

Portland police training audit fails basic task on truth

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The city auditor's March 2015 appraisal of the Portland Police Training Division is devastatingly precise — and damning.

City Auditor Mary Hull Caballero and her colleagues flayed and finely chopped the PPB's excuse for a training program, revealing a shocking practice of starting strong, but losing interest after a year or two; a frail, uninformative reporting system; and a conspicuous lack of the follow-up

needed to see if there's any impact in the field.

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Improved training was a cornerstone of the package of police reforms prescribed by the U.S. Department of Justice in DOJ vs.

City of Portland. Without effective training, especially in terms of helping people with mental illness, policy changes are just words.

And a year or two of training, without measuring its value or sustaining it beyond an initial passion, amounts to no training at all, while virtually guaranteeing further harm to persons with mental illness. It's a deficiency with a body count and litigation price tag.

The auditors understand the connection between police training and police behavior, noting: "Consistent training emphasis over time on major cases, and evaluating the training's effectiveness, could reduce the chance of recurring incidents."

"Recurring incidents" is their way of saying, more deaths and injuries, more tragedies and tears, more "pattern and practice" of needless force against the disabled or different.

The basic task of police oversight is monitoring use of force in avoidable

situations. We don't deny the need for police, or the franchise of use of force. We don't protest use of force in unavoidable situations, whether the person has a mental illness or not. But "unavoidable" use of force is not what the DOJ went looking for; it's not what auditors focused on; and it's not what concerns us. We do take issue with avoidable force, which disproportionately and outrageously victimizes persons with mental illness.

The city auditor's report highlights four "high-profile" cases where civilians were needlessly harmed: James Chasse, Raymond Gwerder, William Monroe and Aaron Campbell. All were impaired by mental illness.

Among the audit's findings:

Training spurred by well-publicized use-of-force cases, in which a person was harmed or killed, tended to "subside after an initial flurry of activity."

The police bureau could not produce any evidence of positive outcomes.

Instructors assumed officers remember what they're taught, with no evidence to support the assumption. For example, one instructor justified spending just 20 minutes on use-of-force policy by assuring auditors that participants "were well aware of the policy." But when asked, not a single participant could correctly recall it.

There was no training on avoiding demeaning labels for persons with mental illness, despite the DOJ pointing this out as a problem.

Both police and the city auditor's report use the acronym "CIT," but fail to define it. All sorts of police crisis training is done under the mantle of "CIT," yet differ startlingly from the best-known model of crisis training. Rarely does anyone ask, "What do you mean by 'CIT'?"

It's an important question.

The Memphis Model Crisis Intervention Team training is the national gold standard of crisis training, and "CIT" has become

synonymous with "Memphis Model." A knowledgeable person, reading the auditor's references to "CIT," would assume the PPB had instituted a particular kind of crisis training, adherent to certain standards and parameters. But that knowledgeable person would be mistaken.

Widely employed, well-studied and proven effective, the Memphis Model CIT is a known quantity — not the untried "next big thing" psychologists slapped together, nor a police-crafted curriculum centered on the importance of using force in certain cases, especially considering the advancing hordes of the insane. No, "CIT" refers to a recognized and specific training, which PPB does not provide.

A lot of people toss around the term "CIT" without much thought; some append it to their inferior training programs for that extra bit of cachet. Since "CIT" is not trademarked, they are free to do so. But it can be confusing if it goes unquestioned — repeatedly, and either no one knows, or they aren't saying.

In 2012, the DOJ described PPB's "deficient" crisis training in this way:

"Crisis Intervention Training as currently delivered by the PPB is a police-based training lacking important community collaboration. It appears that the curriculum is developed by PPB and that the training is opaque to the community at large."

Does the PPB still use police-based training? If so, we may not know what they're using, but we do know it's not CIT.

Is the training still "opaque"? If so, whether it's Memphis Model or faux CIT, they may not tell us.

We asked the auditor, but got nothing responsive. We asked Drummond Kahn, Director of Audit Services, if auditors would consider an addendum to clarify the city's unique use of the acronym. We were politely told they "might" consider including the CIT issue in a future audit — which, Kahn added, would not be anytime soon.

The issue is the community's mistrust of specific officers: Leo Besner, who killed Ray Gwerder and later was promoted; Ron Frashour who killed Aaron Campbell; Kyle Nice, Bret Burton and Chris Humphreys who killed James Chasse; Dane Reister, who shot William Monroe in the back. The dodge from the city has been, "We will train better." We played along: so, what training? CIT training — or so we believed.

We cannot quantify the costs of excessive force, to the victims, their families, involved officers, and the community at large, who once trusted police.

But we do know the costs the city paid to settle lawsuits against police. In five years (2000-2014) the city paid out on nine cases, including all four of the auditor's examples, for a total of \$8.1 million.

We also know the cost of PPB's new, state-of-the-art training facility: \$15 million.

And we know from Chief Larry O'Dea's response to the audit that in 2014, annual in-service training was reduced from 30 hours to 20, "for financial reasons."

That \$8.1 million would probably come in handy about now.

But the way to reduce steep settlement payouts is to put money into training up front, to develop and implement the best training possible, not skimping on training and reaping the consequences later, at a much higher cost — in dollars and in lives. To do any less suggests there are things more important to police than avoiding harm to persons with mental illness.

You don't have to be a member of any faith to recognize the truth in Matthew 6:21: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Spending reveals intent. There is no intent here to protect our lives.

And, to paraphrase the chant heard coast-to-coast after Ferguson, our lives matter, too.



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