

## THEMES FROM MPD OFFICER FOCUS GROUPS

### Overview

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A successful consent decree includes provisions that came directly from police officers because officers are impacted by the changes included in the court-enforceable agreement. That's why nationally recognized policing practice experts at 21CP worked with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR) to hear directly from officers to help inform consent decree negotiations with the City of Minneapolis.

Between August 9 and August 11, 2022, 21CP conducted 15 focus groups with 115 Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) sworn personnel, of varying ranks and assignments. This included two focus groups at Precinct One, one at Precinct Two, two at Precinct Three, one at Precinct Four, three at Precinct Five, two at the MPD Federation, three at MPD Headquarters, and one at the SOC. MPD officers elected to speak with 21CP.

This report shares key themes from those focus groups. Comments are not attributed to any individual officer because the purpose of this work was to gather themes and ideas.

### Focus Group Themes

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**Officers say that they receive too little guidance and training on policies that are overly long and convoluted – which leads to misunderstanding, confusion, and concern.**

- Officers repeatedly told 21CP facilitators that MPD's policies are overly long and confusing – and that officers receive inadequate training generally and about policy changes more specifically.
- Officers cited MPD's use of force policy as the most significant example of overly complicated, confusing policies. Officers explained, however, that MPD has many "longwinded policies."
- Across precincts, officers described policies as being rolled out via an email, with the expectation that personnel will simply read and absorb new policies, without training. Officers noted that reading an email or even watching a video during an electronic training is not adequate for "hands-on" learners.
- Officers shared that the substance and quality of training varies widely.

- Looking forward, many officers expressed a desire for more integrated, reality-based, and scenario-based training.
- Officers suggested that, in the future, when MPD “send[s] out a policy, we should be trained on it before it goes into effect.” Officers expressed concern about consent decree changes becoming effective without “allow[ing] for training in advance.”

**Officers say there is a lack of leadership within the Department.**

- Officers told 21CP that they have minimal interaction with MPD leadership.
- Officers across ranks suggested that senior leaders within MPD and the City generally, do not listen to even good ideas coming up from officers.
- Patrol officers say that senior leadership does not seem to understand or empathize with their concerns.
- Officers complained about the quality of leadership and supervision at lower levels and discussed the lack of training for sergeants.

**Officers lack confidence in and/or are frequently frustrated by MPD’s information and technology systems.**

- Officers do not have confidence in MPD’s information and technology systems.
- 21CP heard from officers that various technology systems do not easily interface with one another, resulting in difficulties fulfilling reporting requirements and the sense that time is being wasted duplicating information already entered in one system to another.

**MPD officers want more comprehensive health and wellness programs and services.**

- Collectively, it appeared to 21CP facilitators that the Department appears, in some ways, on the brink of breaking – not simply as an organization but as a group of humans.
- MPD officers do not believe that the Department or the City provides sufficient health and wellness resources.
- Officers appeared to endorse the possibility of a more “robust program” for officer health and wellness – including as part of consent decree reforms.
- Specifically with respect to the consent decree, multiple officers suggested that issues around officer wellness and mental health needed to be “a highlighted thing” both “woven throughout” a decree and “a separate section” specifically outlining new pathways of care.

**Officer morale is extremely poor, with several factors contributing to widespread anger, anxiety, and/or trepidation.**

Overall, the morale, motivation, and enthusiasm for the job among MPD officers is very low. The following are major factors that appear to be a driver of low morale.

- **Insufficient Staffing:** 21CP heard a good deal from MPD officers about the worsening staffing situation.
- **Demonization of Police:** Many officers cited the sense that elected officials, media, and community members “are demonizing everything so that no one wants to do this job.”
- **Purported Problems with Payroll:** In several conversations, officers were exasperated due to ongoing issues of being paid accurately by the City.
- **Facilities:** Basic issues with facilities also negatively impact officer morale. For instance, Precinct Two has mold in the station by the women’s locker room and in the break room, which is closed due to the mold issue.
- **Discipline:** Officers described issues with MPD’s current discipline system. The current system and application of discipline makes no meaningful differentiation between “honest mistakes” and serious issues. Some officers also articulated a sense that, with rules and expectations changing regularly and sometimes rapidly, it can be difficult to understand what is expected.

**Officers almost uniformly say they like and support the mental health co-response program.**

- The mental and behavioral health co-responder model is well-liked.
- Even officers who were skeptical about it at first say that it should be expanded.

**MPD’s current policy on handcuffing frustrates officers and may lead some officers to hesitate taking subjects into custody.**

- Under MPD’s use of force policy as of August 2022, handcuffing in and of itself is a considered a use of force, even when an individual does resist arrest or if the officer does not need to use any other type of force to effectuate the arrest. Because every use of force requires an officer to complete substantial paperwork, officers explained that a simple handcuffing incident can take a lot of time.
- Several members explained to 21CP that officers in the field regularly debate who will handcuff an individual because officers do not want to complete the paperwork or have it associated as “their” use of force.