

Advisory Panel Recommendations and Implementation Plan

A. Formation of the Advisory Panel

As part of Executive Order 2022-05, issued on July 28, 2022, Mayor Bruce Harrell directed that the following occur:

The Mayor and the Chief of Police will appoint an advisory panel of no more than six local sexual assault subject-matter experts and victim-survivors to assist the Police Department with the assessments identified in this order. This advisory panel will provide an outside perspective and their experiences with widely used and accepted best practices.

The members of the Advisory Panel were identified on November 17, 2022, and included the below individuals:

- Megan Allen, Legal Advocacy Manager, King County Sexual Assault Resource Center
- Michael Cervantes, Policy Manager, Seattle Indian Health Board¹
- George Gonzalez, Assistant Director, Harborview Abuse and Trauma Center
- Dr. Jackie Helfgott, Professor of Criminal Justice, Criminology, and Forensics; Director of the Crime & Justice Research Center, Seattle University
- Sara Mooney, Pro Bono Counsel, Sexual Violence Law Center
- Jennifer Wallace, Program Manager – Sexual Assault Investigations, Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission

The Advisory Panel began its work in January 2023.

B. Information Reviewed and Interviews Conducted

The Advisory Panel began reviewing documentation relevant to SPD's Sexual Assault Unit (SAU) and reform efforts focused on law enforcement and the response to and investigations of gender-based violence. This included SPD policies and procedures, materials concerning advocate-led case reviews, and documentation concerning victim support services and best practices.

The Advisory Panel also requested presentations from a number of system actors, advocates, and subject matter experts. These included: SPD executives; SAU staff; the City's Victim Support Advocates, the Women's Law Center; and the Mayor's Office for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

Staff supporting the Advisory Panel additionally met with representatives of the Center for Policing Equity, the National Crime Victims Law Institute, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Police Executive Research Forum, and the Austin Police Department, among other organizations.

The Advisory Panel also met on several occasions with Dr. Cassia Spohn, who was retained by SPD to conduct an evaluation of SAU, and Dr. Cynthia Lum, who was retained to conduct an evaluation of the Investigations Bureau. The Advisory Panel received presentations on the preliminary findings of each expert and reviewed their reports. Feedback from the Advisory Panel was considered and ultimately integrated into each report.

¹ Mr. Cervantes was required to step away from the Advisory Panel for personal reasons and was replaced by Abigail Echohawk, one of the original signatories to the letter that launched this work.

While the Advisory Panel's focus was on SPD and City policy and practices, and improvements that could be made in Seattle, the group recognized that SPD is one actor in a larger system. The Advisory Panel noted that systemic changes were also necessary within the prosecutors' offices, the courts, and the corrections system. However, such analysis and recommendations were outside of the scope of the group's work.

C. Recommendations

Based on the information reviewed, the interviews conducted, the findings of the two expert reports, and the expertise of the Advisory Panel members, the group identified a number of areas for improvement and innovation.

Need for a Trauma-Informed Approach

A gap identified by the Advisory Panel and during the internal review by Dr. Cassia Spohn was the lack of trauma informed training for patrol officers and detectives, specifically in the context of sexual assault and domestic violence investigations.

The group believes that it is essential for patrol officers and detectives to apply a trauma-informed approach to their responses to incidents, investigations, and interactions with victims and survivors. Not only will this result in victims and survivors feeling supported and valued during the investigative process, but it will also result in a higher likelihood of victims and survivors pursuing cases criminally and better functioning of the criminal legal system.

Ongoing Community and Advocate Involvement

Another recommendation concerned the ongoing involvement of advocates and community in reforming and improving the work of SAU. The Advisory Panel heard from the Women's Law Center, which created a national model for advocate-led case reviews in Philadelphia, as well as learned from the case reviews conducted of SAU by the WCJTC. These successful models informed the determination that a similar approach could yield sustained and community-informed reforms within Seattle.

Similarly, the Advisory Panel discussed the importance of having a robust victim support landscape, including within both the City and community. The group discussed actions that could be taken to assess the existing system and identify potential improvements, including better coordination with SPD, clearer roles and differentiation between system and community-based advocates, amplified community supports, and increased availability of and accessibility to both system and community-based advocates.

Improved Data and Transparency

During its review, the Advisory Panel noted that there was no centralized place to find data and information concerning the status of SAU investigations. Specifically, it was difficult to determine how many SAU investigations resulted in probable cause being determined, cases being referred to prosecutors, and charges being filed. The group believes that the absence of data and information that is easy to locate and understand can contribute to a lack of community confidence and awareness of the functioning and efficacy of SAU and SPD more broadly. The Advisory Panel further cites to the importance show that SPD is prioritizing these investigations and that improvements are taking hold.

Ensuring Recommendation Implementation and Continuous Improvement

Lastly, the Advisory Panel recognized the importance of building mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement. This includes using trusted partners external to SPD to track the implementation of recommendations made both by the group and experts. This also includes establishing metrics to track the efficacy of the recommended trauma-informed trainings and ongoing case reviews. This will test whether these new programs are, in fact, yielding positive results and whether any changes are needed. A focus on evidence-based practices was identified as important to the group.

The Advisory Panel also deemed it essential to maintain ongoing communication and feedback loops with victims and survivors, community-based organizations, and law enforcement – including those working on investigations of gender-based violence offenses.

D. Solutions and Implementation Plan

In order to operationalize these recommendations, the Advisory Panel, in partnership with the Mayor's Office, developed six action items to be implemented in 2025 and 2026. The Mayor allocated \$1,000,000 towards these recommendations in the 2025/2026 biennial budget, as well as an additional \$250,000 from the 2024 budget. This budget was approved by the Seattle City Council. These budget appropriations ensured that recommendations #1-5 were funded. Additional budget is required to effectuate recommendation #6.

Most of these action items, particularly the ongoing items such as the case reviews (#2), victim support services (#5), and program evaluation (#6), will also require ongoing funding to be successful. Both the Advisory Panel and the Mayor's Office strongly encourage the City to continue to support this work both financially and programmatically.

1. Trauma-Informed Response Training

SPD will deliver a two-phase trauma-informed response training for all employees focusing on investigations of gender-based violence.

Police understanding of the dynamics of sexual assault and the application of trauma-informed responses improves community experience and confidence, and also leads to increased reporting, accountability and, ultimately, prevention.

A trauma-informed approach by police in the initial interaction with a victim is a strong influence on continued participation in a case and constitutes an evidence and research-based, national best practice. Training on trauma-informed police responses have only recently been introduced in Washington and continue to expand. Increased understanding of trauma, combined with strength-based communication skills can improve victim engagement and resiliency. It is crucial for officers and all personnel to understand and address the trauma experienced by victims. Also, officers need training to monitor and regulate their own resiliency. Training on investigative practices such as evidence collection, report writing, and cultural competence can further prepare and equip officers with necessary tools in furtherance of improved victim experience and prosecutorial outcomes on these cases.

The Strengths-based Engagement through Acknowledging Trauma and Trusting Lived Experience (SEATTLE) Model is a two-phased approach to integrating a trauma and resiliency informed approach to

sexual violence at all levels of SPD. This approach is further responsive to the recommendations made in the expert reports.

Both training phases will include cultural competency and racial equity elements, with the goal of helping officers to effectively recognize and respond to the diverse needs of individuals from various backgrounds and for officers to interact with victims and survivors of gender-based violence in a respectful and fair manner.

All SPD employees holding the rank of Lieutenant or higher will participate in both training phases, with the goal of institutionalizing a commitment to trauma-informed policing within the Department's leadership. The Chief of Police will identify supervisory employees to participate in the Train the Mentor workshop.

i. Pre-Training Inquiry (PTI):

Description: A PTI will be conducted to bring information from the Advisory Panel up to date with the many changes at SPD and as part of the iterative process (each part informing the next) of the phased training. The PTI will help ensure that the trauma-informed lens is tailored to and adapted for Seattle PD and its community. The PTI will aid in assessing SPD's current trainings, understanding, and application of trauma-informed responses to the community, particularly on sexual assault and other gender-based violence cases.

The PTI will address any updates since or in response to the CJTC case reviews (2022), the George Mason University report, and the Dr. Spohn/Arizona State report. It will also be important to get a snapshot of the SPD response and current practices and policies through meetings with SAU team members, a small (3-5) sampling of cases, and reviews of SA incident reports from each precinct.

Deliverable: Pre-Training Inquiry.

Implementation Timeline: Complete.

ii. Phase I: Foundations and Action (est. 4 hours)

Description: Phase I of the training will be comprised of two parts.

Part 1 will include two (2) hours of online training in the Foundations of trauma and strengths-based engagement utilizing a Case Study inspired by actual SPD incident reports (reviewed during PTI).

Part 2 will include two (2) hours of in-person skills training or "Action" facilitated by a minimum of 20 SPD SEATTLE Model Advisors who have participated in a two-day Train the Advisor (TIA) Workshop around delivering the skills to their assigned audiences/teams.

Deliverable: Two-part training.

Audience: All SPD personnel

Implementation Timeline: Q3 2025/Q3 2026. Foundations course and TIA Workshop development in progress.

iii. Phase II: Advanced Trauma-Informed Response Training (est. 6-8 hours)

Description: The City will work to design, develop, and deliver fully online/virtual Sexual Assault Investigation (SAI)/Gender-Based Violence training that is trauma-informed, dynamic, timely, relevant, and audience-oriented, and that integrates the SEATTLE Model with applicable laws, SPD Policy, and investigative best practices.

Phase 2 training will leverage “just-in-time” learning (retrievable when needed) and “chunked” microlearning (30 minutes or less) online modules that are scaffolded and spaced to achieve observable and measurable outcomes. Training will focus on essential investigative knowledge, skills, and values through a trauma-informed lens.

For patrol and detective participant learners, training culminates in an individual field assessment [IFA] checklist conducted by Sergeants. Learners will receive constructive feedback and recommendations for training reinforcement.

Deliverable: Advanced trauma-informed response training.

Audience: SPD patrol officers and detectives, with others optional or as assigned.

Implementation Timeline: Q4 2025/Q4 2026. Currently in progress.

iv. SEATTLE Model Trauma Informed Approach Certification

Description: Expanding the two-phase training, SPD will build a Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA) certification, modeled after the 40-hour Crisis Intervention Training. The purpose of doing so is to build specialization and recognition for officers and supervisors who participate. The Department will assess how to best incorporate TIA certification into promotional assessments consistent with legal and collective bargaining requirements.

SPD will work with the PSCSC, SDHR, Labor Relations, CAO, and other relevant departments to determine whether and how to implement this recommendation. Selection to and participation in the TIA Workshop and the facilitation of a minimum of six (6) in-person “Action” trainings are the suggested requirements to achieve initial certification. TIA personnel may also be consulted or included in policy or practice reviews being conducted through a trauma-informed lens.

Deliverable: The development and implementation of a trauma-informed training certification.

Audience: All sworn SPD personnel.

Implementation Timeline: Q1-Q3 2026

2. Post-Training Assessment

Description: Assess training impact and outcomes through review of select SPD Sexual Assault Unit/Gender-Based Violence cases. The IFA checklists, described above, and Incident Reports will also be included as part of the Post-Training Assessment and Case Review Learning Assessment (CRLA).

Two teams, consisting of a mix of internal and external multi-disciplinary experts will conduct the reviews. Case reviews will enable team members to assess training impact/effectiveness and identify any trends, patterns, gaps, or takeaways to consider with regards to training, procedures, and policies and will be

complementary to, not duplicative of the reviews noted in Section 6, below. The results of the case reviews will be provided in a comprehensive report and relied on for training modification and/or development.

Deliverable: Ongoing case reviews involving advocates and internal subject matter experts.

Implementation Timeline: Q4 2026/Q4 2027

3. Ongoing Independent Assessment of Recommendation Implementation and Continued Reform

Description: The City will task an external entity from SPD with tracking the implementation of recommendations made by the Advisory Panel and within the two expert reports. The entity will work in ongoing collaboration with members of the Advisory Panel.

The implementation tracking will include an overview of each recommendation, the date of issuance, the date of implementation, and – if implementation has not occurred – an explanation concerning the lack of implementation. This assessment will be publicly available.

Deliverable: An ongoing assessment of recommendation implementation that is either in the form of a periodic report or a continuously updated dashboard.

Implementation Timeline: Ongoing

4. Data Transparency

Description: The Advisory Panel identified that there is a lack of visibility into the work conducted by the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Units and recommends more accessibility and transparency.

Given this, the Advisory Panel recommended an SPD dashboard that provides visibility into investigations conducted by the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Units. The dashboard should identify investigations initiated, cases referred for prosecution, and cases closed and for what reason.

The City will collaborate with community-based organizations to build awareness of the dashboard, what data it includes, and the ways in which the data reflects the different components of the Advisory Panel's recommendations and the implementation thereof.

The City will also seek to partner with the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the Seattle City Attorney's Office, the Seattle Municipal Court, and any other local government entities that maintain databases concerning the investigation or prosecution of gender-based violence offenses to determine whether such data can be integrated into the City dashboard.

Deliverable: SPD dashboard with future integration with prosecutor and court data.

Implementation Timeline: Ongoing

5. Expanded Funding for Victim Support Services

Description: Given current and anticipated funding reductions at the federal level, as well as existing funding shortfalls for most victim support services providers, the City will provide additional support to

King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, Sexual Violence Law Center, Seattle Indian Health Board, and Harborview Trauma and Abuse Center to maintain community-based programming.

This will allow these organizations to continue to provide critical services to victims and survivors, as well as to mitigate against layoffs and programmatic cuts.

Deliverable: Funding appropriations to service providers.

Implementation Timeline: Q4 2025

6. Program Evaluation

Description: The City (managed by SPD Performance Analytics & Research, Research Management) would engage a local academic/research institutions to complete a mixed-method approach to measure the effectiveness of sexual assault investigations conducted by the Seattle Police Department (SPD) and evaluate the policies and practices implemented to improve SPD's Sexual Assault Unit (SAU). This continues the work started by Dr. Cassia Spohn and be response to the findings in her evaluation of SAU, the broader findings of the George Mason University evaluation of SPD's Investigations Bureau, and the work of the SAU Advisory Panel.

The purpose of the evaluation is to measure the effectiveness of trauma-informed training and the prospective case review process focusing on five elements of sexual assault investigations: (1) victim/survivor experience; (2) trauma-informed response training; (3) investigation processes; (4) organizational change and police culture; and (5) community perception.

Deliverable: Annual mixed method assessment conducted by an academic/research institution.

Implementation Timeline: 3+ years (mid 2026-2029)