston City Council in which he sought additional resources for the department to address staffing shortages.

2

Between the time the SL code was established in 2016 and when the magnitude of the problem was discovered in 2024, it was used for 264,371 incidents.

The overwhelming majority of these cases (more than 98 percent) are associated with incidents that occurred since January 1, 2018. In limited instances (less than two percent), older cases imported into RMS for administrative reasons were mistakenly coded SL.

3

The department's current RMS is antiquated, non-intuitive, and lacks modern features.

The system was purchased in 2009 and went live for officer use in 2014. The company from which it was purchased was sold (twice), and vendor support for the product has waned as the product is no longer sold. HPD is actively involved in the implementation of a replacement RMS scheduled to go live in March 2025.

4

A lack of governance structure for the RMS technology, frequent transfers, significant waves of retirements, and weak knowledge management protocols collectively result in very limited knowledge within the department on how the system operates.

The department has expanded the role of the Office of Planning to include data governance. The RMS support unit reports to the office, now referred to as the Office of Planning & Data Governance. This consolidates system knowledge and has been beneficial in the SL code investigation.

5

In 2016, all investigative divisions were trained to use the new SL code. The Special Victims and Major Assaults & Family Violence Divisions formalized the code's use in SOPs.

Most investigative divisions and some patrol tactical units were using the SL code as trained, but no management actions were taken to ensure that divisions using the code adopted an SOP to govern its use.

6

The Department failed to establish guidelines on when the SL code should not be used.

Each division, in conjunction with the appropriate assistant chief, was left to determine individual policies regarding use of the code with no written parameters or guidelines for the acceptable use as it related to different crimes. For example, no distinction was made between property crimes and crimes against persons.

7

Based on case volume, there will always be a need to triage cases and prioritize investigative activities. Person-on-person crimes with workable leads are HPD's highest priority.

Based on the NIBRS statistics that HPD reports to the FBI monthly, approximately 25 percent of crimes committed in Houston are violent. Identifying these from the roughly 18,000 NIBRS incidents reported to the Department each month necessitates a process of sorting the cases. They are routed to investigative divisions based on crime type, and then assigned to investigators in accordance with divisional SOPs.

8

HPD remains understaffed. While the public generally recognizes this in terms of visibility and response times, the Department's investigative divisions also remain understaffed. The Department simply cannot investigate all crimes.

HPD's investigative capacity has not significantly changed since the 2014 PERF staffing study. The SL code matter has led to a thorough review of the policies and procedures associated with use of the code, including the ways in which investigations are prioritized.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For at least the last 10 years, HPD has consistently sought additional funding to increase department staffing levels. In 2010, the Department asked City Council for more funding for personnel. Then City Councilmember Clarence Bradford, himself a former HPD Chief, requested an independent staffing study to validate the department's request for additional personnel. As reported by the *Houston Chronicle*, that study "was delayed by the city's recent budget shortage."[2]

In 2013, the Department was finally allocated funding for an independent staffing analysis. While it addressed all types of employees, the PERF/Justex report was clear in its assessment of the status of investigations.

> *A survey of Investigative Division commanders revealed excessively high numbers of cases with leads that were not investigated in 2013 due to lack of personnel: for Burglary and Theft, nearly 15,000; nearly 3,000 assault cases in the Homicide Division; nearly 3,000 hit-and-runs. The situation is so egregious in Burglary and Theft that a separate [staffing] increase is recommended … for that unit. However, every unit should be staffed such that all cases with leads receive at least some attention. Achieving that end should be the focus of the allocation of any new resources.*[3]

In the Department's response, McClelland highlighted the impact of personnel shortages on the ability of the Department to assign and investigate criminal cases.

> *Not every criminal case is subjected to a follow-up investigation. Reasons include no clues exist for an investigator to work; a complainant refuses to cooperate; or there is insufficient manpower available to work a case with leads.*[4]

The report also detailed an "immediate need" for an additional 101 officers in Investigative Operations.[5]

In June 2014, the *Houston Chronicle* reported that Chief McClelland presented the results of the PERF staffing study to Council.

> *"I've been with the Houston Police Department over 37 years," McClelland told council members at a Thursday budget hearing. "During that 37 years, there has never been a time that I have been employed there that the Houston Police Department has had the capacity to investigate every crime that's been reported to the*

[2] Pinkerton, J. and Morris, M. (3 June 2014) 20,000 criminal cases not investigated in 2013 by HPD. *Houston Chronicle*. https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/20-000-criminal-cases-not-investigated-in-2013-by-5522573.php

[3] *Houston Police Department Operational Staffing Model*. (May 2014) Police Executive Research Forum and Justex Systems, Inc. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/operational_staffing/Houston_Police_Department_Operational_Staffing_Model_May_2014.pdf

[4] *Proposed Operational Staffing Enhancements for the Houston Police Department*. (Oct 2014) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/operational_staffing/Staffing-Recommendations-for-the-HPD-Final.pdf

[5] See Footnote 3

agency. This is not unique to the Houston Police Department." [6]

A year later, a *Houston Chronicle* article about the Department's 2015 budget request also referenced the Chief's budget request from the prior year.

> *Houston Police Chief Charles McClelland last year asked City Council for $105 million over five years to hire hundreds of new officers, a request that came on the heels of a report that showed his department leaves thousands of cases uninvestigated because of a lack of personnel.*
>
> *Seven months after McClelland first sounded the alarm about staffing, he reminded City Council of the request at a budget hearing in May.*
>
> *"We're not in crisis in the sense that I'm saying that something bad, really, really bad is going to happen in this city if I don't have more staffing immediately," McClelland said. "But I can't do the extra things when people call me up and say 'Chief, can you put in more extra patrols in my neighborhood;' there is no extra. It's death by a thousand cuts. It's just a slow, slow bleed."* [7]

According to historical data, HPD was granted allotments for additional personnel; however, as illustrated in Table 1 of this report and explained in the Introduction section, as of June 30, 2024, HPD employs 485 fewer personnel than were employed at the time of McClelland's 2014 presentation to City Council. The number of civilian personnel budgeted and employed by the department has decreased significantly since the presentation. These personnel may be used to contact victims, screen incident reports, review surveillance video, complete administrative tasks, and answer the phones, often providing information or otherwise assisting citizens. When sufficient civilian staffing is not available to conduct these tasks, the roles must be filled by classified employees. As explained in the PERF staffing study:

> *When a police department must cut its budget, sworn officers often are considered more "essential," so civilians are usually the first employees to be laid off. Elected officials and the public often say that their top priority is to avoid reducing the number of officers on the street, in order to maintain a level of public safety. However, when civilians are cut from essential positions in the police department, those positions usually end up being "back-filled" with sworn officers. Thus, the outcome of cutting civilian personnel in non-discretionary positions is the same: fewer officers on the street.* [8]

Data and Reporting Challenges

In January 2014, HPD leadership created the Divisional Data Sheet (DDS) Summary to standardize and capture divisional case management information for review at the Command Staff level. Some of the information required from investigative divisions included received cases, assigned cases, unassigned cases, and clearance rates. The information for this monthly report was gathered through various data systems maintained in each investigative division. A recommendation was made to incorporate a standardized system for gathering the data; however, this was delayed due to the impending implementation of a new reporting system. In June 2014, HPD replaced the Online Offense System (OLO) with the Tiburon Records Management System (RMS). Unfortunately, as is often the

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[6] Morris, M. (5 Jun 2014) McClelland: report on investigation failures not news to HPD. *Houston Chronicle*. McClelland: report on investigation failures not news to HPD (chron.com)

[7] Driessen, K. and Morris, M. (16 Jun 2015) HPD's call for more officers gains little traction with Parker, council. *Houston Chronicle*. https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/houston/article/HPD-s-call-for-more-officers-gains-little-6326955.php

[8] See Footnote 2

case with new software, unexpected complications occurred after the RMS system went "live." Prior to implementation, each division used its own case management system; however, the switch to Tiburon RMS impacted the connection between the reporting system and the case management system for many divisions. Since each division had individual needs specific to the mission of that division, the case management system provided with the Tiburon RMS was not compatible with the processes in place at each criminal investigative division. Due to these intricacies, the implementation of this system caused significant issues regarding the reporting of case management statistics via the DDS report.

On March 6, 2015, a Criminal Intelligence Analyst in the Burglary and Theft Division submitted a report, *Departmental Data Sheet Issues, Concerns and Reporting Limitations*, detailing these difficulties. The analyst noted documentation of incorrect data would not benefit the department and, "will likely lead to faulty comparisons, poor decision making, and a decrease in public confidence." [9] The report went on to detail the information captured in the DDS report as well as the resources available to gather the data. The report noted the case management terms listed on the DDS report.

The report described difficulties with each of the available data sources and further indicated discrepancies in reporting that may impact Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR)[10] data. Furthermore, according to the analyst, subsets of the information required on the DDS report impacted the accuracy of the data depending on the source of information. Assigned cases were divided into *open*, *inactive*, and *cleared* categories. Unassigned cases included the subset *suspended*, which included both cases with no predetermined solvability factors as well as cases not assigned due to resource limitations. Clearance rates were presented in standard and operational calculations. The analyst explained RMS, in the current form, was unable to accurately generate the appropriate data.

It is important to note that this report was generated by a Criminal Intelligence Analyst assigned to the Burglary and Theft Division. The division has since been restyled as the Property and Financial Crimes Division; however, the focus of this investigative division remains on property crimes rather than crimes against persons. At an average annual incoming case volume of 95,000 offense reports, the number of incoming property crime reports far exceeded the capacity of available investigators, and this was a division with a common practice of suspending cases due to this variance.

The report concluded with a series of recommended temporary and long-term solutions to ensure the accuracy of the reported case management statistics. These solutions included the appointment of an RMS workgroup to create an RMS based tool for crime analysts supported by command level reporting and training.

RMS Workgroup Recommendations

An RMS workgroup was formed to explore the issue and offer a solution. The workgroup findings were presented in the document, *RMS Workgroup Findings and Recommendations,* dated November

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9   *Departmental Data Sheet Issues, Concerns and Reporting Limitations*. (11 Mar 2015) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/Departmental_Data_Sheet_Issues_Concerns_and_Reporting_Limitations.pdf

10   The Uniform Crime Reporting program of the Federal Bureau of Investigation provides statistics for use in law enforcement.

20, 2015.[11] The group outlined a series of changes, both temporary and long-term, to address the issues and ensure accurate data reporting. The group noted RMS contained restrictive activity codes that failed to accurately capture case management data.

The RMS workgroup proposed a review of all activities and creation of additional codes to accurately reflect said activities. The group further proposed creation of a "common language" for case management to ensure consistency in data collection amongst the various investigative divisions. Following these changes, the Office of Technology Services would create reports based on the new RMS activity codes, case management definitions, and revised DDS format. While not specifically titled *Suspended - Lack of Personnel* at this time, *Suspended* cases were defined as, "all primary and secondary cases that have workable leads but cannot be assigned due to manpower limitations."

The workgroup solicited input from various investigative divisions and established a final list of activity codes to incorporate into the RMS system. The list of new activity codes included *Suspended - Lack of Personnel* (SL). According to email documentation from the workgroup,[12] the activity codes were approved by the Executive Assistant Chief and Assistant Chief overseeing the RMS project. Training was developed to ensure all investigative divisions were using the "common language" for case management. The activity codes, including the SL code, were added to the RMS system, and made available for use in March 2016. In July 2016, multiple one-hour training sessions for "New Case Activity Codes for RMS Case Management," were provided to all investigators regardless of assigned investigative division.

None of the discovered documents, including the case activity code training, contained parameters for the acceptable use of suspension activity codes.

Use of the SL code quickly became common in multiple divisions. While the DDS was intended to standardize reporting across investigative divisions, the data challenges resulted in the report failing to consistently provide commanders and department leadership with situational awareness on the increasing use of the SL code to suspend cases. Between 2016 and 2024, there were at least seven opportunities when the magnitude of the issue could have been identified. These include:

- The 2016 audit of the Special Victims Division case management process
- Periodic leadership transitions
- Creation of the Major Assaults & Family Violence Division
- The 2018 FSGI incident
- The 2020 House Bill 1 audit
- The 2021 blue note and proposed circular
- The 2021 Special Victims Division presentation to Executive Staff

Each of these missed opportunities is discussed in turn in the sections that follow.

The 2016 Audit of the Special Victims Division Case Management Process

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[11] *RMS Workgroup Findings and Recommendations.* (20 Nov 2015) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/RMS_Work_Group_Summary_11-2015.pdf

[12] RMS work group emails. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/RMS_workgroup_emails.pdf

In 2014, the Special Victims Division (SVD) Family Violence Unit was audited by HPD's Inspections Division. One of the recommendations in the audit report was revision of the SOPs.[13] As a result of this recommendation, in November 2015, SVD revised the case assignment SOPs associated with all of their units.[14,15] These SOPs determined the case assignment priorities within each unit of SVD. Although the new RMS activity codes had not yet been activated, SVD included the new codes recommended by the RMS work group. The SL code was only included in two of the SOPs: for Case Management associated with the Adult Sex Crimes Unit and for the Child Sex Assault Unit. Prior to these revisions, the SOP contained minimal guidance regarding the assignment of cases within the division. This revision was approved by the Assistant Chief over the Criminal Investigations Command, who was also the Assistant Chief overseeing the RMS project. The revised policy established a tiered triage system to determine case assignment priority.

In July 2016, the Inspections Division[16] was ordered by the Acting Chief of Police to conduct an audit of the Special Victims Division (SVD) case management process. The audit involved a review of a sample of suspended sex crimes cases between January 1, 2016, and June 30, 2016. The purpose of the audit was to determine if SVD was using the established SOP correctly regarding the suspension of cases not assigned to an investigator. Following the audit, a report was prepared for the Acting Chief of Police. The report indicated SVD suspended 34.7% of cases involving sex offenses received during the audit period, a rate significantly lower than other investigative divisions.

> *SVD sex crimes units suspend cases at a lower rate (35%) than most other reactive investigative divisions. Table 2 … details the total number of suspended cases per total cases received by each of the 5 reactive investigations divisions listed during the time period of January 1, 2016 through June 30, 2016. These figures were obtained directly from the HPD portal reports menu in the RMS Case Management Complements – IN PROGRESS.* [17]

On October 4, 2016, the Acting Chief of Police generated correspondence indicating the audit report had been thoroughly reviewed and instructed the Assistant Chief of Criminal Investigations Division to "follow-up and ensure that you provide a written response to my office and Inspections Division, within 90 days stating what actions were taken to address the findings and recommendations." The Captain[18] of SVD provided a written response to the audit findings on November 28, 2016.[19]

Periodic Leadership Transitions

In March 2017, a new captain was assigned to SVD. At the time, SVD was under the Criminal Investigations Command, Investigative & Support Operations. The new captain observed a backlog

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[13] *Special Victims Division Family Violence Unit Case Management Audit.* (Jun 2014) Houston Police Department Inspection Division. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/RMS_workgroup_emails.pdf

[14] *SVD Captain Family Violence Case Management Audit Response memo to Chief of Police.* (15 Sep 2014) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/SVD_Captain_to_COP_Family_Violence_Case_Management_Audit_Response_9-15-14.pdf

[15] *SVD Captain Family Violence Case Management Audit Response memo to Chief of Police.* (7 Jan 2015) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/SVD_Captain_to_COP_Family_Violence_Case_Management_Audit_Response_1-7-2015.pdf

[16] HPD's Inspections Division was renamed the Risk Management Division in 2018.

[17] *Special Victim Division Suspended Case Audit.* (Sep 2016) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/Special_Victims_Division_Suspended_Cases_Audit_Sept_2016.pdf

[18] While HPD currently uses the term commander for classified division leadership, before October 2018 the title captain was used.

[19] *SVD Captain Audit Response memo to Chief of Police.* (28, Nov 2016) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/SVD_Captain_Audit_Response_memo_to_COP_11-28-2016.pdf

of approximately 1,600 unassigned cases in the Child Sexual Assault Unit and notified the Assistant Chief of Criminal Investigations Command and the Executive Assistant Chief of Investigative & Special Operations of the critical need to assign and investigate these cases. The division received 17 additional personnel to assist with the backlog of Child Sexual Assault Unit cases, and the policy for this unit was altered, no longer allowing suspension of cases with leads in the Child Sexual Assault Unit.

In June 2018, the Child Sexual Assault Unit and the Child Physical Assault Unit were combined to form the Crimes Against Children Unit. This new unit continued to prohibit use of suspension codes for any case with workable leads. With the assistance of additional manpower and overtime funding, the unit was able to assign the backlog of cases. During this project, $50,000 was reallocated from Field Operations to Investigative & Special Operations under the authority of the Executive Assistant Chief of Field Operations to "assist in the workload within the Special Victims Division."

Subsequent to this change in the leadership of the division, there have been numerous additional leadership transitions in the department. Every transition in the leadership of investigative divisions was another missed opportunity to identify and sound the alarm about the continued use of the SL code.

Creation of Major Assaults & Family Violence Division

In July 2018, the Family Violence Unit of the Special Victims Division (SVD) and the Major Assaults Unit of the Homicide Division were combined to create a new Major Assaults & Family Violence (MAFV) Division. Both SVD and MAFV were under the authority of the Criminal Investigations Division, Investigative & Special Operations. In December 2021, MAFV created an SOP for its Case Management Unit to provide guidance on the triage of cases.[20] This SOP included use of the SL code. As with the Burglary & Theft Division, the number of incoming new incident reports coming to the MAFV significantly outpaced the availability of investigators. On average, the MAFV Division receives between 65,000 and 75,000 offense reports annually. To address this imbalance for a division investigating crimes against persons, the triage policy was based on the level of severity of the crime, with emphasis placed on felony assaults and family violence incidents.

The 2018 FSGI Incident

On July 19, 2018, a citizen emailed the Chief of Police regarding the lack of investigation on a failure to stop and give information (FSGI) incident. The message was forwarded to the Chief of Staff , who researched the issue and provided an update on the matter via email to the Chief of Police, the Executive Assistant Chief of Field Operations, the Assistant Chief of Patrol Region 2, and the Commander of Vehicular Crimes Division (VCD).

The July 20 update included the following facts:
- The report was written on April 8, titled *FSGI – Full Plate and Able to ID Suspect*, and included a notation about road rage*.*
- It was routed to VCD for investigative follow-up on April 9.
- The title of the original report was changed to *FSGI – Damage Under $1,000 or Private Property*. The case was subsequently suspended under the SL code on May 24.

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[20] *Standard Operating Procedure, Criminal Investigations Command–Major Assaults & Family Violence Division, Procedure No. 200/1.19: Case Management Unit.* (1 Dec 2021) https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/SOP_CIC-MAFV_200-1.19_Case_Management_Unit_12-1-2021.pdf

On the same day, the Executive Assistant Chief of Field Operations responded that the suspension of this report was unacceptable; he instructed the Commander of VCD to research the matter and provide him with a follow-up of the findings.[21]

In 2018, the widespread use of the SL code had not yet been realized; the FSGI case referenced in this email became the main issue, and no deep dive on the use of the code was initiated.

The 2020 House Bill 1 Audit

The State Auditor's Office was required by House Bill 1 of the 86th Legislature to examine the investigation and prosecution processes for adult and child sexual assaults. This audit was not specific to the HPD and included law enforcement agencies across the state. The review sought to identify why some reported sexual assault cases may not proceed to prosecution and conviction within the criminal justice system. Data was collected and analyzed throughout the state and several local law enforcement agencies, district attorneys' offices, and district clerks' offices were subject to site visits. Additionally, a statewide survey was conducted of local law enforcement agencies, district attorneys' offices, district clerks' offices, crime laboratories and community-based advocacy organizations.

In January 2020, HPD was informed that the State Auditor's Office would be conducting an audit of sexual assault investigations reported to HPD between January 1, 2014, through December 31, 2018, as part of the House Bill 1 audit. The audit involved both the Special Victims and Vice Divisions. Under HPD's organizational structure at the time, SVD was under the Criminal Investigations Command and Vice Division was under the Special Investigations Command. The Executive Assistant Chief of Investigative & Special Operations supervised both commands.

The October 2020 report on the audit included three key takeaways:

1) Collecting evidence to determine whether a suspect committed a sexual assault may be difficult.
2) A victim of sexual assault may be reluctant to participate in the investigation and prosecution process.
3) Key differences in the investigation and prosecution procedures for sexual assaults involving adult and child victims may affect how a sexual assault case progresses through the criminal justice system.[22]

Although the SL code had been in use by SVD for approximately four years at the time of the audit, the report did not mention HPD's suspension of cases due to lack of personnel.

The 2021 Blue Note & Proposed Circular

On July 28, 2021, a sergeant assigned to the Office of the Executive Chief authored a blue note addressed to the Executive Chief. A blue note is an unofficial form of communication within the department. The subject line of the blue note was *RMS Disposition Code: (SL) Suspended – Lack of Personnel*. The note referenced an earlier conversation with the Executive Chief regarding use of this code by investigative divisions. The sergeant noted, "I mentioned the optics of how the use of this

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[21] See email exchange following citizen message regarding Incident #143974118 (Jul 2018) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/Email_exchange_citizen_message_on_Incident_14397 4118_Redacted.pdf

[22] *An Audit Report on Investigation and Prosecution Processes for Reported Sexual Assaults in Texas.* (Oct 2020) State Auditor's Office. https://sao.texas.gov/reports/main/21-002.pdf

code may give the public the wrong impression as to how a variety of cases are handled."[23]

The sergeant went on to explain that he contacted the Crime Analysis & Command Center Division to get data on how often the code was being used, the Special Victims Division to determine how the code was being used in practice, and a police administrator in the Office of Planning & Data Governance (OPDG) to better understand when and why the code was created. He learned that the code was created during an initiative with a former Executive Assistant Chief to capture the number of cases the department was unable to assign for investigation due to insufficient manpower. The second page of his blue note included a table indicating how many times various units had used the code between January 1, 2021, and July 11, 2021.

The Executive Chief subsequently sought to change the code's label. The matter was deferred to the Executive Assistant Chief over Investigative & Special Operations, who sought input from Investigative Standards Committee on changing the title of the code from *Suspended – Lack of Personnel* to *Suspended*. The Investigative Standards Committee was created to develop standards for training, case management, productivity, evidence handling, external partnerships and standard operating procedures. The committee is composed of commanders from criminal investigative divisions. Email correspondence indicates the Investigative Standards Committee discussed the matter and saw "no problems associated with changing *suspended – lack of manpower* to *suspended."*[24]

A sergeant assigned to OPDG was subsequently tasked with changing the name of the code. Removing the code entirely was not feasible, as every

From the Desk of
D. J. Maki
Sergeant
Office of the Executive Chief
(713) 308-1566
Wednesday, July 28, 2021

To: Executive Chief M. D. Slinkard

Subject: RMS Disposition Code: (SL) Suspended - Lack of Personnel

Chief, a couple weeks ago I mentioned the RMS disposition code of (SL) *Suspended – Lack of Personnel* that was being used by investigative divisions. I mentioned the optics of how the use of this code may give the public the wrong impression as to how a variety of cases are handled.

To further understand how the divisions are utilizing this code, I first contacted Crime Analysis & Command Center to determine how often the "SL" code is used. The attached report gives a breakdown by division from January 1 through July 11, 2021. Next, I contacted a case management sergeant in Special Victims Division and inquired as to how the disposition code is used in his division. He advised the code is used in accordance with the guidelines described in the *Case Management Terms and Definitions*:

"**Suspended – Lack of Personnel**: all primary and secondary cases that have workable leads but cannot be assigned due to manpower limitations. These cases could be assigned for investigation or non-investigative follow up at a later time."

I finally contacted Melissa Cummins in the Office of Planning & Data Governance, who I was advised has historical knowledge on the creation of the SL code. She provided the below information:

"In 2016, I worked on an initiative with Chief Oettmeier in which we attempted to standardize the way in which we collected data on case assignments and clearances. We created the 'Suspended Lack of Personnel' code to capture the number of cases with workable leads we were unable to assign due to workforce shortages. With the use of that data, our intent was to justify additional investigators and provide estimates on the number of cleared offenses required to improve operational clearance rates."

She also stated that in addition to the guidance provide in the *Case Management Terms and Definitions*, RMS codes are used based on division policy. Some divisions/units will never use the SL code. For example, a lieutenant in SVD's Crimes Against Children Unit advised all cases with workable leads will be assigned.

This Blue Note is an informational summary of a potential issue that may or may not be of concern. A viable argument not to change the *current* code title is to highlight the importance and need for more officers.

individual case on which the SL code had previously been used would need to be individually reopened and changed to fully remove the code from the system. On October 29, 2021, the sergeant completed the task of renaming the code and advised the code would now show as *SL – Suspended* in the RMS option menu. This resulted in the requested change in the code's label; however, the policies and practices associated with the use of the code were not altered. Additionally, changing the code's label in the menu did not change the label on the code elsewhere.

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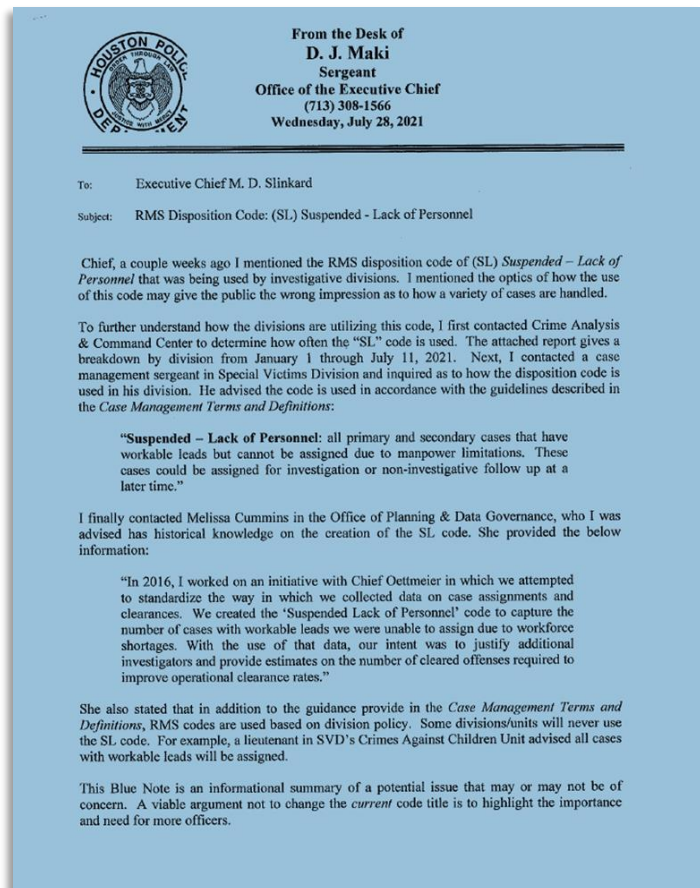
[23] *Blue Note to Executive Chief M.D. Slinkard*, (28 July 2021) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/Blue_Note_to_EAC_Slinkard_7-28-2021.pdf

[24] See Suspended Cases Change email chain. (29 Oct 2021) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/Email_exchange_on_Suspended_Cases_Code_Change_10-29-2021.pdf

The same day, the chairperson of the Investigative Standards Committee requested the sergeant draft a circular advising the department of the change. Circulars are informational documents issued by the Chief of Police to announce legal matters, specific events, personnel openings, and other information that should be communicated department-wide. Circulars may also be used to announce policy or procedural changes pending the addition, update, or revision of appropriate General Orders or SOPs. The proposed circular was drafted along with an accompanying cover memo explaining the purpose of the circular. The cover letter was addressed to the Chief of Police and routed through the Office of the Executive Chief.

The cover memo and draft circular, both drafted on October 29, 2021, were marked received by the Office of the Executive Chief on November 1, 2021.[25] The Executive Chief signed the cover letter on November 2, 2021 and indicated that it should be sent to the Executive Assistant Chief of Investigative & Special Operations prior to routing to the Chief of Police. The documents were received by Investigative & Special Operations on November 4, 2021. According to the tracking notes, an email was sent to the Deputy Director of OPDG on November 16, 2021, asking, "Is a circular necessary since this only applies to investigations?" On November 17, 2021, the Deputy Director responded via email indicating, "I would think yes. But does patrol close cases?"
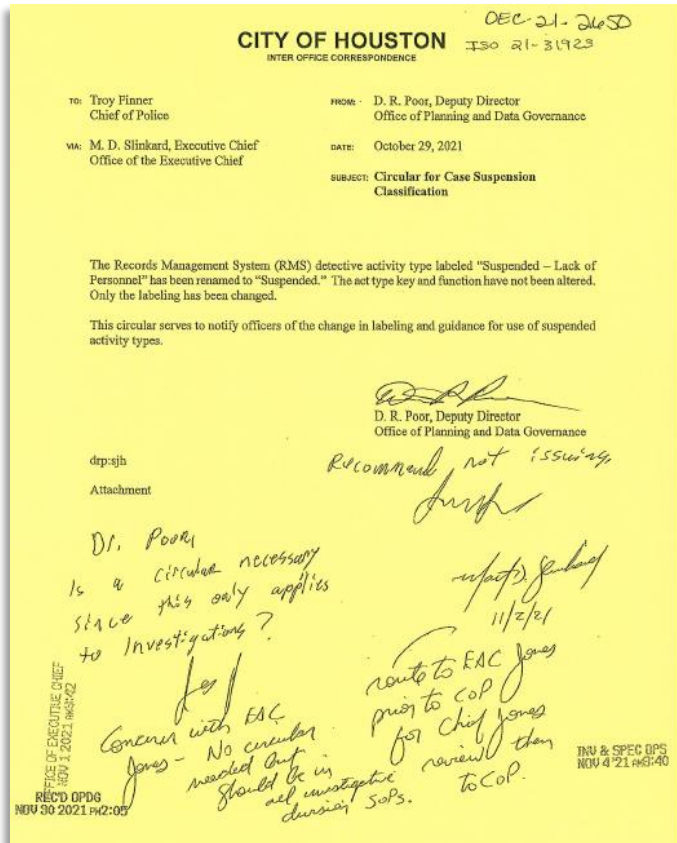
The documents were returned to the Executive Assistant Chief of Investigative & Special Operations. He recommended that the circular not be issued. The Executive Chief subsequently noted concurrence with the Executive Assistant Chief of Investigative & Special Operations and indicated that the information, "should be in all investigative division SOPs." The documents were returned to OPDG on November 29, 2021 and placed in a file.

No documentation was found to indicate that these documents were ever routed to the Chief of Police for review. Additionally, no documentation was found conveying instructions to investigative divisions to include the information in their respective SOPs. None of the correspondence indicated any discussion occurred regarding the practice of suspending incident reports with workable leads.

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25   ODPG Deputy Director Poor memo to Chief of Police on Circular for Case Suspension Classification. (29 Oct 2021) Houston Police Department. https://www.houstontx.gov/police/department_reports/suspended_incidents/OPDG_Dep_Dir_memo_to_COP-Proposed_Circular_for_Case_Suspension_Classification_10-29-2021.pdf

2021 Special Victims Division Presentation to Executive Staff

On September 2, 2021, the Commander of the Special Victims Division (SVD) was instructed to create a presentation for the Executive Staff regarding case management. During this time, SVD was under the Special Investigations Command, Investigative & Special Operations. The presentation was originally scheduled for September 16, 2021, rescheduled to September 23, 2021, and eventually rescheduled to November 4, 2021.

On November 4, 2021, one day prior to the AstroWorld mass casualty event, the SVD Commander briefed members of the Executive Staff regarding caseload and personnel issues within SVD. Topics discussed included the cases received in SVD between October 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021; the number of cases assigned for investigation; the number of suspended cases; the priority levels used to determine case assignment; when the prioritization methodology was established; and recommendations for process improvement.

During the presentation, the SVD Commander requested 22 additional investigators to allow the assignment of every incoming case. Her request did not address the number of investigators needed to clear the backlog of cases that had been previously suspended due to inadequate staffing.

The Chief of Police publicly stated that during this meeting, he directed that use of the code be discontinued.[26] He subsequently allocated 12 additional investigators to SVD. The SVD Commander was advised of this allocation by a sergeant in the Transfers, Allocations, and Promotions Unit (TAP). The SVD Commander advised the Assistant Chief of Special Investigations Command that, while this increase was welcome and needed, the additional 12 investigators would be insufficient to address the backlog of cases under the *Suspended - Lack of Personnel* (SL) designation.

A review of the SVD organizational charts indicates SVD received the additional allocation; however, the positions were not filled, leaving the division with a significant deficit in personnel.

Discovery of a Suspended Sexual Assault Case

On September 9, 2023, patrol officers responded to a robbery call at a Fiesta Mart on Airline Drive. As the officers arrived on scene, the suspect fled to a nearby residence where he subsequently committed a home invasion by forcibly entering the home and sexually assaulting one of the residents. The suspect fled the scene in the complainant's stolen vehicle. DNA evidence was left at the scene by the suspect and collected by crime scene investigators.

Through interagency cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Robbery Division investigators had the DNA evidence analyzed and run through the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS).

CODIS is a computer software program used to operate local, state, and national databases of DNA profiles from convicted offenders, unsolved crime scene evidence, and missing persons. Once a DNA profile is uploaded into CODIS, one of two outcomes occur. Some uploaded profiles will not return any immediate match within the database. Whereas a CODIS "hit" indicates the uploaded profile is linked to an identified perpetrator or another case with an unidentified perpetrator, known as a "case-to-case hit." It is important to note that a CODIS "hit" serves as an investigative lead but does not always identify the perpetrator. Reference samples must be taken to verify the "hit," known as

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[26] Chief Troy Finner Press Conference on Adult Sex Crime Investigations Review. (22 Feb 2024)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7yHl1jlWfk

match confirmation.

In mid-October 2023, HPD was notified of a CODIS "hit" linking the September 9, 2023, incident to a sexual assault case from 2022. This "hit" linked the DNA evidence to DNA evidence gathered from a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) examination following the report of a sexual assault on September 21, 2022. The 2022 sexual assault case was not assigned to an investigator and had been suspended by a supervisor assigned to the Special Victims Division (SVD) under the disposition code *Suspended - Lack of Personnel (SL)*.

The 2022 sexual assault report contained sufficient leads for robbery detectives to develop identification of a possible suspect in the September 2023 incidents through additional investigation. A comparison was performed, and in November 2023, robbery detectives learned the suspect was a confirmed match for the DNA collected in both the 2022 and 2023 incidents. Upon receiving this confirmation, the commander of the Robbery Division advised the chain of command of the use of the SL code for a sexual assault investigation which contained sufficient leads for an investigator to develop a suspect. Additionally, the commander notified the Internal Affairs Division (IAD) of the need to investigate the suspension of a sexual assault case with workable leads.

Following the discovery of this suspended sexual assault case, several inquiries, assessments, and investigations were set in motion via the Internal Affairs Division, the Office of Planning & Data Governance (OPDG), and the Executive Staff.

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE

HPD has endeavored to be fully transparent in its response to the SL code issue. This section of the report documents the efforts that have been taken to date. Two components, *Cooperation with the Mayor's Independent Review Committee* and the *Internal Investigation*, are briefly covered on the following page. These are addressed only at a high level, as is explained in each respective section.

The overwhelming majority of the work that the Department has undertaken has been within the investigative divisions themselves, and this work is outlined in the *Case Review by Investigative Divisions & Outreach to Victims* section. Significant Department resources have been allocated to allow these divisions to promptly review all 264,371 incidents, assess the current status and solvability of each, and assign investigators to those cases as warranted. Finally, this section closes with a section that outlines the *New Quality Assurance/Quality Control Process* that was employed to ensure that the work being undertaken was consistent with the quality and procedures that Department leadership established for these cases.

COOPERATION WITH THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW COMMITTEE

HPD is fully cooperating with Mayor Whitmire's Independent Review Committee's investigation. To date, this cooperation has entailed:

- Promptly responding to all requests for documents and data.
- Providing information on all 264,371 incidents.
- Engaging Department leadership in meetings with the Committee to address their questions.
- Providing weekly updates on the progress of case review and investigations.
- Conducting a demonstration for the committee on how the case management process works within multiple divisions.

The inputs the department has and continues to provide to the Independent Review Committee are being incorporated into the Committee's reports and do not need replication here. HPD will continue to provide data to the Committee until its work concludes. The Department also looks forward to any additional recommendations they may offer.

HPD leadership has reviewed the 15 recommendations contained in the Committee's interim report, and a subsequent section of this report contains the Department's response and position on each of their recommendations.

INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

As soon as the magnitude of the SL matter was brought to the attention of the Chief of Police, an internal investigation was launched to identify the origin of the code and the extent to which it had been used. Much of the discovery associated with the internal review of the policies and practices that led to the creation and widespread use of the SL code is included within the prior *Historical Context* section of this report; some of this material has already been provided to the media.

The results of the investigations of the Internal Affairs Division cannot be communicated within this report. This is due to the limitations on public disclosure of investigations as provided in Texas Local Government Code Chapter 143.

CASE REVIEW BY INVESTIGATIVE DIVISIONS & OUTREACH TO VICTIMS

After identifying the SL reports in February 2024, HPD launched a department-wide effort to triage and review the cases associated with the 264,371 incidents. The Department's review prioritized crimes against persons over crimes against property. The data demonstrated that the majority of reports belonged to the Special Victims, Major Assaults & Family Violence, Homicide, Property & Financial Crimes, Vehicular Crimes, and Auto Theft Divisions. Structurally, these divisions are assigned to the Assistant Chiefs over the Criminal Investigations and Special Investigations Commands, overseen by the Executive Assistant Chief of Investigative & Special Operations.

The initial focus for each division was to:
- develop and implement a procedure for case prioritization,
- establish processes for case review,
- develop and refine workflows,
- expand their case management team to increase review capacity, and
- collaborate wherever possible within the department (e.g., with HPD's Victim Services Division) and with external organizations such as the Harris County District Attorney's Office, Houston Forensic Science Center, Houston Area Women's Center, and others.

The sections that follow outline the efforts divisions have taken to address their respective SL cases.

Special Victims Division

When the SL problem was recognized, the Special Victims Division (SVD) began developing a process to review each of the incident reports. This process aimed to systematically review the accumulated SL coded incident reports while implementing measures to prevent new backlogs. The division's objectives included assessing and prioritizing cases, allocating resources, streamlining processes, ensuring clear communication, evaluating the quality of reviews, and establishing prevention strategies.

Priorities

At the outset, SVD identified a need to dramatically increase its capacity to address the SL cases. A special team of 24 investigators, five sergeants, two lieutenants, and a commander was temporarily assigned to the division to assist. After further review, additional personnel were also allocated to the Adult Sex Crimes Unit.

With additional personnel in place, the division prioritized the review of 4,017 sexual assault-related incidents. Personnel tasked with reviewing these reports ensured the offenses were properly titled, followed by a thorough review of the elements of the crime. Disposition codes for cases incorrectly suspended with SL were corrected, and the statute of limitations for each incident was determined. Additionally, the department requested the Houston Forensic Science Center to compare the SL incident numbers with known CODIS "hits." The comparison yielded 94 returns; these incidents were subsequently assigned to investigators for priority follow up.

Table 2: Special Victims SL Incident Report Status	
SL Incident Reports	9,012
Reviewed Reports	7,157 (79%)
Reviewed Reports: Inactivated	3,825
Arrest Warrant Filed	1
No Further Leads	3,820
Pending Lab Analysis	4
Reviewed Reports: Closed	726
Closed by Investigation	726
Reviewed Reports: Cleared	398
Arrest Charges - Adult	19
Arrest Charges - Juvenile	1
Charged in Other Case	0
Death of Defendant	8
Exception - Adult	260
Exception - Juvenile	1
Lack of Prosecution by Complainant	4
Unfounded	105
Reviewed Reports: Suspended	152
No Leads	80
Patrol Arrest	58
Emergency Detention Order Initiated	14
Reviewed: Final Disposition Entered	5,101 (57%)

Source: HPD OPDG, RMS, as of 7/22/2024

Processes

As part of the review process, coordinated efforts were made to contact victims. SVD launched a call line and main email address for individuals seeking information or clarification regarding previously suspended incidents, offering a direct point of contact with HPD personnel. Personnel attempted to contact victims via phone call, text, email, or letter. For contact attempts that were unsuccessful, the division partnered with HPD's Differential Response Team to go in person to the victim's last known address or probable place of residence in attempts to reach them. All contact attempts to locate victims were documented. If no contact was made or the review required no further action, investigators entered the final supplement and completed the case management entry.

If contact was established, the victim was asked if they wished to continue with the investigative process, and the case was assessed for workable leads. When workable leads were identified, the case was assigned for investigation and a forensic interview was scheduled. Cases where there were no workable leads, but the nature of the offense required assignment, it was still assigned for further investigation. Once the investigations were completed, the investigator entered the final supplement and finished the case management entry. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the department implemented Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures for all SL incidents with a sexual assault nexus. This structured workflow ensured thorough review and appropriate follow-up for each of the SL cases. Throughout the process, the Victims Services Division was incorporated to

inform, support, and assist the survivors of sexual assault.

A Project Guide was created to ensure standardization of the review. The guide outlined a systematic approach to handling SVD SL coded incidents and delineated the responsibilities of officers and supervisors, ensuring clear roles and accountability. Reference material on disposition codes and updated call scripts were included to standardize communication with victims. Finally, the guide emphasized collaboration with the Mental Health Division to access and integrate consumer information, enhancing the overall support system for victims.

Continued Efforts

SVD is continuing its work to review all cases. As indicated in Table 2, 79 percent of cases have been reviewed and 57 percent have a final disposition.

The Department authorized the expansion of the Adult Sex Crimes Unit from 24 to 35 investigators (an increase of 11 positions) and from three to five sergeants (an increase of two positions). As of this report, nine of the 11 investigative positions and the five sergeant positions have been filled. In the upcoming months, the SVD priorities will focus on several key activities, including the review, investigation, and case management of the remaining SL cases. The division will continue to schedule and support the forensic interviews with TXFNE, ensuring comprehensive support for victims. Collaboration with the Victim Services Division will persist, providing essential services to victims. To maintain high standards, the department will continue to provide Quality Assurance and Quality Control feedback for the SL project supervisors. Lastly, the review of the remaining incident reports with the SL code will continue, ensuring thorough and accurate case management.

To manage both the review of the SL coded cases in addition to new incidents routed to the division daily, a newly created case management unit has been expanded to include 12 investigators, two sergeants, a senior police service officer for records retention, and a lieutenant dedicated to managing the intake and retention of cases. To date, the following positions have been filled: ten investigators, two sergeants, and one senior police service officer. These strategic personnel assignments will enhance the unit's overall capacity and efficiency.

Collaboration with Outside Partners

HPD actively collaborates with numerous external organizations and each partner plays a significant role in enhancing public safety and community support. As a result of the SL response, processes with these partners have been reevaluated and improved upon.

▪ Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)

HAWC provides comprehensive support to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse. This partnership involves HAWC advocates working alongside HPD to ensure victims receive immediate assistance and access to critical resources. HAWC provides training to HPD personnel on trauma-informed approaches, helping officers to better understand and respond to the needs of victims. Additionally, HAWC and HPD coordinate on case management, with HAWC offering ongoing support services, counseling, and legal advocacy, while HPD focuses on the investigation and enforcement aspects. This collaboration ensures a holistic approach to victim support, enhancing both their safety and recovery.

Several HPD investigators and Victim Services Division's employees have benefited from attending training sessions hosted by HAWC. The training is a comprehensive, 55-hour Crisis Intervention (CI) training program designed to equip participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to support victims. It covers essential topics such as understanding trauma, active listening, safety planning, and providing emotional support. Participants learn about legal and medical advocacy, community resources, and cultural competency to effectively assist diverse populations. The program includes both theoretical instruction and practical exercises, ensuring trainees are well-prepared to handle crisis situations with empathy and professionalism. By the end of the training, participants are not only adept at offering immediate support to victims but are also capable of connecting them with long-term resources and assistance, ultimately empowering them on their path to recovery. HPD's plan includes sending all members of the Special Victims Division to attend the training.

▪ Forensic Center of Excellence: Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners (TXFNE)

TXFNE supports HPD through their expertise in forensic medical examinations and evidence collection in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence. This partner provides specialized training to HPD investigators on recognizing and preserving forensic evidence, ensuring that crucial details are not overlooked during investigations. TXFNE also offer on-call forensic nurses who can respond promptly to incidents, conducting thorough medical exams and collecting evidence that is vital for prosecution. Their detailed documentation and expert testimony in court bolsters the credibility and strength of HPD's cases. This collaboration ensures that victims receive compassionate care while enhancing the overall effectiveness of the criminal justice response to violent crimes.

HPD has funded to expand service hours for TXFNE to include early and late appointments for forensic interviews, as well as some availability on Saturdays. This enhancement allows the Department and TXFNE to accommodate a broader range of schedules, making services more accessible to victims who may have difficulty attending a forensic interview during regular business hours. The additional appointment times provide greater flexibility for victims, providing the support and assistance they need at more convenient times. This improvement demonstrates HPD's commitment to meeting the diverse needs of the community and enhancing the overall accessibility and effectiveness of the SVD's services.

▪ Harris County District Attorney's Office (HCDAO)

During the department's response to the SL coded incident reports, SVD has worked closely with the HCDAO to streamline the process of case presentations, the filing of charges, and prosecution. The collaboration begins with HPD detectives working alongside assistant district attorneys to review the evidence and ensure all necessary documentation is in order. The HCDAO provides guidance on legal protocols and charging decisions, helping investigators understand the criteria needed for successful prosecution. Regular meetings and consultations between HPD and HCDAO facilitate the exchange of information and strategies for handling complex cases. The HCDAO also offers training for HPD investigators on legal updates, courtroom procedures, and best practices for presenting evidence in court. This partnership ensures a cohesive approach to justice, with both agencies working together to build strong cases that lead to effective prosecutions.

▪ Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC)

The HFSC provides crucial support to the HPD's Special Victims Division through its specialized forensic services. HFSC conducts detailed analyses of physical evidence collected from crime scenes, such as DNA testing, toxicology reports, and fingerprint analysis, which are vital in building strong cases against suspects. HFSC also offers expert testimony in court, helping to explain forensic findings and strengthen the prosecution's case. Additionally, HFSC provides ongoing training and technical support to SVD investigators, ensuring they stay current with the latest forensic techniques and methodologies. This partnership enhances the investigative capabilities of SVD, ensuring that cases are thoroughly investigated.

In addition, the HFSC is essential in supporting SVD through its management and analysis of Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) hits. When DNA evidence from a case matches a profile in the CODIS database, HFSC notifies the SVD, providing critical leads that can help identify suspects or link cases together. HFSC ensures the accuracy and reliability of these DNA matches through laboratory procedures and quality control measures. HFSC also assists with the interpretation of CODIS results and provides expert testimony in court to explain the significance of the DNA evidence. This collaboration between HFSC and SVD significantly enhances the ability to solve cases, apprehend offenders, and achieve justice for victims of sexual assault and other violent crimes.

▪ Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)

HPD is a proud member of the SART in Houston, which includes other key outside partners and operates as a state-mandated initiative to provide a coordinated and comprehensive response to sexual assault cases. Key partners in the multidisciplinary team include HCDAO, TXFNE, HFSC, and the HAWC. Each partner brings specialized expertise to the table: HPD focuses on law enforcement and investigation, HCDAO on legal prosecution, HFSC with evidence analysis, TXFNE on forensic medical examinations and evidence collection, and HAWC on victim advocacy and support services. This collaboration ensures that victims receive immediate and thorough care, legal support, and emotional assistance, while enhancing the overall efficacy of the criminal justice process in handling sexual assault cases.

Major Assaults & Family Violence Division

During the review of SL incidents, it was determined MAFV had multiple incidents suspended under this activity code. HPD's OPDG provided MAFV a list of 109,339 incident reports – or 41 percent of all of the reports that had been suspended with the SL code. These incidents were prioritized into smaller groups, and additional internal tracking metrics were created for each group.

Due to the nature of family violence, specifically that it is often a recurrent, ongoing issue for a family, MAFV engaged the Victim Services Division to provide outreach and appropriate support or referral services for all family violence survivors whose cases had been suspended with the SL code.

Priorities

Incidents were initially divided into three groups:

- Reports involving family violence;
- Aggravated incidents with serious bodily injury; and
- Aggravated assaults that involved a deadly weapon.

Given the overwhelming number of incidents to be reviewed, the next priority was to develop a process for reviewing the cases, to identify personnel to conduct the reviews, and to address the logistical needs of each review team – locations for the work to be conducted, computer and telephone lines, and all associated equipment.

Processes

After grouping the data, three workgroups were developed for different purposes to:

1. Conduct an initial review of each incident;
2. Investigate any incident which required investigation; and
3. Review any incident past the statute of limitations.

Table 3: MA&FV SL Incident Report Status	
SL Incident Reports	**109,339**
Reviewed Reports	**61,074 (56%)**
Reviewed Reports: Inactivated	**1,608**
Arrest Warrant Filed	85
No Further Leads	1,520
Pending Lab Analysis	3
Reviewed Reports: Closed	**1,976**
Closed by Investigation	1,976
Reviewed Reports: Cleared	**4,550**
Arrest Charges - Adult	248
Arrest Charges - Juvenile	3
Charged in Other Case	0
Death of Defendant	19
Exception - Adult	3,413
Exception - Juvenile	40
Lack of Prosecution by Complainant	22
Unfounded	805
Reviewed Reports: Suspended	**11,480**
No Leads	10,702
Patrol Arrest	719
Emergency Detention Order Initiated	59
Reviewed: Final Disposition Entered	**19,614 (18%)**

Source: HPD OPDG, RMS, as of 7/22/2024

The initial review was tasked to two separate teams, one housed at 1200 Travis (the *DOC team*) and the other housed in the Central police complex (the *Central gym team*, currently operating from 33 Artesian). Both teams consist of non-MAFV officers (who were not in the call for service loop) and a MAFV supervisor to review incidents. These teams review incidents and document their findings. Examples of documented findings include coding errors, needed home visits, or follow-up investigation. Their work is ongoing.

As the review teams work, MAFV employees review the documentation to know what actions are needed on each incident. Due to RMS configuration, only divisional employees are permitted to enter disposition codes. If a reviewed incident was coded incorrectly, MAFV employees enter the correct code(s).

As part of the review process, coordinated efforts are made to contact complainants. Personnel first

attempt to contact victims via phone call, text, email, or letter. For priority cases involving family violence, aggravated assaults, or any incident involving an elderly complainant, unsuccessful contact attempts result in officers from HPD's Office of Community Affairs attempting in-person visits to the victim's last known address or probable place of residence in an attempt to reach the complainant. All such contact attempts are documented.

If no contact is made or the review requires no further action, reviewing officers enter a supplement and document any needed actions. If contact is established, the victim is asked if they wish to continue with the investigative process. If so, the case is assessed for workable leads. For family violence-related cases, the investigative process continues even if the complainant indicates they do not wish to prosecute. All family violence cases and any other cases with a workable lead are assigned for investigation.

The Department placed several non-MAFV investigative teams on special assignment to assist MAFV with the SL case follow-up. These teams consist of at least one sergeant and a team of officers trained in conducting investigations. For the non-family violence incidents needing further investigation, the MAFV DOC team supervisor assigns each case to an assisting team for follow-up. The assisting team is responsible for managing the investigation to closure, including entering any supplements, pursuing charges when appropriate, and entering clearance and closure codes. The MAFV DOC team supervisor is assigning cases based on the level of severity, beginning with aggravated felony offenses.

The MAFV DOC team supervisor is tasked to ensure the incident is assigned for follow-up. For family violence incidents, MAFV identified one sergeant and two officers to conduct the follow-up investigations. Due to the severity of family violence incidents, it was important for MAFV to have one of their own division teams conduct any needed follow-up investigations on these cases.

Unfortunately, incidents have been identified through this case review that were past the statute of limitations. MAFV has tasked an in-house supervisor to re-review each of these cases. This supervisor verifies that the statute of limitations has passed and enters the proper closure code. A MAFV lieutenant subsequently checks the incident and approves the code entry.

Once investigations are complete, the investigator enters the final supplement and finishes the case management entry. A supervisor subsequently reviews each following entry of a clearance of a closure disposition code. To ensure accuracy and consistency, the Department implemented a Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QAQC) process. Following supervisor review and approval at MAFV level, the independent QAQC team is conducting a review all family violence cases. This structured workflow ensures thorough review and appropriate follow-up for each case that had previously been suspended with the SL code.

Continued Efforts

MAFV is continuing its work to review all cases. As indicated in Table 3, 56 percent of cases have been reviewed and 18 percent have a final disposition. The number of additional resources that have been required to reach this point in the SL case review make it clear that the division would need supplemental resources or a change in processes if all cases are to be adjudicated moving forward.

In conjunction with the Department's review of case management practices, MAFV has endeavored to identify opportunities for process improvement. MAFV reviewed internal procedures, evaluated the volume of incidents routed to the division, evaluated available manpower, and proposed a new Divisional Case Management Protocol. The proposed protocol will ensure that all incidents are reviewed by a case management team member.

Homicide Division

Prior to July 2018, the Major Assaults Unit was part of the Homicide Division. During the review of SL incidents, it was determined that multiple incidents that had been suspended under the SL code had been done so by the Homicide Division. The OPDG provided Homicide a list of 6,537 incident reports that had been suspended with the SL code. The overwhelming majority of these cases were assaults and did not involve the death of the complainant.

Priorities

Upon initial receipt of the list of SL reports, the Homicide Division prioritized the reports for review that involved felony crimes against persons and investigations that were natural, accidental, or suicidal deaths.

Process

The Division stored an Excel file with the data in a shared electronic workspace so case managers and administrative personnel could coordinate the initial case review in a timely and organized fashion.

Priority cases for review were assigned in groups of 100. Reports were reviewed to determine if elements of an offense existed and the level of offense (misdemeanor or felony).

Once high priority cases were reviewed and supplemented, reviewers updated the Excel file with disposition codes and notations for each case.

Table 4: Homicide SL Incident Report Status	
SL Incident Reports	**6,537**
Reviewed Reports	**6,537 (100%)**
Reviewed Reports: Inactivated	**2**
Arrest Warrant Filed	0
No Further Leads	2
Pending Lab Analysis	0
Reviewed Reports: Closed	**494**
Closed by Investigation	494
Reviewed Reports: Cleared	**340**
Arrest Charges - Adult	24
Arrest Charges - Juvenile	1
Charged in Other Case	3
Death of Defendant	0
Exception - Adult	235
Exception - Juvenile	0
Lack of Prosecution by Complainant	7
Unfounded	70
Reviewed Reports: Suspended	**1,271**
No Leads	1,229
Patrol Arrest	36
Emergency Detention Order Initiated	6
Reviewed: Final Disposition Entered	**2,107 (32%)**

Source: HPD OPDG, RMS, as of 7/22/2024

The second review phase addressed misdemeanor offenses, with most cases being harassments and terroristic threats. Those cases were reviewed, supplemented, and updated on the shared Excel file.

The final phase of the SL Project is currently underway and involves final closures in the RMS Case Management module. To date, all cases have been reviewed and 32 percent have been properly documented in the RMS Case Management module. No reports within the statute of limitations have required additional follow-up.

Continued Efforts

The Homicide Division has reviewed all SL reports and will complete the process of closing the remaining cases by August 31, 2024. Moving forward, Homicide will maintain its relationship with the Harris County District Attorney's Office and continue to host the assistant district attorneys on a weekly basis to ensure the accessibility of detectives to receive and provide assistance on their investigations. The division will also continue to participate in monthly meetings with both the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council and Parents of Murdered Children.

Property & Financial Crimes

During the review of SL reports, it was determined Property & Financial Crimes (P&FC) was responsible for nearly 35 percent of the cases suspended with the SL code. HPD's OPDG provided the Division with a list of these 91,484 incident reports.

Priorities

The P&FC Division review of SL project reports is proceeding from most recent cases to oldest; within each year, cases with the strongest leads are prioritized for follow-up investigation. Reports for incidents that occurred in 2024 and 2023 have been completed by the division. P&FC received support from another investigative division for the initial review and supplementation of all 2022 cases. Work on older cases is ongoing. Designated P&FC supervisors are reviewing, recoding, and supplementing all reports pursuant to the Department's SL guidance.

Process

The Division began by establishing a common workspace in the MS Teams platform for the project and added all relevant personnel so they could access the data. They created reference documents to provide guidance to personnel involved in the review of SL reports. This guidance was shared via the Teams platform. Officers are easily able to identify the next incident for review using Teams.

Table 5: P&FC SL Incident Report Status	
SL Incident Reports	**91,484**
Reviewed Reports	**55,626 (61%)**
Reviewed Reports: Inactivated	**99**
Arrest Warrant Filed	14
No Further Leads	82
Pending Lab Analysis	3
Reviewed Reports: Closed	**26**
Closed by Investigation	26
Reviewed Reports: Cleared	**76**
Arrest Charges - Adult	11
Arrest Charges - Juvenile	0
Charged in Other Case	0
Death of Defendant	0
Exception - Adult	62
Exception - Juvenile	0
Lack of Prosecution by Complainant	0
Unfounded	3
Reviewed Reports: Suspended	**18,739**
No Leads	18,291
Patrol Arrest	441
Emergency Detention Order Initiated	7
Reviewed: Final Disposition Entered	**18,940 (21%)**

Source: HPD OPDG, RMS, as of 7/22/2024

Officers review case information in each report to assess solvability factors, including the existence of any workable leads. Officers enter supplements as needed, noting appropriate disposition codes and brief justification.

When work on a report is concluded, officers update the disposition code as necessary in the RMS Case Management module. They also enter the new disposition in an Excel tracking spreadsheet in Teams.

P&FC supervisors review, code, and supplement as necessary the support work on 2022 cases provided by an outside division. Lieutenants also conduct regular random audits of supplemented reports, log into their standardized tracking sheets, and email selected officers for corrections.

Continued Efforts
P&FC is continuing its work to review all cases. As indicated in Table 5, 61 percent of cases have been reviewed and 21 percent have a final disposition. Should additional staffing be authorized in the future, P&FC would like to implement a contact squad of senior police service officers or other civilian personnel to contact citizens who submit reports and assist them with evidence submission or answer any process questions they may have. P&FC will continue to reallocate administrative officer positions (i.e., budget, technology officers, etc.) to case management and investigations when possible. P&FC will also continue to evaluate job duties, transitioning responsibilities from classified officers to civilian personnel, when feasible, to help classified officers focus on investigations and case management.

Collaboration with Outside Partners
Due to the nature of most P&FC reports, collaboration with outside non-law enforcement agencies or non-profit organizations is limited. However, questions regarding charges and statute of limitations are directed to the HCDAO and our Cyber & Financial Crimes investigators have monthly meetings with HCDAO ADAs. Financial Crimes will also continue to meet monthly with the Houston Better Business Bureau and outside law enforcement agencies to discuss trends in fraud and scams. P&FC also has several task force officers permanently assigned to the FBI and US Secret Service where they conduct counterfeit currency, money laundering, cyber, and other investigations.

Vehicular Crimes Division

The Vehicular Crimes Division (VCD) was responsible for approximately 15 percent of the total cases suspended with the SL code. The OPDG provided the division with a list of 38,605 incident reports and the overwhelming majority of them were failure to stop and give information (FSGI) reports, with no known suspects or vehicle license plates.

Priorities
To address the number of SL incidents within VCD, the division began by reviewing each report to determine if there are workable leads, prioritizing all failure to stop and render aid (FSRA) incidents

first and then reviewed less serious offenses with no reported injuries. For SL incidents where the statute of limitations was close to expiring, the division prioritized the review and assignment of those, working towards more recently reported incidents. Downtown Patrol officers assisted the division with screening incidents on an overtime basis.

Process

Initially, Hit and Run detectives reviewed and triaged incidents that were more time sensitive. With additional support from another division, all identified incidents beyond the statute of limitations were supplemented and properly closed within RMS. After completion, supervisors reviewed and approved the investigative follow up.

Continued Efforts

VCD is continuing its work to review all cases. As indicated in Table 6, 95 percent of cases have been reviewed and 69 percent have a final disposition. As VCD continues to address SL incidents, the case contact squad will follow up with complainants for additional information on the extent of unknown injuries in possible FSRA incidents. They send postcards requesting estimates for workable FSGI incidents, which permits the Division to ensure incoming incidents are properly coded and prioritized.

Table 6: Vehicular Crimes SL Report Status	
SL Incident Reports	**38,605**
Reviewed Reports	**36,642 (95%)**
Reviewed Reports: Inactivated	**3,000**
Arrest Warrant Filed	2
No Further Leads	2,998
Pending Lab Analysis	0
Reviewed Reports: Closed	**123**
Closed by Investigation	123
Reviewed Reports: Cleared	**37**
Arrest Charges - Adult	4
Arrest Charges - Juvenile	0
Charged in Other Case	0
Death of Defendant	0
Exception - Adult	7
Exception - Juvenile	0
Lack of Prosecution by Complainant	0
Unfounded	26
Reviewed Reports: Suspended	**23,334**
No Leads	23,317
Patrol Arrest	17
Emergency Detention Order Initiated	0
Reviewed: Final Disposition Entered	**26,494 (69%)**

Source: HPD OPDG, RMS, as of 7/22/2024

Other Divisions

A review of the data revealed that multiple other divisions each had less than 5,000 cases to manage. These divisions include Auto Theft, Gang, Major Offenders, Narcotics, Vice, and assorted Patrol Divisions or smaller operational units. Due to the comparatively small numbers of SL reports for each, these Divisions have generally been able to review and resolve these cases quickly and without need for additional resources.

Prioritization

Due to the low number of cases, they were generally reviewed using an offense hierarchy, reviewing the most serious crimes first.

Process

To resolve the SL cases, each division reviewed their cases. Staff reviewed the case management

terms and definitions and SL report handling procedures. Sergeants and officers were assigned to review all SL reports. If a report had been suspended (SL) incorrectly and should have been suspended with no leads (SU), per policy, the reviewer changed the code to SU. Any cases needing follow-up investigation were assigned or are pending assignment. The final step involves the investigation of remaining cases. The divisions will identify any cases beyond the statute of limitations, providing a thorough supplement to properly close the report. The divisions will also investigate any cases that have workable leads that are not beyond the statute of limitations.

Continued Efforts

The other divisions are continuing their work to review all cases. As indicated in Table 7, 98 percent of cases have been reviewed and 94 percent have a final disposition.

Table 7: Other Division SL Incident Report Status	
SL Incident Reports	**9,394**
Reviewed Reports	**9,185 (98%)**
Reviewed Reports: Inactivated	**841**
Arrest Warrant Filed	8
No Further Leads	804
Pending Lab Analysis	29
Reviewed Reports: Closed	**3,202**
Closed by Investigation	3,202
Reviewed Reports: Cleared	**595**
Arrest Charges - Adult	53
Arrest Charges - Juvenile	0
Charged in Other Case	0
Death of Defendant	2
Exception - Adult	145
Exception - Juvenile	3
Lack of Prosecution by Complainant	12
Unfounded	380
Reviewed Reports: Suspended	**4,185**
No Leads	3,893
Patrol Arrest	291
Emergency Detention Order Initiated	1
Reviewed: Final Disposition Entered	**8,823 (94%)**

Source: HPD OPDG, RMS, as of 7/22/2024

NEW QUALITY ASSURANCE/ QUALITY CONTROL PROCESS

The review of 264,371 reports in a relatively short period of time – while regular department operations, including response to two severe weather events – represents a massive undertaking. Due to the delays that many of these cases had already experienced, it was all the more critical for the Department to ensure that their review was undertaken appropriately, consistently, with quality, and in compliance with the procedures that Department leadership established for these cases. Personnel were working long hours and, in some cases, divisions were being supported by personnel from other areas of the Department. For all these reasons, it was critical that a quality assurance/quality control (QAQC) process be implemented.

Goals of the QAQC process were to:

- Inform the divisions of opportunities for improvement as early in the process as possible to mitigate any mistakes or inconsistencies being made that could lead to further process delays;
- Ensure appropriate and relevant documentation was included for each report; and
- Help identify any common mistakes and provide targeted guidance to divisions.

The Executive Assistant Chief over Investigative and Special Operations initiated the QAQC process. A separate and independent team was established to review all cases associated with the highest priority crimes – those with a sexual assault or family violence nexus. The team worked with investigative lieutenants to identify best practices, to develop a case review workflow and a reference guide for case review. These materials were provided to applicable investigative division lieutenants to standardize their review processes of associated documentation.

To date, the QAQC team has been assigned 2,540 cases to review: 1,663 cases that were initially reviewed by the Special Victims Division and 877 cases that were initially reviewed by the Family Violence Unit of the Major Assaults & Family Violence Division. The QAQC team has completed their review on 2,450 of the assigned cases, of which 62 percent required no additional follow-up. Some of the most common errors for which the QAQC team is returning cases to the divisions include:

- Unclear documentation that victim contact had been attempted.
- Missing a second supervisor (lieutenant) concurrence for cases in which the statute of limitations has expired.

Plans are underway to develop a training on the QAQC process for all investigative division supervisors so this process can be institutionalized within the divisions themselves. Additionally, a recommendation is being considered for an independent QAQC audit team to be permanently created to conduct random audits of completed reports.

RESPONSE TO THE INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW COMMITTEE

Department leadership has reviewed the Interim Report of the HPD Independent Review Committee. The department overwhelmingly concurs with the committee's recommendations and appreciates the time that they committed to investigating this matter. The Department's response to each of the committee's preliminary recommendations are outlined in the two sections that follow; the response follows each recommendation

Department-wide Recommendations of the Independent Review Committee

1   Written directives for policy changes affecting the entire department.

Adopt written directives to ensure clear communication and consistent implementation of department-wide policy changes. These directives will comprehensively outline new policies, undergo rigorous review and approval, and be promptly distributed to all personnel.

COMPLETE   A written directive was sent out requiring divisions to review their SOPs and submit them for approval to their Assistant Chief and Executive Assistant Chief.

2   Attendance protocols for all Executive Staff meetings and Command Staff meetings.

Regular and consistent attendance at Executive Staff and Command Staff meetings within the HPD. To ensure effective communication, collaboration, and decision-making, the committee recommends the establishment of clear attendance protocols for these critical gatherings.

COMPLETE   Attendance is now documented for Executive Staff and Command Staff meetings.

3   Meeting minutes recorded to document decision points.

For transparent decision-making and accountability within the HPD, the committee proposes recording meeting minutes to document key decision points during all departmental meetings.

COMPLETE   Major decision points and actions from Executive Staff meetings are being captured. It has been tasked to the Chief of Staff or his designee.

4   General Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for RMS and Case Management.

Comprehensive documentation of the procedures and protocols governing the use of RMS and handling cases within the department. This documentation shall cover critical aspects such as data entry, retrieval, storage, security protocols, case assignment, tracking, and closure procedures.

IN PROGRESS   Investigative & Special Operations is developing a common case management framework. This framework provides specific case management parameters that will be included in the individual case management SOPs for every investigative division. Each

division will apply minor adaptations to the SOP framework, without altering the required elements, to meet address the unique needs of each based on the types of crimes they investigate.

5   Case assignment process must have reasonable/workable timelines.

HPD shall define clear and realistic timelines for the assignment of cases to investigative units or individual detectives. These timelines shall consider factors such as case complexity, priority level, available resources, and departmental workload.

IN PROGRESS   HPD is aware that caseload is an issue in some divisions. For divisions with a lower volume of incoming cases, the system used by SVD is a valid approach to managing investigative assignments. A rotational system to distribute incidents for case investigations was introduced to SVD's Adult Sex Crimes Unit. The Department approved an initiative funded with overtime compensation to provide resources to align the department's current capabilities and allocation with actual staffing. Although not a long-term solution, the unit is conducting monthly reviews of workload to ensure equal distribution and issuance to assigned investigators.

The Department is continuing its efforts to identify industry best practices to address divisions where the incoming report volume greatly exceeds available staffing levels, as is the case with MA&FV and P&FC.

6   Supervisory review or chain of command approval before an investigation is suspended or made inactive.

Before an investigation can be suspended or made inactive, it shall undergo a thorough review by a designated supervisory authority within the investigating unit or division. This review process ensures that all investigative avenues have been exhausted, evidence has been adequately pursued, and all available leads have been followed.

IN PROGRESS   Until revised policies are published, the Department has implemented policy to require secondary review of every SL report that is inactivated or suspended. Moving forward, divisional SOPs on this issue will take into account the nature of the crimes that a division handles and the volume of those crimes. For example, the proposed case management workflow for SVD includes two levels of supervisory approval prior to case investigations being inactivated or incident reports being suspended.

7   Simplify RMS offense titles ensuring they are consistent with the Texas Penal Code.

With the implementation of the new RMS system, HPD shall ensure that all RMS titles are in line with the corresponding offense in the penal code ensuring consistency in labeling.

IN PROGRESS   OPDG is actively working to reconfigure offense titles for the new, Versaterm RMS system that will be deployed in 2025. This is intended to simplify and streamline case routing, analysis, and the prioritization of cases for review. Further, this project will allow new officers to identify the appropriate offense report title and corresponding charges.

Independent Review Committee Recommendations Specific to the Special Victims Division

1   Process to consistently review "bucketed" incident reports.
   a. *Upon CODIS notification, the system generated response for follow-up verification.*
   b. *Collaboration with the Houston Forensic Science Center ("HFSC") to develop SOPs specific to lab results.*
   c. *Process to ensure all lab results are uploaded to RMS in a timely manner.*

ONGOING

Special Victims has implemented a system to periodically monitor any reports inactivated while waiting on forensic interviews, lab results, or new leads.

- Upon CODIS notification, the system generates a response for follow-up verification.
- SVD has collaborated with the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) to develop SOPs specific to lab results. A successful example of this collaboration occurs when a SANE kit is delivered to the Property Room; this immediately triggers a notification to the HFSC that a kit is ready to be picked up and tested.
- SVD currently has supervisors who review a separate email account to which all CODIS-related messages are routed. This ensures that the messages receive priority review and assignment.

A process has been established to consistently review "bucketed" cases. The division has currently enacted changes for the CODIS process within the newly developed Case Management Unit to support Adult Sex Crimes Unit. The unit has created a process for managing all CODIS email notifications. These SVD members will upload all CODIS reports to RMS and complete a supplement upon receipt. The responsible SVD members will ensure that the detective assigned to the case investigation is notified and all activities will be documented in a supplement report in RMS. Also, these SVD members will be the direct liaison between HPD and HFSC. The updated processes establish a system to ensure redundancy and eliminate any single points of failure.

2   24-hr availability of SVD investigators for incident referral or questions.

The HPD shall establish staffing schedules to ensure that SVD investigators are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including weekends and holidays. Shift rotations and on-call arrangements shall be implemented to maintain continuous coverage.

COMPLETE

SVD currently has established an on-call system to provide 24-hour availability of investigators for referral or questions for timely and effective handling of sexual assault incidents.

3   Improved coordination with victim services outside of HPD.

The HPD shall actively seek to establish partnerships and collaborative relationships with external victim service organizations, including non-profit agencies, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and government agencies. These partnerships shall be based on mutual respect, trust, and shared goals of supporting victims and promoting justice.

Improving coordination with community service providers has been a priority for HPD since the Victim Services Unit (VSU) was initially established in 2017. In fact, building the Department's capacity to provide victim-centered, trauma-informed approaches is such a high priority that HPD expanded the VSU in 2021 to a stand-alone division. The Victim Services Division (VSD) provides both on-scene assistance and a warm handoff to long-term service providers. They play a critical role by providing immediate, compassionate, trauma-informed, and comprehensive support for all victims of violent crime, including survivors of sexual assault.

ONGOING

VSD has made it a priority to ensure outreach, resources, and referrals are not extended to victim survivors in a one-size fits all approach. Each person is unique with the trauma endured during the reported incident and can choose from providers that best suit that person's needs.

HPD victim advocates also consider logistical requirements. There are times when it is necessary to have web-based therapy as an option for recovery and those options are given as well. Cultural considerations play a large role in having the victim survivors stay engaged on their path to achieve a new normal. It is very important to have advocacy with cultural competence, delivered by someone who speaks the same language, is seen as trustworthy, and can be accepted by survivors who know their customs. VSD works closely with various social services and legal resources to support the diversity within the city. Community partners to which VSD refers survivors include but are not limited to:

- Houston Areas Women's Center
- The Bridge Over Troubled Waters
- Montrose Counseling Center
- Jewish Family Services
- Northwest Assistance Ministries
- Boat People SOS
- Nick Finnegan Counseling Center
- Katy Christian Ministries
- Bay Area Turning Point
- Fresh Spirit Wellness
- Innovative Alternatives
- Fort Bend Women's Center

- Tahirih Justice Center
- The Harris Center
- Shield Bearer Counseling Center
- The Landing
- Montgomery County Women's Center
- Family Houston
- Women's Center of Brazoria County
- Aid to Victims of Domestic Violence Abuse
- UH-ADAPT
- UT Trauma and Resilience Center
- Legacy Community Health Services

- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
- Family Time Crisis Counseling Center
- Bo's Place
- The Lucine Center for Trauma and Grief
- Legal Aid for Survivors of Sexual Assault
- Lone Star Legal Aid Foundation
- Parris Foundation
- An-Nisa Hope Center
- Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative

4   Updated victim notification protocols that include input from Houston Area Women's Center ("HAWC").

Engage in collaborative discussions with representatives from HAWC to seek their input and expertise in updating victim notification protocols. These discussions shall include reviewing existing protocols, identifying gaps or areas for improvement, and exploring best practices in victim-centered notification.

ONGOING

VSD, SVD, and MAFV are all members of the Harris County Sexual Assault Review Team (HCSART) chaired by the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC). The HCSART protocol is multidisciplinary, discipline specific, and inclusive of all member voices, including survivor voices.

The HCSART was charged with creating protocols for SOPs and General Orders, specific to the needs of adult sexual assault survivors. The goals of this protocol are

to increase safety, promote continuity of care, support and empower survivors while holding offenders accountable in a fair and just system. This protocol is a living document that was published in December of 2023, and will be updated and amended based on the needs of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). It is intended to supplement individual agency policies and procedures.

Pursuant to SB 476, the HCSART will update and review the protocols a minimum of once every two years. The protocols include roles, responsibilities, commitments, expectations, and standards for each member's response at different points in time. The protocol identifies points of collaboration between disciplines. In developing this protocol, the SART members considered Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure; provided different procedures for use within a particular municipality or area of the county served by the response team; and prioritized the health and safety of survivors.

In keeping with the mission of HCSART and the department's promise to handle survivor outreach with the utmost care, HPD referred to research on methodology. Special attention was given to a study conducted in March 2015, by the University of Austin Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault School of Social Work, which gave insight and recommendations from survivors and professionals on how to notify victims about sexual assault kit evidence. HPD collaborated across various divisions and disciplines with members from HAWC and HCDAO to create trauma-informed messaging, call scripts, and contact letters for officer interactions with victim survivors to ensure HPD's approach is sensitive, compassionate, and understanding.

5	Mandatory HAWC administered 55-hr training for all members of SVD.

Recognizing the specialized nature of handling cases involving vulnerable populations, the committee proposes a mandatory 55-hour training program administered by the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) for all members of the Special Victims Division (SVD) within the HPD.

IN PROGRESS

SVD supports making the 55-hour Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) administered by HAWC mandatory for all investigators assigned to SVD. SVD is currently in the process of registering division members for upcoming training sessions.

6	Co-facilitated victim and trauma-centered training at the patrol level in the Academy plus a yearly refresher for all officers.

Recognizing the pivotal role of patrol officers in responding to and supporting victims of crime, the committee proposes integrating co-facilitated victim and trauma-centered training into the curriculum at the Academy for patrol-level officers. Additionally, a yearly refresher course is recommended to ensure that all officers stay up to date with best practices and remain sensitive to the needs of victims.

IN PROGRESS

SVD's Adult Sex Crimes Unit currently provides classroom instruction to the Department's cadets during their Basic Peace Officer Course at the Training Division. The class covers sexual assault investigations to prepare the cadets to handle their on-scene response with sensitivity, professionalism, and competence. The course goals include understanding the legal framework, recognizing signs of sexual assault, response and victim care, evidence collection and preservation, interview techniques, and report writing. Although not currently created, SVD is committed to developing and providing refresher training to all employees.

7 **Regarding incident reports with a final disposition of INAC – No leads, where the victim-survivor could not be located.**

Recognizing the challenges associated with locating victim-survivors in cases where leads have been exhausted, the committee proposes enhanced collaboration with victim service organizations and human trafficking agencies such as The Landing, United Against Human Trafficking, and the City of Houston, Mayor's Office of Case Manager, to facilitate the location of victim-survivors and provide them with the necessary support and resources.

ONGOING

Officers use a multitude of ways to attempt to contact victim-survivors. They may reach out by phone, text, or e-mail. They may attempt to visit a last known address. Other efforts are made for specific population groups:

- If the victim-survivor is believed to be homeless, officers reach out to the Homeless Outreach Team to determine if they might have recent contact information to share.
- If the victim-survivor is found to be incarcerated, the officers notify their supervisor, and the incident report is referred to the Case Management Unit for assignment.
- If the victim-survivor has had prior contact with HPD's VSD, the officers can contact VSD to determine if they happen to have more current contact information for the individual. Efforts are underway to ensure that this coordination is occurring.

If contact is not made after all those attempts, the incident report will be dispositioned as Inactive – No Further Leads (Pending Location Check or Complainant Contact).

8 **When scheduling Forensic Interview with Victims, allow victim-survivor to schedule an interview at the convenience of their individual schedule. The timing of the interview shall not be solely dependent on the availability of the investigator.**

During the course of our review, we learned that many victim survivors were provided a small scheduling window for their forensic interview dependent on the availability of the investigator. For example, victim survivors were expected to schedule an interview during their work week and during business hours only, specifically being told that due to overtime constraints, interviews could not be scheduled on the weekends or after 2pm on the weekdays. This investigative process should be victim-centered and primarily take into account the availability of the victim's schedule.

COMPLETE

If there is a positive contact, the complainant is provided with the officer's name and with information following a script. If the complainant wishes to proceed, the officers will send the complainant's information to TXFNE and ask if the complainant would like a victim services advocate to contact them for services or resources. TXFNE will then contact the complainant to schedule the Forensic Interview that works best for the complainant's schedule. The timing of the interview is not based on the availability of the investigator.

NEXT STEPS

HPD is committed to ensuring that the Department learns from this experience. The Department has been transparent at every step in the process. While all available resources are currently deployed to review and investigate the SL cases, leadership is also engaged in the process of identifying the actions that need to be taken – processes that need to be revised, trainings that need to be developed, and other improvements that need to be made – to keep the Department from finding itself in the same position in the future.

Collectively, the items below are not a finalized plan. Some are already underway, while others will require longer-term effort. Ultimately, the consideration, prioritization, and resource allocation for the items below will fall to the new Chief of Police to manage in collaboration with the Mayor, City Council, and Houston community.

Finalize a case management SOP.

The Department is working to standardize a case management SOP that will mandate review of incoming incident reports each workday. The standardization will also ensure proper coding, prioritization, and routing of cases. It will include elements that are already in practice, like the supervisory review of case dispositions, as well as new elements like monthly random audits. This model SOP will include some mandatory elements for all investigative divisions, while other sections of the SOP will afford divisions the ability to address unique issues based on the nature of the crimes they investigate.

Implement case management training.

The Commander who chairs the HPD Investigative Standards Committee is working to finalize a training on case management for all investigative personnel. The goal is to implement this training during the upcoming 2024-2025 training cycle. All existing investigators and case management personnel will take the course during the initial year. It will be subsequently provided at sufficient frequency that any new personnel assigned to these roles will be able to take it within 90 days of assignment. An appropriate schedule for refresher training will be implemented.

Institutionalize QAQC processes.

While a separate, independent quality assurance/quality control (QAQC) team is currently reviewing the highest priority cases, it is critical that the QAQC protocols be instituted at the division level to ensure that supervisors reviewing reports, particularly at the conclusion of investigations, are checking them for quality and completeness.

Explore opportunities to use technology, and specifically automation, for administrative tasks.

After the implementation of the new RMS, new technologies that were incompatible with the existing HPD RMS will become feasible. It is incumbent on leadership to explore how new technologies can help to address critical deficits in the Department. A strategic approach to the review and procurement of new technology is critical to maximizing impact and return on investment.

Review staffing allocations to ensure congruence with Department priorities.

It is clear that the Department needs more personnel in patrol and in investigations. Leadership acknowledges that Department's staffing shortage may never be fully addressed. For this reason, it is incumbent upon the Department's leadership to regularly review staffing allocations to ensure they continue to align with shifting priorities.

Maintain working relationships with partners.

HPD continues to benefit from strong working relations with our public and community-based partners. The SL crisis required the Department to lean on its partners for support, problem-solving together to achieve workable solutions. Maintaining trust with our partners is critical to ensure that they remain willing to help when needed.

Despite distractions, maintain the implementation schedule for the new RMS to achieve the go live date of March 2025.

HPD greatly appreciates that the City Council authorized the purchase of the Versaterm records management system to replace the department's aging RMS. A diverse implementation team assigned from all areas of the department are working to ensure that the implementation is as seamless as possible.

Maintain the fidelity of the new RMS.

Many of the challenges with the current RMS were caused by the lack of a governance structure. Changes were made to the existing system at the request of one group without consideration of the how that change might impact other users. The Department allowed divisions to make decisions on how they would use the Case Management module, with many opting to use their own stand-alone systems to supplement the RMS. The configuration of the new system must afford leadership strong managerial awareness and oversight of the case management process.

Identify ways to address the knowledge transfer challenges associated with the level of transfers, promotions, and retirements that HPD experiences.

Current processes allow little to no opportunity for incumbents in positions to spend time with the individuals replacing them. For civilian positions, the hiring process completely precludes this. This is one reason that SOPs are so critical for all roles, yet they currently fail to address all aspects of most roles, and this is especially true at higher levels of the organization and for roles that are niche by nature.

Continue working to address HPD's staffing shortage.

The introduction section of this report outlines the extensive history of unanswered pleas for additional personnel by Department leadership. While the sixth academy class budgeted for FY2025 will help, creative recruiting strategies, incentives for officers to stay with the department, and other ideas are also needed to meaningfully address the staffing dilemma. The City also needs to revisit expanding its civilian workforce so more officers can return to patrol and investigative functions.