



Office of Independent Review **PRESS RELEASE**

OIR Issues Report on Investigation of Sheriff's Department Force Practices

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(Santa Ana, CA) — The Orange County Office of Independent Review (OIR), a government oversight body charged with ensuring transparency and accountability across five justice-related agencies, issued a public report on August 25, 2021 detailing its months-long investigation of the Orange County Sheriff's Department's (OCSD) force policies and practices.

The report describes the investigation, its findings, and related recommendations. The OIR found that:

- OCSD policies do not provide enough information on de-escalation and other critical areas, including the use of lethal force. Policies also allow avoidable high-risk force practices, including what OCSD calls “alternative” force – which are force techniques OCSD does not address in its policies or cover in its training. This may result in deputies using prohibited force or using force in a manner divorced from policy constraints and training. These vulnerabilities increase risk for the public.
- OCSD training on force and crisis intervention revealed troubling cultural currents that may contribute to undesirable deputy conduct, including bias against individuals with mental health needs. One instructor teaching a crisis intervention course presented a slide with three photographs and the caption: “Danger to Others? Why do all mass shooters look like mass shooters?” The instructor’s presentation and comments, along with others observed by the OIR in other courses, suggest that deputies can determine whether an individual is a threat based on appearance.
- OCSD’s force-reporting and review practices make it difficult to fully understand how well OCSD is managing the use of force by its deputies. Force reports often lacked necessary detail and the supervisory reviews that followed were, at times, deficient – leading to failures to refer potential misuse of force to its Internal Affairs team. The OIR also identified a frequent practice of late reports. Twenty one percent (21%) of use-of-force packets reviewed from 2020 included at least one late force report. One was filed 41 days after the force incident took place.

“The OIR’s investigation and report represent the realized promise of zealous and independent oversight of the county’s criminal justice system,” said Executive Director Sergio Perez. “If addressed through changes in policy and practices, the issues identified by my office will help secure more just and effective policing services for the people of Orange County.”

The report includes recommendations intended to improve OCSD policy and practices. Those recommendations touch on improvements to policy, better vetting and monitoring of trainers, and changes to the way force is reviewed, among other things.

The report is available on the OIR’s website: <https://oir.ocgov.com/>