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SFPD Responds to Media Report on Use of Force

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In response to a report in the SF Standard that arbitrarily conflates use-of-force cases with a subject's housing status, the SFPD is setting the record straight.

SFPD officers received 174,176 homeless-related calls from dispatchers between 2017 and 2022. Only 43 of those cases resulted in a use of force after the individual either assaulted or resisted police or committed another crime.

Nearly all 43 of those use-of-force cases involved officers using a physical control hold. In one case an officer used OC spray.

The statistics are unequivocal: For homeless-related calls for service, SFPD officers used force less than 3 times out of every 10,000 calls – specifically .024% of the time.

This is data that was shared with the Standard, which they did not include in their report.

In the vast majority of cases in which SFPD officers used force, officers were responding to crimes in progress, often violent crimes. SFPD officers do not factor in a suspect's housing status – nor should they – when responding to crimes in progress.

The following are the most common calls for service *in order* that resulted in officers using force against a person who was later classified as homeless: Burglary, Vehicle Theft, Suspicious Person, Trespasser, Person with a gun, Assault with a Deadly Weapon, Auto Boost, Assault and Battery, Person with a Knife, Vandalism, Warrant Arrest, Robbery, and Homicide.

The SFPD has welcomed and collaborated with the city in finding alternative responses to calls involving homeless people.

Those responders, however, are not trained or certified to respond to violent crimes, burglaries, and other crimes in progress. The SFPD will continue responding to these types of calls in the future.

What's more, a person's housing status is often difficult to measure and is often not apparent. The state and federal governments do not ask law enforcement jurisdictions to track suspects' housing status.

An individual may be classified as “homeless” in SFPD’s records if they refuse to provide an address, are living with friends or family members, or a variety of other circumstances in which they have not recently maintained a fixed address.

The SFPD is committed to delivering safety with respect for all in our mission to build trust and transparency with all the communities we serve. The department has been a leader in 21st Century Policing, including numerous use-of-force reforms that have since become state law.

The SFPD will continue to police with dignity and respect and our officers will continue to use force when necessary and appropriate to keep the public safe.

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