



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

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## Sheriff's Office Data Shows Racial Disparities, Potential to Expand Alternative Policing

BRIAN CRIST  
GRANT DAILEY  
PETER HEINECCIUS  
BROOKE LEARY

### Executive Summary

Our analysis of data from the King County Sheriff's Office shows racial disparities in the numbers of arrests and uses of force, as well as potential to expand alternatives for responding to low-risk calls. King County Code and data systems constrain how regularly the Sheriff's Office collects racial demographics for calls for service, limiting its ability to proactively identify racial disparities. We recommend that the County take steps to reduce racial disparities in policing by collecting and analyzing data on all calls for service where an officer stops a member of the public. We also recommend that the County use lessons learned from other large metropolitan areas to increase the chances of success for a pilot of policing alternatives.



**King County**

## Content Warning, Terms, and Values

**This report contains references to police use of force, domestic violence, and other traumatic experiences.**

If you have concerns about specific interactions with law enforcement in King County, there are resources to assist you with filing a formal complaint.

The King County Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO) is available to help with any complaints, questions, or comments regarding the King County Sheriff's Office. Contact OLEO by calling 206-263-8870 or by emailing [OLEO@kingcounty.gov](mailto:OLEO@kingcounty.gov). For more information about filing complaints, visit the following web page:

- <https://kingcounty.gov/independent/law-enforcement-oversight/complaints.aspx>

You may also file a complaint directly with the Sheriff's Office by calling 206-263-2525 or visiting the following web page:

- <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/sheriff/about-us/contact/complaint.aspx>

**Language is an important tool for advancing equity and accountability, and data systems sometimes include words that lag behind the evolution of terms.** Throughout this report, we selected terms based on their original data sources. We also performed some operations in our data analysis that aggregated racial and ethnic identities to match the data from other systems. The data from the King County Sheriff's Office follows reporting standards set by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and uses broad racial and ethnic categories which represent a diversity of peoples. These categories include American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and White. The Sheriff's Office uses Hispanic origin as a race in its data; we have analyzed it in this way to align with how the Sheriff's Office records data on race.

**The King County Auditor's Office is committed to equity, social justice, and ensuring that King County is an accountable, inclusive, and anti-racist government.** While planning our work, we develop research questions that aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of King County government and to identify and help dismantle systemic racism. In analysis we strive to ensure that communities referenced are seen, not erased. We promote aligning King County data collection, storage, and categorization with just practices. We endeavor to use terms that are respectful, representative, and people- and community-centered recognizing that inclusive language continues to evolve. For more information, see the King County [Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan](#), King County's [statement on racial justice](#), and the King County [Auditor's Office Strategic Plan](#).

## Acknowledgment

**We would like to thank the King County Sheriff's Office for its responsiveness to the audit team's requests and its assistance throughout the audit process. We are especially grateful for its cooperation at this particular time, while the Sheriff's Office continues to navigate the ongoing pandemic and a changing leadership environment.** In the face of ongoing staffing shortages, the Sheriff's Office continued to work to meet the needs of its many contract partners while also preparing for the appointment of new department leadership. During these changes, current Sheriff's Office leadership was quick to answer our questions and helpful in connecting the audit team with officers and leaders across the County and with representatives from multiple contract partners.

**The Sheriff's Office has taken important steps to improve its data analysis capabilities in recent years.** In the interest of increasing transparency and building community trust, the Sheriff's Office has published a public-facing use of force dashboard on its website with information on use of force incidents that occurred from 2014 to 2019. The Sheriff's Office also publishes exportable data on offenses and crime statistics both for internal use and summarized for the public. These are necessary first steps to addressing the issues raised in this report and show the Sheriff's Office's dedication to improving its analytical capacity.

# Sheriff's Office Data Shows Racial Disparities, Potential to Expand Alternative Policing

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

### What We Found

The King County Sheriff's Office records a variety of information about its 350,000 calls for service each year, including both dispatched 9-1-1 calls and officer-initiated calls. However, information on the racial identities of community members stopped during these interactions is only available in around 4 percent of calls. King County Code may limit when officers may collect data on race. In addition, the data entry system for calls lacks a field for entering race. However, an officer's perception of a person's race is key to analyzing racial disparities in policing, which are a problem nationwide.

We found racial disparities in the numbers of arrests and uses of force, where the Sheriff's Office does collect data on race. People and officers reported Black people as suspects and officers arrested Black people at rates nearly four times higher than expected given their proportion of the county population. Few calls resulted in uses of force, however we found that, overall, White officers as a group used force twice as often as Black or Asian officers. Additionally, both Black and Hispanic people were subjected to uses of force more often than White people. While the Sheriff's Office has improved its analytical capabilities, leadership has stated that it lacks the capacity to analyze race data even if collected. Contract partners that we spoke with said they would benefit from increased data analysis and sharing from the Sheriff's Office.

Other jurisdictions across the nation have developed alternative models for responding to some types of calls for service. We compiled best practices and lessons learned from four cities which have implemented these programs.

### What We Recommend

We ask Council to consider changing code to allow for broader data collection and recommend that the Sheriff's Office collect data on perceived race for all calls for service and that the County Executive analyze it to identify and reduce racial disparities.

### Why This Audit Is Important

The Sheriff's Office is the primary police force for all unincorporated areas of the county and for 13 contracted incorporated areas, covering a combined population of over 500,000 people. The Sheriff's Office also provides services to Metro Transit, Sound Transit, an airport, and marine areas. Each year, the Sheriff's Office receives around 150,000 dispatched calls for service and officers initiate another 200,000 calls. How officers interact with the community during these calls can have profound impacts on both the individuals involved and the public at large.

The Sheriff's Office responds to 9-1-1 dispatched calls and conducts officer-initiated calls.



Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of King County Sheriff's Office data, 2019-2021

# Sheriff's Office Data Shows Racial Disparities, Potential to Expand Alternative Policing

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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- [i](#) Content Warning, Terms, and Values
- [ii](#) Acknowledgment
- [iii](#) Report Highlights

## SECTIONS

- [1](#) 1: Data Incomplete but Indicates Racial Disparities
- [17](#) 2: Alternative Response Models

## APPENDICES

- [24](#) 1: Descriptive Information about Sheriff's Office Calls for Service
- [30](#) 2: Risk Index
- [37](#) 3: Executive Response
- [41](#) 4: Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objectives & Methodology
- [46](#) 5: List of Recommendations & Matter for Council Consideration
- [47](#) 6: Mission and Values Statement



# Data Incomplete but Indicates Racial Disparities

## SECTION SUMMARY

**Our review of data from the King County Sheriff's Office showed racial disparities in arrests and uses of force. The Sheriff's Office rarely collects data on race during calls that do not result in an arrest or a use of force.** The Sheriff's Office responds to hundreds of thousands of calls for service each year, policing the unincorporated areas of the county as well as areas that contract for service. This section discusses findings from our review of data on calls for service from 2019 to 2021, including information on the shortcomings of Sheriff's Office data.

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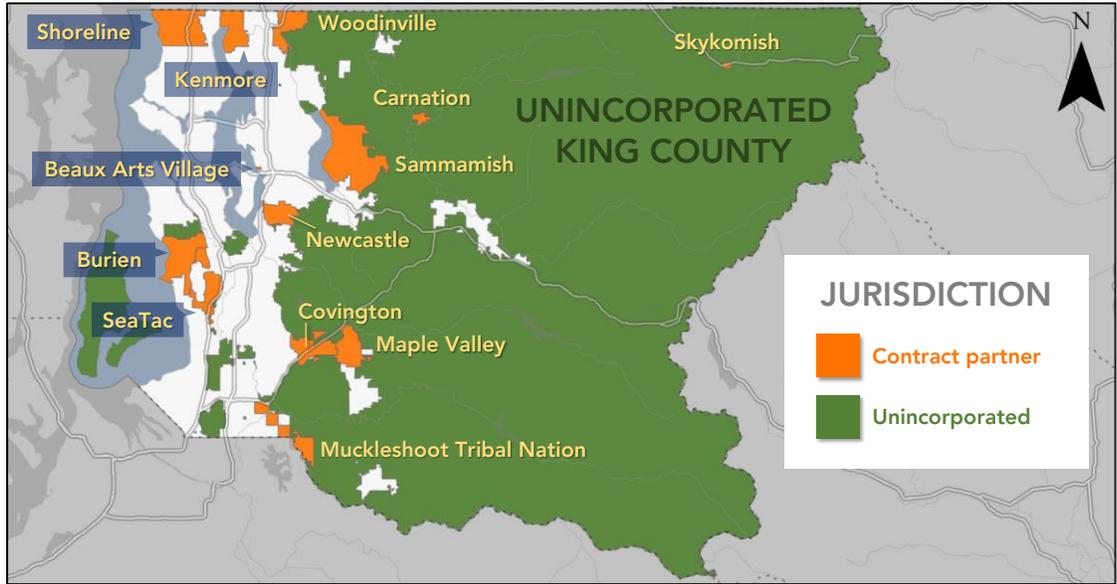
### Sheriff's Office is the primary police force in many areas of King County

**The Sheriff's Office is the primary police force for large portions of King County, responding to around 350,000 calls for service each year.** Calls for service include both dispatched 9-1-1 calls (43 percent) and calls that officers initiate while they are on patrol in the community (57 percent). The Sheriff's Office is responsible for policing unincorporated King County as well as 13 incorporated areas which contract for service (see exhibit A, below). Unincorporated areas account for around 90,000 calls per year, while another 150,000 calls come from contracted areas. The Sheriff's Office also responds each year to around 100,000 calls from across the county involving Metro Transit, Sound Transit, King County International Airport-Boeing Field, and marine jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup> For more detail on the number and types of calls that the Sheriff's Office respond to, please see Appendix A.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Numbers for calls related to Metro Transit and Sound Transit are likely low, since these officers are not only dispatched by King County Communication Center, but also other call centers which we do not have data on.

EXHIBIT A: The Sheriff’s Office provides primary policing services for unincorporated and 13 contracted areas of the King County.



Note: In addition to the specific jurisdictions on this map, the Sheriff’s Office provides policing services across the county for Metro Transit, Sound Transit, King County International Airport-Boeing Field, and marine jurisdictions.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office information

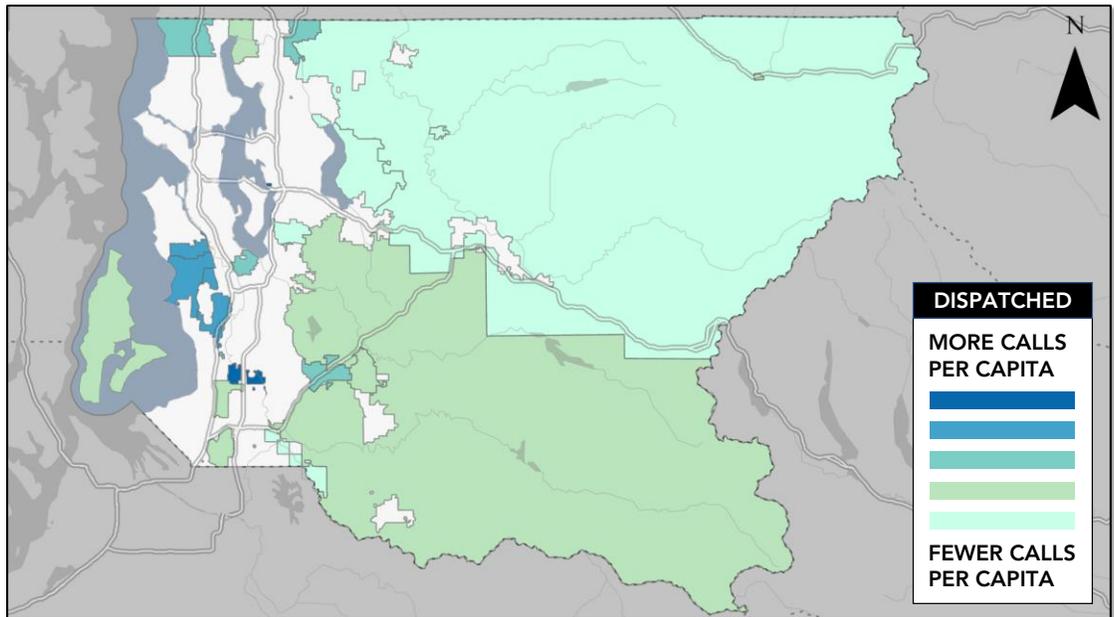
**Volume and types of calls vary from area to area**

**The volume and types of calls for service the Sheriff’s Office responds to vary across King County.** The Sheriff’s Office is responsible for providing police services to both rural and densely populated areas. In addition, contract partners can determine policing strategies within their jurisdictions. For example, the city of Sammamish places an emphasis on traffic patrols, while other areas do not. The Sheriff’s Office does not dictate a centralized approach across the county, which contributes to a wide variation in priorities and strategies as reflected in the data.<sup>2</sup>

Some areas of the county have more dispatched 9-1-1 calls per capita than average, while other areas have significantly more officer-initiated calls (see exhibits B and C, below). For example, the Muckleshoot Reservation had substantially more officer-initiated calls than average for the number of people who live there, but significantly fewer dispatched calls for service. According to the Sheriff’s Office and representatives of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, officers emphasize a proactive policing approach in part because there may be a cultural reluctance to calling 9-1-1 due to generations of trauma.

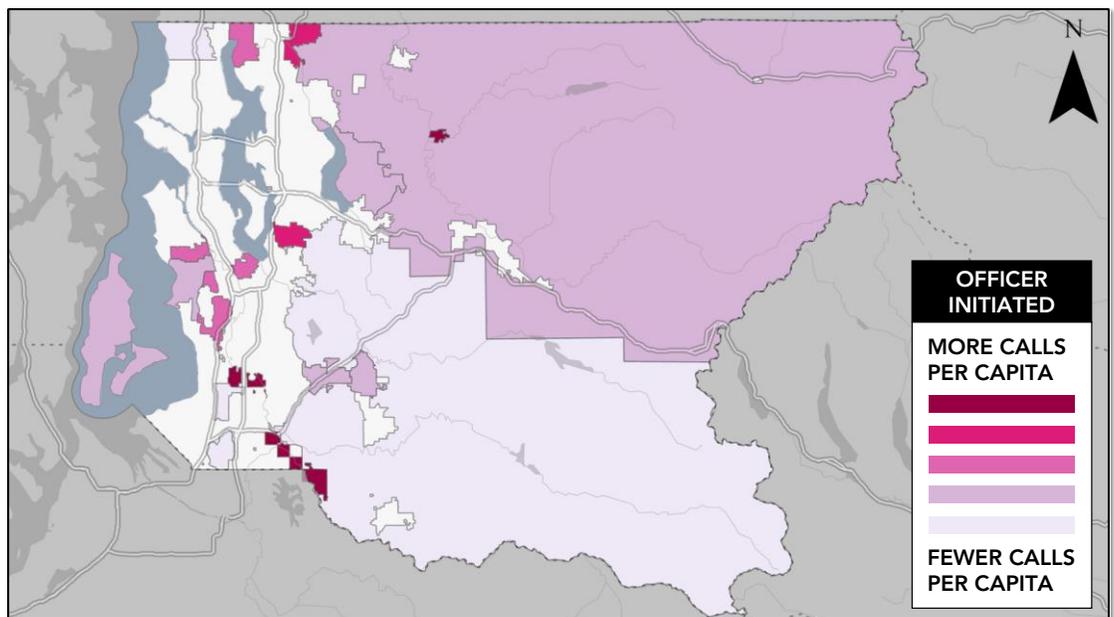
<sup>2</sup> We discuss the differences in traffic enforcement strategies in more depth in our 2022 audit report titled “Traffic Enforcement: Strategies Needed to Achieve Safety Goals.”

EXHIBIT B: Some areas have more dispatched 9-1-1 calls for service per capita than others.



Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office information

EXHIBIT C: Some areas have more officer-initiated calls for service per capita than others.



Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office information

**Sheriff's Office lacks data to identify disparities**

**The Sheriff's Office does not collect sufficient demographic information to assess whether there are racial disparities in calls for service.** The Sheriff's Office uses the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system to record information about calls for service, including both 9-1-1 dispatched calls and officer-initiated calls. While officers use this system to record a variety of information about calls, there is not a field for them to note the race of the people who are stopped.<sup>3</sup> The Sheriff's Office plans to obtain a new CAD system in the next biennium that may have this ability. Having more comprehensive data is important because we found evidence of racial disparities in separate data systems that track arrests and uses of force. However, the data collected in these other systems only corresponds to around 4 percent of all calls for service in CAD. We discuss these disparities in more detail below.

**King County Code may limit when officers may collect data on race**

**King County Code may currently prohibit the Sheriff's Office from collecting perceived race data.** In 2018, Ordinance 18665 sought to ensure that King County's data and limited resources are not used to assist with federal government deportation efforts, but may unintentionally prevent the Sheriff's Office from collecting data needed to assess potential disparities.<sup>4</sup> Previous Sheriff's Office leadership has also stated that officers should not collect information about race, limiting the ability to quantify and ultimately reduce racial disparities. One concern of previous leadership was that officers could incorrectly identify a person's race. However, the officer's perception of a person's race is key to analyzing racial disparities in policing. This is because any implicit or explicit bias would be based on that perception, even if the officer's perception did not match the person's racial identity. For this reason, the state of California enacted the Racial and Identity Profiling Act in 2015 which requires officers to collect race data, including perceived demographic information on the person stopped for all police interactions. There are no such requirements in King County Code, although Washington state law states that law enforcement agencies should collect and analyze traffic stop demographic data to ensure racial profiling does not occur.

**Matter for Council Consideration 1**

**In order to facilitate research and mitigation of the causes for racial disparities, the King County Council should consider amending King County Code 2.15.010.G to allow for the collection of race data.**

<sup>3</sup> The Sheriff's Office records information for traffic warnings and citations in a data system called SECTOR, which is maintained by Washington State Patrol. While demographic information is entered into SECTOR for citations, this information must be requested from Washington State Patrol and is not continually monitored or analyzed by the Sheriff's Office.

<sup>4</sup> See King County Code 2.15.010.G.

## Recommendation 1

**The King County Sheriff's Office should ensure the Computer Aided Dispatch system can capture race data.**

## Recommendation 2

**The King County Sheriff's Office should develop, document, and implement a policy that officers collect data on perceived race for people who are stopped when those interactions are logged in the Computer Aided Dispatch system. Leadership should provide sufficient guidance to officers on how to collect this data.**

Additional analysis required

**The causes of racial disparities in the criminal legal system are complex and likely require collaboration across different county agencies to fully analyze, understand, and address.** It is important to note that while the analyses we discuss below establish that racial disparities exist in King County, these analyses alone do not identify the reasons why the disparities exist. Some factors that lead to the racial disparities we observed may be largely outside the control of the Sheriff's Office. Additional analyses would be required to explain the extent to which different factors contribute to these disparities. Without these analyses, it would be difficult for the Sheriff's Office and other county agencies to know where to focus attention and resources to eliminate the racial disparities we observed.

Analytical capacity limited

**The Sheriff's Office states it has limited capacity to conduct data analysis, preventing it from identifying disparities.** The Sheriff's Office Crime Analysis Unit focuses on mandatory reporting and crime analysis and states it has a very high workload. Sheriff's Office leaders report they have requested additional analytical staff in past budget cycles, but those requests have not made it into the County Executive's final proposed budget to Council. The Sheriff's Office has begun discussions with King County Information Technology and other county agencies about developing a shared data warehouse to pool criminal legal data across the county, but this effort is not yet fully developed. The Sheriff's Office is also building its own secure data portal, which houses data on offenses, which the Sheriff's Office Crime Analysis Unit says may assist officers in making data-driven decisions. The Sheriff's Office has also begun publishing data on the King County Open Data Portal.<sup>5</sup> Whether located within the Sheriff's Office or in a centralized data analysis group within the executive branch, additional resources and expertise are likely necessary to analyze data on racial disparities.

<sup>5</sup> <https://data.kingcounty.gov/>

### Recommendation 3

**The King County Executive Office should designate an entity to work with the King County Sheriff's Office to analyze race data collected from interactions between officers and members of the public to identify and reduce racial disparities.**

Sheriff's Office collects more race data for arrests, uses of force

**The Sheriff's Office collects data on a person's race consistently in case files that involve an arrest and in use of force reports, but this only represents a small portion of all interactions with the public.** The Sheriff's Office keeps information on calls for service, case files, and uses of force in three separate data systems. Officers do not typically collect race data for most interactions with the community. Officers did record suspects' race in 29 percent of case files, in 84 percent of arrests, and 89 percent of reported uses of force. However, most calls for service do not require opening a case file and uses of force are only reported in 0.06 percent of calls. By merging records from all three systems, we identified race information for around 4 percent of calls in CAD. While a small percentage of total calls, this still represents over 37,000 calls across three years of data. Based on this combined data set, we found racial disparities in several areas, which we discuss below.

Use of force by Sheriff's Office and the limited scope of our review

**The scope of our review of use of force information is limited to assessing whether there are racial disparities in reported uses of force.** A use of force incident occurs when an incident involves any act reasonably likely to cause physical pain or injury. We did not review Sheriff's Office policies and procedures related to use of force, nor the appropriateness of any individual use of force. For a review of those topics, see the recent report from the King County Office of Law Enforcement Oversight: Use of Force Complaint Processing in the King County Sheriff's Office.<sup>6</sup> Our review is limited to an examination of the different proportions of racial groups in the data for both officers and people who experienced a use of force.

**From 2019 to 2021, the Sheriff's Office reported 619 incidents that involved at least one use of force.** Overall, 0.06 percent of Sheriff's Office calls for service involved a use of force incident, or one use of force incident for every 1,695 calls for service. These incidents involved 385 unique officers and 650 unique people who experienced a use of force. Each incident can involve multiple officers and people experiencing use of force. More than half of the 385 officers were involved in multiple uses of force. Uses of force do not include routine compliance activities, such as placing an individual in handcuffs or into a patrol car, unless a person reports feeling pain. Individuals reported pain in 39 percent of use of force incidents. The Sheriff's Office determined that four of the 619 use of force incidents were not within policy (0.6 percent of all uses of force).

<sup>6</sup> "Use of Force Complaint Processing in the King County Sheriff's Office," Office of Law Enforcement Oversight, July 12, 2018, <https://kingcounty.gov/~media/independent/law-enforcement-oversight/Documents/2018/Use-of-Force-Complaint-Processing.ashx?la=en>

### White officers more likely to use force

**White officers as a group appear to use force twice as often as Black or Asian officers, but the available data does not explain why.** Between 2019 and 2021, White officers collectively responded to 929,270 calls for service and used force 898 times (a rate of one use of force for every 1,035 calls for service). In comparison, Black officers used force once for every 2,143 calls for service, and Asian officers used force once for every 2,326 calls. When compared to all officers responding to calls for service, White officers were 52 percent more likely to use force than officers in all other racial groups combined. Conversely, Black and Asian officers were about 50 percent less likely to use force than all other groups combined (see exhibit D, below).<sup>7</sup> Note that this analysis does not explain why White officers appear to use force more frequently than other officers. Analyses of other law enforcement agencies in the United States have also found that White officers use force more frequently than other officers.

#### A NOTE ON STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

A difference is considered statistically significant if we are confident that it is based on an actual difference between the groups and not based on random chance.

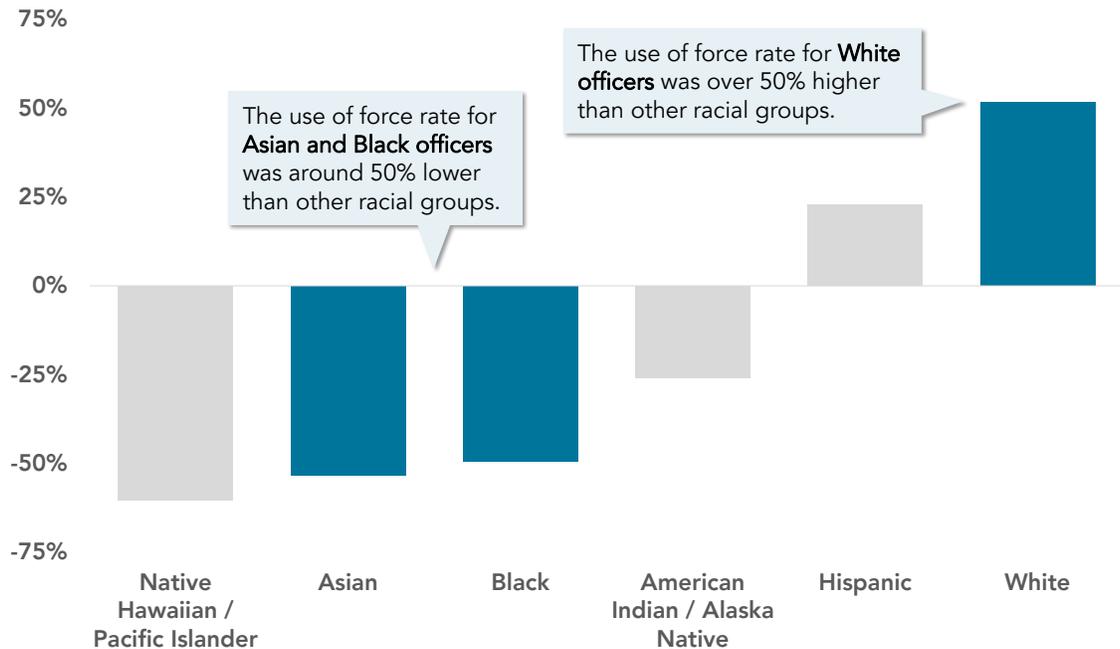


To test for significance, we first assume that there is no underlying difference between the groups. Next, we calculate how likely differences would be for groups of that size. If there is less than a one-in-a-thousand chance of seeing differences as large as we observed, then we say the difference is statistically significant. The Auditor's Office uses this conservative standard of one-in-a-thousand ( $p < .001$ ) throughout this report. This is much more stringent than common research conventions of  $p < .01$  or  $p < .05$ .

Some exhibits in this report show how different each racial group is from the average of all others for certain measurements. Some differences are statistically significant (shaded in blue), and some are not (shaded in gray). In many cases, lack of statistical significance may be due to the small size of the groups being analyzed. Differences described in the text of this report are all statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup> The racial makeup of the most frequent users of force was not significantly different than all other users of force. This means that the higher rate was not because a small number of White officers used force very frequently and skewed the average.

EXHIBIT D: White officers used force more frequently than other officers, and Black and Asian officers used force less frequently.



Note: In this chart, the zero percent line indicates what we would expect based on the average rate of all officers in other racial groups, while the bars indicate the variance from that average. Gray bars are not statistically significant (because the variance is too close to the average for their number of uses of force).

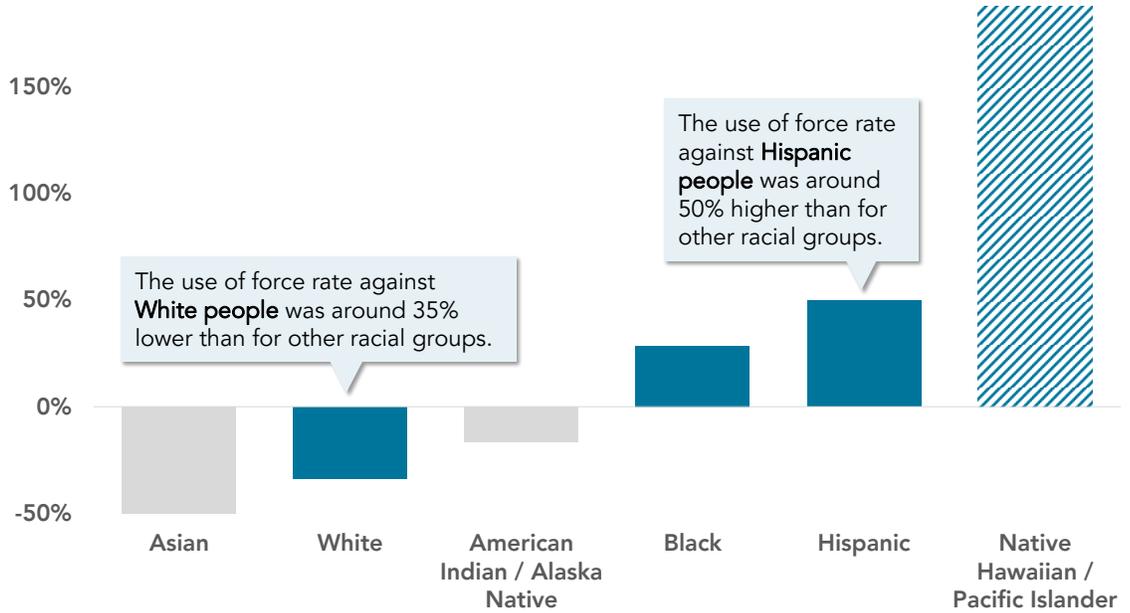
Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data from 2019 through 2021

Hispanic and Black people experienced uses of force more often

**Officers from the Sheriff’s Office used force against both Hispanic and Black people more often than other races and against White people less.** National studies have shown that law enforcement agencies use force against Black and Hispanic people at disproportionate rates nationwide. In King County, Hispanic people were 50 percent more likely to experience uses of force than people of all other races. Black people were 29 percent more likely to experience uses of force than people of all other races. Conversely, White people were 34 percent less likely to experience uses of force (see exhibit E, below). Uses of force against people who are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander were substantially higher than others (at 188 percent); however, most of this disparity was due to a single incident involving 10 individuals.

EXHIBIT E: White people experienced uses of force less often than expected when compared to the racial makeup of arrests, and Hispanic and Black people experienced uses of force more often. See note below chart about the rate for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people.

200% NOTE CHANGE IN SCALE



Note: In this chart, the zero percent line indicates what we would expect based on the average rate of all other people, while the bars indicate the variance from that average rate. Gray bars are not statistically significant (because the variance is too close to the average for their number of uses of force).

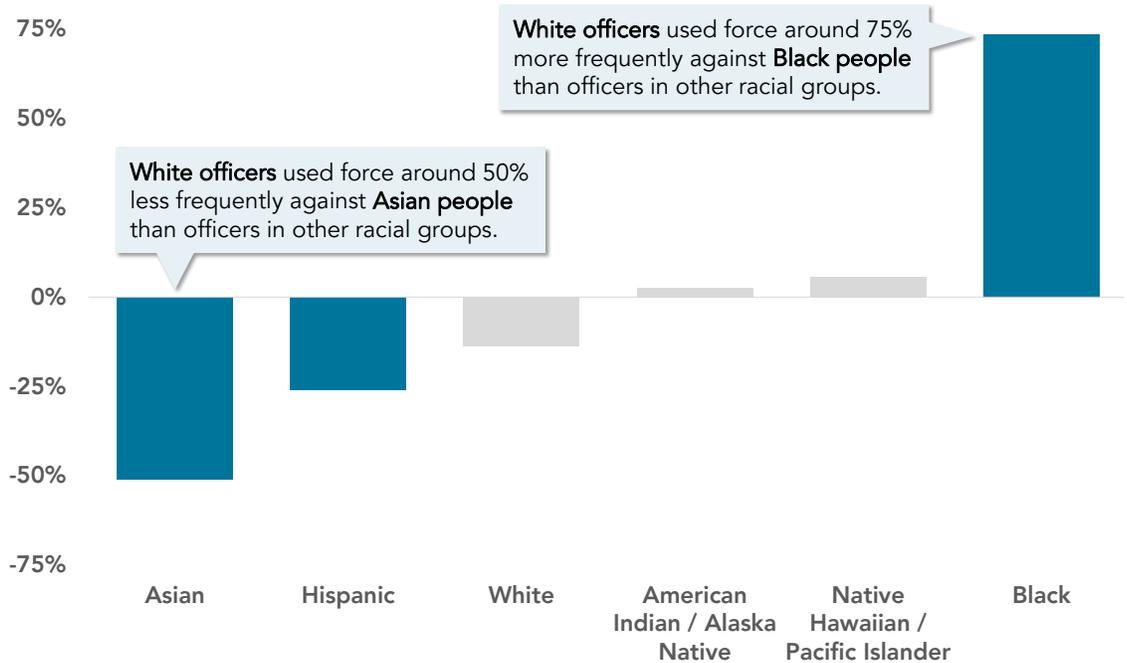
Note: There was a single incident in the data that involved an officer using force against 10 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people; this single incident accounts for over a third of all people in this group with reported uses of force against them. Excluding this incident, the use of force rate is not statistically significant given the relatively small number of incidents for this racial group.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data from 2019 through 2021

**White officers used force more often against Black people**

**White officers use force against Black people more often than other officers, indicating racial disparities.** When considering the race of both the officer and the person experiencing the use of force, we found that White officers used force against Black people around 75 percent more frequently than officers in other racial groups. Conversely, White officers used force against Asian people around 50 percent less frequently than other officers and against Hispanic people around 25 percent less frequently (see exhibit F, below). Differences for officers in other racial categories were not statistically significant.

EXHIBIT F: White officers used force against Black people more frequently than other officers, and they used force against Asian and Hispanic people less frequently.



Note: In this chart, the zero percent line indicates what we would expect based on the average rate of all other officers, while the bars indicate the variance from that average. Gray bars are not statistically significant (because the variance is too close to the average for their number of uses of force).

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data from 2019 through 2021

Some racial groups experience higher arrest rates

**The Sheriff’s Office data show racial disparities in the number of people reported as suspects when compared to the King County population, particularly for Black people.** Both officers and community members calling 9-1-1 may report a person as a suspect, and racial disparities exist in both types of reporting. This racial disparity carries over into the number of arrests the Sheriff’s Office makes, since the number of suspects and the number of arrests are highly correlated. Black people make up around 7 percent of the population in unincorporated and contracted areas of King County, but they make up around 25 percent of Sheriff’s Office arrests. This means that the Sheriff’s Office is over 350 percent more likely to arrest Black people than one would expect given their proportion of the population in the county.<sup>8</sup> American Indian/Alaska Native people, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander people, and Hispanic people were also arrested at rates higher than their proportions of population in the county. Conversely, the Sheriff’s Office arrested Asian people and White people at lower rates than others (see exhibit G, below). We found disparities in the arrest rate of Black people in nearly every jurisdiction, indicating that this is a systemic issue across the county (see exhibit H, below).

<sup>8</sup> Population figures are based on 2020 US Census Bureau data, adjusted for systemic undercounting of Black people identified by the US Census Bureau (see report CB22-CN.02, release March 10, 2022). Using unadjusted data, the Sheriff’s

**The causes of these disparities are complex, and the Sheriff's Office does not have sufficient data to explain them.** Several studies have documented the disproportionate representation of Black people in the criminal legal system across the country and shown that disparities remain even after controlling for individual behavior.<sup>9</sup> However, the data also shows that these disparities cannot be attributed solely to officer discretion. For instance, the disparities in arrests largely disappear after controlling for the number of people reported as suspects and the type of offense (see exhibit I, below). Additional analyses are required to explain the complex causes behind these racial disparities.

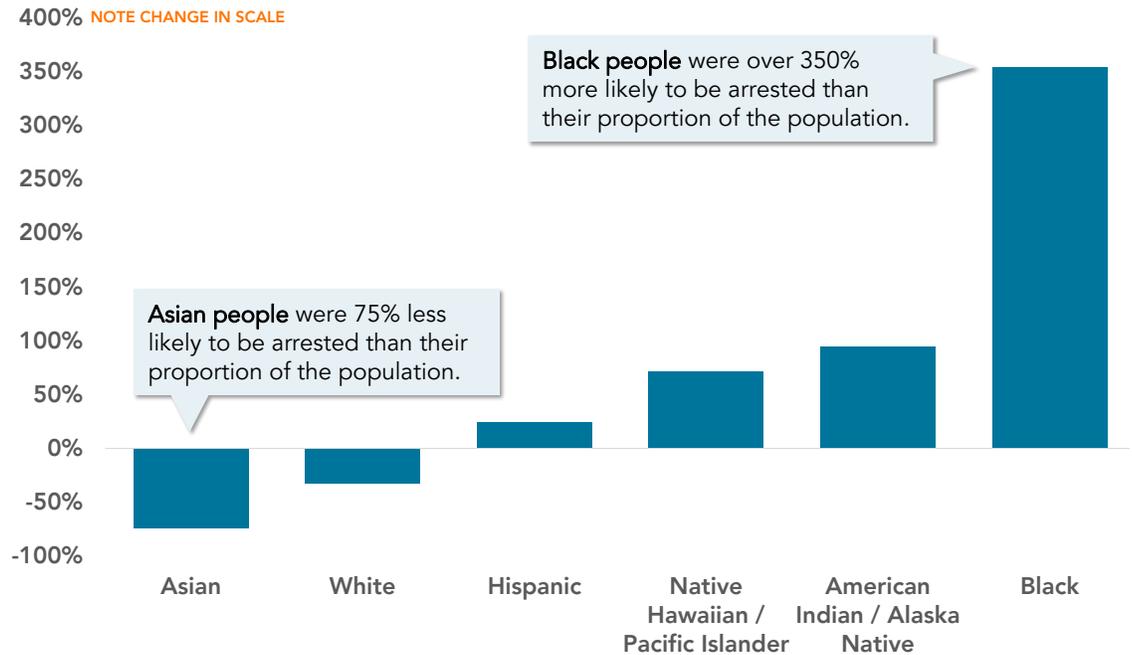
Whether a person is reported as a suspect is often not driven by the Sheriff's Office or decisions by individual officers. For example, a person may be reported as a suspect based on a caller's statement in a 9-1-1 call. When breaking down the disparity in arrests by whether they came from dispatched 9-1-1 calls or officer-initiated stops, the data shows that the disparities in arrest rates for Black people are larger for dispatched calls than officer-initiated calls (see exhibit J, below). This example highlights the complexity of the observed disparities by showing that outcomes such as arrest rates of suspects are impacted both by community input and officer discretion. Together this demonstrates the importance of collecting perceived race information as stated in Recommendation 2, above, so that King County can develop strategies to address the causes of such disparities.

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Office would be 375 percent more likely to arrest Black people than one would expect based on their proportion of the population.

<sup>9</sup> "Understanding Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Arrest: The Role of Individual, Home, School, and Community Characteristics," National Library of Medicine, December 8, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5509345/>

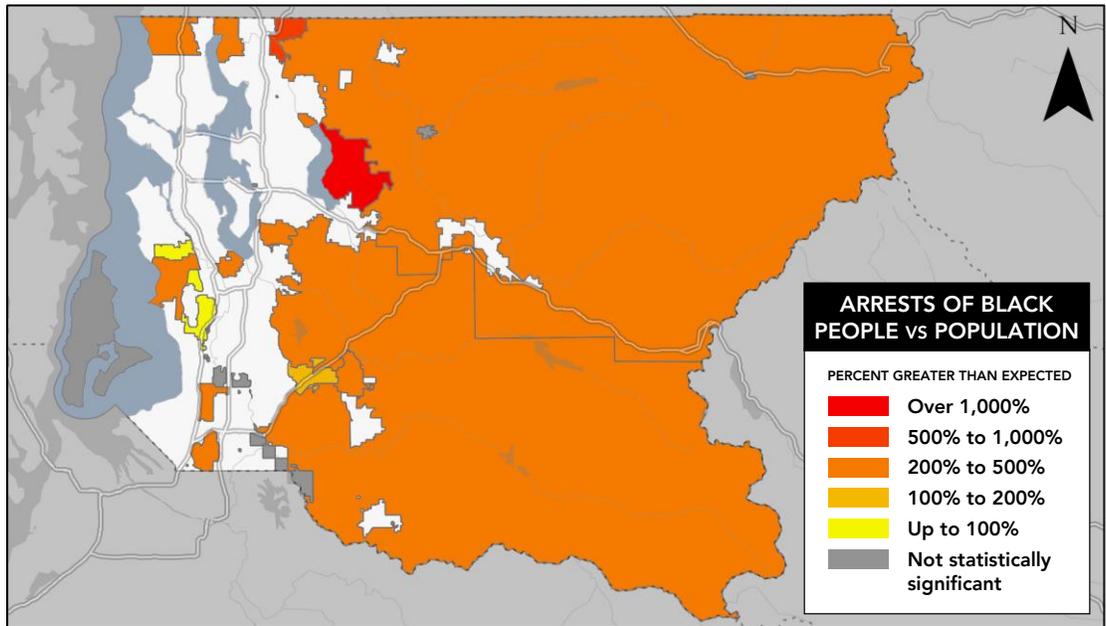
EXHIBIT G: The Sheriff’s Office arrests people at uneven rates relative to their racial group’s proportion of the population across King County.



Note: In this chart, the zero percent line indicates what we would expect based on average arrest rates for that proportion of the population, while the bars indicate the variance from that average. All variances in this chart are statistically significant. This analysis excludes contracted services that lack a comparable population base (e.g., Metro Transit). This chart does not control for the frequency that people in different racial groups are reported as suspects (see exhibit I, below, for that analysis).

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data from 2019 through 2021

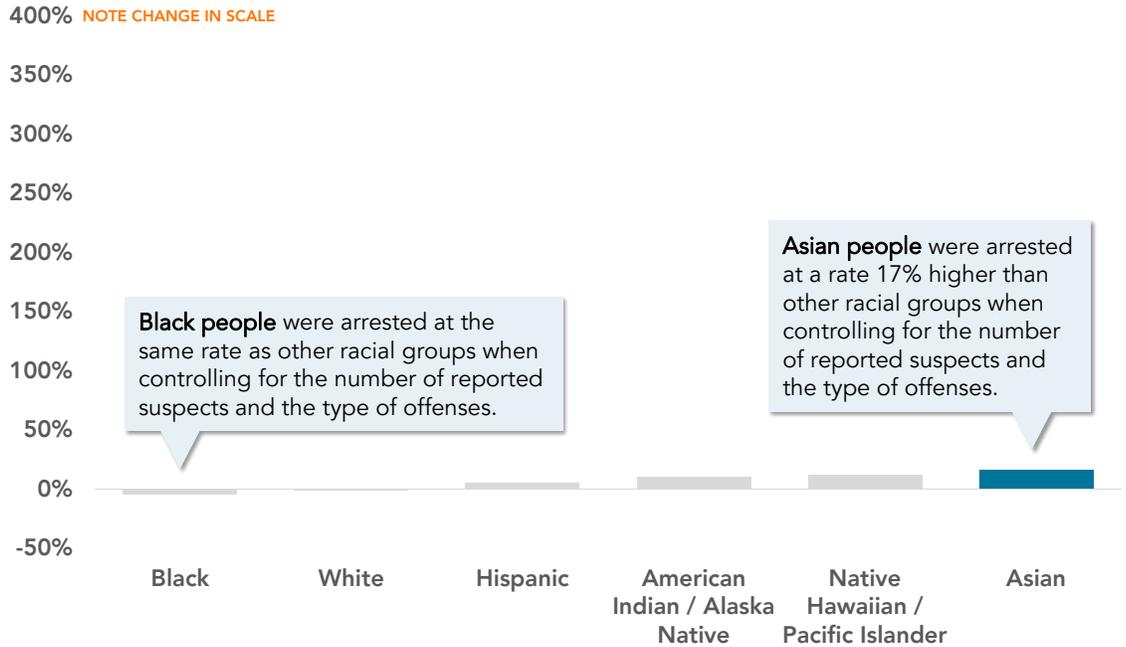
EXHIBIT H: Disparities in the arrest rate of Black people compared to their proportion of the population are spread across the King County.



Note: This chart represents the difference between how often Black people were arrested compared to what we would expect based upon their proportion of the population in that area. This analysis excludes contracted services that lack a comparable population base (e.g., Metro Transit).

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office data from 2019 through 2021 and population information from the US Census Bureau 2020 Redistricting Data

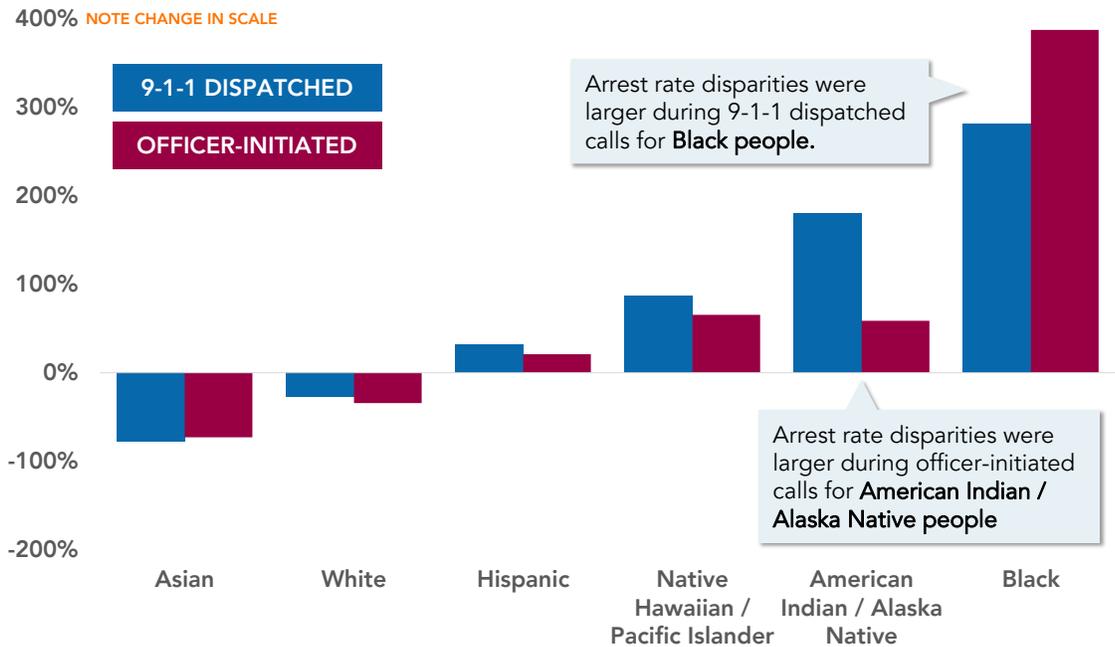
EXHIBIT I: The Sheriff’s Office arrests people at rates similar to their racial group’s number of reported suspects when controlling for types of offenses.



Note: In this chart, the zero percent line indicates what we would expect based on average arrest rates for the number of reported suspects for each racial group, while the bars indicate the variance from that average. Gray bars are not statistically significant (because the variance is too close to the average for their number of arrests). The scale of this chart is the same as exhibit G, above, to allow for comparison. Unlike exhibit G, this analysis ignores the large racial disparities observed between the number of suspects for each racial group and their proportion of the population.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data from 2019 through 2021

EXHIBIT J: The Sheriff’s Office arrested Black people at higher rates during dispatched 9-1-1 calls than during officer-initiated calls and arrested American Indian/Alaska Native people at higher rates during officer-initiated calls.



Note: In this chart, the zero percent line indicates what we would expect based on average arrest rates for that proportion of the population. The blue bars indicate the variance from that average for 9-1-1 dispatched calls. The red bars indicate the variance from the average for officer-initiated calls. All variances in this chart are statistically significant. Compare with exhibit G, above, which shows the variances for both dispatched and officer-initiated calls combined.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data from 2019 through 2021

Sheriff’s Office lacks data to explain disparities

**The Sheriff’s Office lacks data and analysis to share with its contract partners, which limits their ability to identify and address practices that do not serve community goals.** The Sheriff’s Office allows contract partners to choose how they want to police their communities since different communities may have different goals and priorities. Representatives from the contract partners that we spoke with indicated that more frequent analysis and reporting of policing outcomes by the Sheriff’s Office would help them monitor progress toward achieving desired community goals.

For example, the high arrest rates for American Indian/Alaska Native people during officer-initiated calls shown in exhibit J, above, is concentrated on the Muckleshoot Reservation, where American Indian or Alaska Native people make up about 30 percent of the population. Based on the data, the higher arrest rate stems from officers arresting more people (of all races) for criminal warrants, including during officer-initiated suspicious circumstance calls and traffic stops. When we asked about this practice, the Sheriff’s Office and a representative from the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe explained that this may be due to an emphasis on outstanding warrants or nuisance properties that often house multiple people with outstanding warrants.

In addition, they noted that they were not aware of how policing in their jurisdiction compared to other parts of the county since the Sheriff's Office had not conducted this kind of analysis before.

This highlights the importance of local context that the Sheriff's Office has advocated for throughout the course of this audit. Additionally, more comprehensive and complete data and reporting will help the Sheriff's Office to better understand whether disparities in policing outcomes are unique to a given situation, such as the Muckleshoot Reservation, or if they are indicative of broader systemic issues. As the County Council, County Executive, and contract partners consider how to best align policing activities with community goals, they will need data analysis to assess whether or not they are meeting their targets. As stated in Recommendation 3, above, analysis of race data collected from interactions between officers and members of the public can also help to identify and reduce racial disparities, and could help inform new options and opportunities for policing. We discuss some of the innovative practices being explored in other jurisdictions around the country in the next section.



# Alternative Response Models

## SECTION SUMMARY

**King County and jurisdictions across the country are developing programs that provide alternatives to a police response for some types of calls.** Models for alternative crisis response have their roots in mental health response and have expanded to include other types of calls for service. Alternative response models can help protect people’s rights and reduce liability for law enforcement agencies. Innovative programs in Albuquerque, NM; Austin, TX; Denver, CO; and Phoenix, AZ highlight different approaches, organizational structures, and lessons learned in determining what has and has not worked well for responders and for the community. This review covers the approaches these jurisdictions have taken and what they have learned across the three critical features of a crisis response system: call center triage, mobile response, and crisis stabilization centers. As King County weighs options for using funding from the 2021–2022 budget to begin its own alternative response pilot project, lessons learned from other jurisdictions can help it be successful.

## Alternative response models protect people and government agencies

**Alternative response models can help protect people’s rights and reduce liability for law enforcement agencies.** Law enforcement officers regularly respond to calls that involve people experiencing a crisis, and often this can include a mental or behavioral health component. Similar to other jurisdictions, King County and the Sheriff’s Office have found that law enforcement officers may not be the best suited to provide the most appropriate services to a person in crisis. As a result, local initiatives such as the North Sound RADAR Navigator Program have worked to include social worker navigators along with law enforcement officers to respond to in-progress calls.<sup>10</sup> These programs are important steps to ensure the safety and well-being of residents. Counties have a legal obligation to provide services that are the most appropriate to the needs of people with mental health and developmental disabilities. For example, the United States Department of Justice issued a report to Alameda County in California addressing the county’s inadequate mental health services system, including the county’s over-reliance on incarceration.<sup>11</sup> The report cited concerns about police too often transporting individuals to jail or a psychiatric hospital rather than providing appropriate services in a less restrictive setting. The United States Supreme Court has held that individuals with disabilities have the right to receive services in the least-isolated setting appropriate for their needs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> RADAR stands for Response Awareness, De-escalation, and Referral.

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Justice — Civil Rights Division: Notice Regarding Investigation of Alameda County, John George Psychiatric Hospital, and Santa Rita Jail. <https://www.justice.gov/crt/case-document/file/1388891/download>

<sup>12</sup> US Supreme Court: Olmstead v. L. C., 527 U.S. 581 (1999). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/527/581/>

Based on this and overall goals of advancing equity and public safety, several jurisdictions across the country have started developing alternative models for responding to calls that involve a person experiencing a crisis.

### Common goals drive alternative response

**The jurisdictions we reviewed reported common policy goals for implementing alternative responses to calls for service.** Even when methods varied, these jurisdictions shared the following goals:

- providing the best resource for the individual
- enhancing public safety by allowing police to respond to other calls
- using a trauma-informed approach
- pursuing the least-restrictive option first
- de-stigmatization and de-criminalization of mental health and poverty
- limiting crisis escalation due to police presence
- alleviating public mistrust or fear of police
- promoting racial justice by using an anti-racist approach
- preventing future crises

See exhibit L, below, for best practices and lessons learned by the different jurisdictions.

**Models for alternative crisis response have their roots in mental health response, but have expanded to include other types of calls for service.** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration outlines three critical components of a crisis response system:<sup>13</sup>

- **Call Center:** specialists able to triage calls and determine the best resource to respond at the call's origin.
- **Mobile Response:** specialists able to respond either alone or as a co-responder with law enforcement, as appropriate.
- **Crisis Stabilization:** places where the person experiencing crisis can go to receive services (avoiding incarceration or institutionalization).

Other jurisdictions have found that a crisis response system has the potential to work for a variety of different call types, including welfare checks, loitering, public intoxication, and suicide attempts. These models can also help to address disparate police treatment based on race, since national data has shown that Black people experiencing a crisis are more likely to be involved in fatal police encounters than White people experiencing a crisis.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services — Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Executive Order Safe Policing for Safe Communities: Addressing Mental Health, Homelessness, and Addiction Report. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/safe-policing-safe-communities-report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, M. D., Jewell, N. P., & Allen, A. M. (2021). Black and unarmed: Statistical interaction between age, perceived mental illness, and geographic region among males fatally shot by police using case-only design. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 53, 42-49.e3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2020.08.014>

Crisis response models vary

**The cities of Albuquerque, Austin, Denver, and Phoenix have each implemented differing approaches to crisis response.** Each of these jurisdictions has developed a flexible system that allow them to tailor an appropriate response based on calls that come in. In cases where a mobile response is dispatched, there are two primary approaches:

- **Civilian-Led Model:** Where a crisis response specialist responds to certain calls without a law enforcement officer present.
- **Co-Responder Model:** Where a crisis response specialist and a police officer respond to calls together as a team.

There is also variation within each of these models. For instance, while the city of Austin uses a co-responder model but dispatches crisis responders only after the police have stabilized the incident if the caller does not know the individual crisis. In Denver, however, the relationship between caller and the individual does not factor into the response. Additionally, programs vary in where the crisis response team is organizationally located, ranging from within the government to outside contractors (see exhibit K, below).

EXHIBIT K: Different cities structure their crisis response program in different ways.

<b>Albuquerque</b>	Fully government-run
<b>Austin</b>	Fully contracted
<b>Denver</b>	Government coordinated with contracted mobile response
<b>Phoenix</b>	More than one program; both government and contracted mobile response

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis

### Call risk can inform appropriate response

**All response models use triage at the call dispatch center to determine whether the call is appropriate for alternative response.** Jurisdictions use the risk level associated with a call to decide whether to send a civilian-led, co-responder team, or police-only unit. One concern we heard from the Sheriff's Office is that it can be difficult to determine the risk level of any given call in advance. Other jurisdictions have addressed this problem using two strategies: (1) identifying call types that are lower risk based on data or (2) using licensed clinicians in call centers to help ascertain call risk for individual calls in real-time (discussed in detail below). For example, Albuquerque has categorized different types of calls that civilians can respond to, based on assessed risk to responders. In Austin, any calls involving violence or threats of violence are automatically routed to police-only units to secure the scene rather than a civilian-led or co-response unit. For some call types, such as suicide attempts, dispatchers use a scripted set of questions and decision trees to determine the most appropriate response. Either approach can be a successful method of assigning alternative responders; for instance, the city of Denver reported that since the program launched in June 2020, its crisis response teams have never needed to call for police backup.

### Many calls in King County present low risk to responders

**The Auditor's Office developed a risk index to evaluate the types of initial calls that are most likely to result in risk to the responder using historic call data from the Sheriff's Office.** It is possible to evaluate each call type for the risk to responder safety by analyzing how frequently those call types have led to risk in the past. This is because some call types lead to risky situations only very rarely, while others are risky more frequently. Using Sheriff's Office data from the past three years, we developed a risk index that categorizes each call type in King County on a five-point scale, from low risk to high risk. We based our risk index on how frequently each call type had resulted in one or more of the following risk factors:

- arrest at the scene
- use of force at the scene
- non-officer shooting at the scene
- average number of officers responding to the call
- officer-reported hazards, such as armed suspects, suspects resisting arrest, domestic violence, and assaults on officers.

Based on this analysis, we found that 58 percent of Sheriff's Office calls for service fall into the lowest-risk category for call outcomes. If King County developed an alternative response model for call types similar to those being diverted in other jurisdictions, it could change how the Sheriff's Office responds to approximately 15 percent of calls.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Not all call types that other jurisdictions divert have analogous call types in Sheriff's Office data. For instance, syringe disposal and panhandler are diverted in other jurisdictions but are not existing call types in King County. In addition, many of the low-risk calls officers in King County respond to are area checks and park closure checks, which are not typically calls related to assisting persons in crisis.

More than 80 percent of the call types diverted in other jurisdictions fall into the moderate to lower-risk category, with risk scores of 1 to 3, based on our analysis of Sheriff's Office data.<sup>16</sup>

See appendix 2 for more on how our risk index categorized different call types in King County.

### Embedded clinicians can tailor responses

**Some jurisdictions embed on-site mental health providers into call centers to help advise dispatchers on which response is appropriate.** For example, in Phoenix, there is a licensed clinician at the call center two days a week to coach, assist, and answer questions. In Austin, there are licensed clinicians at the call center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These mental health providers can take calls transferred from dispatchers to determine whether a mobile responder is appropriate or whether a provider could address the issue over the phone. This is a more sophisticated model than relying on call type categorization since it allows a trained professional to tailor the response to the specific needs of the individual call.

### Lessons can inform new programs

**Each jurisdiction working to implement alternative response models has learned important lessons.** Representatives from these programs agreed that considering the interplay between clinician and police priorities, understanding the public's perception, and building relationships were essential to cultivating their programs. In this emerging area, there is no perfect crisis response model, and many program decisions come with trade-offs. We compiled a selection of lessons learned and best practices cited by representatives from these programs (see exhibit L, below).

King County is in the process of developing an alternative response pilot project. As King County moves forward with its efforts, lessons learned from other jurisdictions will be valuable.

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<sup>16</sup> The calls that do not fall into the low-risk category, but which are included in alternative response models by other jurisdictions are primarily those related to responding to suicidal persons and domestic violence.

EXHIBIT L: Best practices and lessons learned from the cities of Albuquerque, Austin, Denver, and Phoenix.

**Start small:** Participants in Denver and Phoenix advocate for starting off with a small pilot program that can expand as capabilities grow.

**Build relationships and confidence:** Programs benefit from collaborative relationships between police and responders. When crisis responders have long response times and are unwilling to take over the scene upon arrival, it can erode officers' confidence in the program and likelihood of using it in the future.

**Consider de-escalation needs:** When officers remain on the scene after crisis responders take over, it may detract from de-escalation efforts and impair open conversation with providers due to fear of self-incrimination.

**Maintain independence:** If civilian responders are seen by the community as similar to police or serving police interests, the benefits of a civilian response are undermined.

**Structure:** Programs run by the government have an advantage in communication and buy-in with law enforcement, as well as better staff benefits and retention. Conversely, contract-led programs often benefit from greater access to existing patient records for individuals already under their care.

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of information collected from other jurisdictions implementing call diversion

## Recommendation 4

**The King County Executive should integrate relevant best practices and lessons learned from other jurisdictions as the County develops its pilot program for alternative police response.**

## Conclusion

Our analysis of Sheriff's Office data identified disparities in uses of force and arrests that merit further exploration to determine causes and contributing factors. Identifying and reducing these disparities will likely require increased direction and administration from Sheriff's Office leadership—informed by data analysis and collaboration with contract partners which set their own policing priorities. Representatives from the contract partners that the audit team spoke with indicated that more frequent analysis and reporting of policing outcomes by the Sheriff's Office would help them monitor progress toward achieving their desired community goals as well.

Ongoing efforts around the United States to improve the equity and effectiveness of services, particularly for people in crisis, can provide important inspiration and lessons learned for King County in this time of transition for the Sheriff's Office. As the County Council, County Executive, and contract partners consider how to best align policing activities with community goals, increased data analysis can help assess whether policing or alternative practices are meeting their targets.



# Appendix 1

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## Descriptive Information About Sheriff's Office Calls for Service

### BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

We examined data from the King County Sheriff's Office Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system representing over one million calls for service that occurred over a three-year period (2019–2021). In addition, we merged information from case files and use of force reports to the CAD data where possible. The combined data set provides descriptive information about the activities of officers responding to calls for service. However, the data does not necessarily present a full picture of the Sheriff's Office entire workload, since it does not include non-dispatched follow-up work (e.g., investigations, lab work, or administrative work). This appendix is an overview of some of the descriptive information in the data set.

### CALL TYPES

Dispatchers categorize all calls for service in CAD into call types. Some of the most common call types involve an officer checking on an area, a park at night, a business, or the welfare of a specific person. See exhibit 1 below for more detail on common call types for Sheriff's Office calls for service.

EXHIBIT 1: The most common call types for Sheriff's Office calls for service from 2019–2021 were area checks and park closure checks.

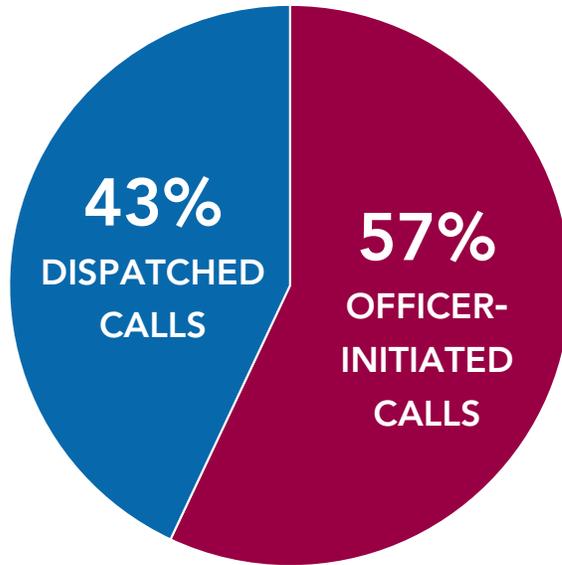
Call Type	Number of calls	Percent of all calls
Area check	361,987	34%
Scheduled park closure check	71,468	7%
Traffic stop	61,779	6%
Suspicious circumstances	34,473	3%
Business check	30,527	3%
Welfare check	25,252	2%
Larceny	23,528	2%
Domestic violence	22,215	2%
Follow up	21,938	2%
Trespass	21,093	2%

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office data, 2019–2021

### CALL ORIGIN: 911 DISPATCH OR OFFICER-INITIATED

Calls for service in CAD can originate as either a 9-1-1-dispatched call or as an officer-initiated call. Since officers initiated most area check call types, the majority of all calls are officer-initiated. See exhibit 2 below for more detail on the proportion of calls that are dispatched calls for service versus officer-initiated calls.

EXHIBIT 2: The majority of all calls for service are officer-initiated.

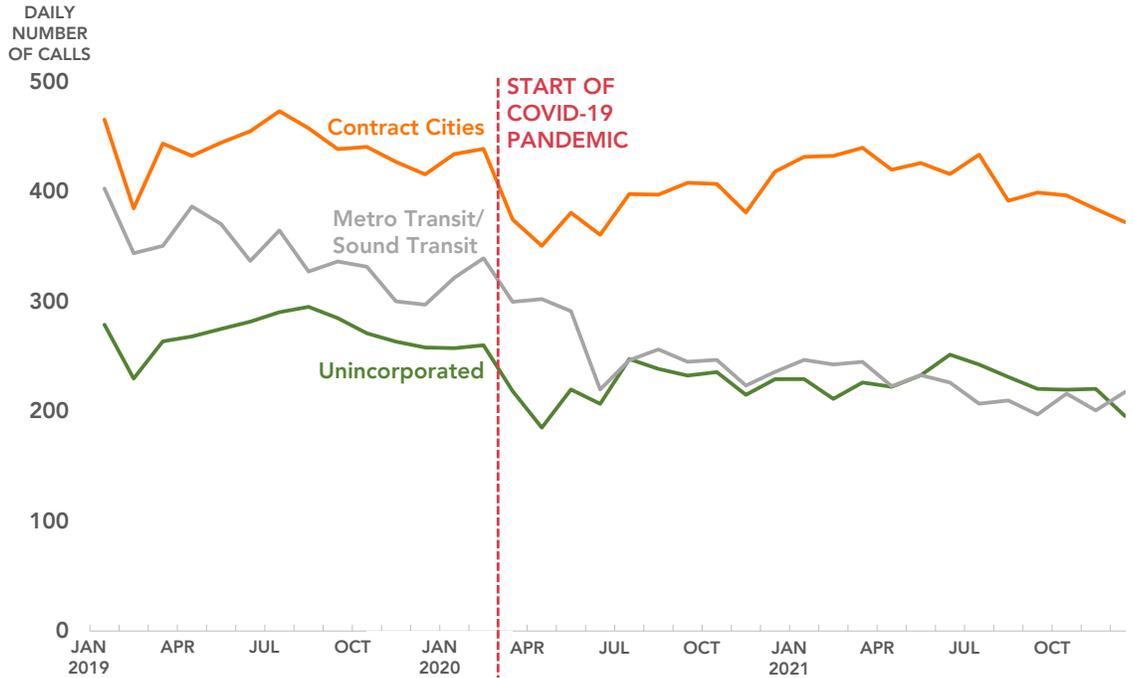


Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office data, 2019–2021

### AVERAGE DAILY CALLS

The average number of calls per day decreased by around 18 percent after the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020. See exhibit 3 below for more detail on the decrease in the average number of calls over time.

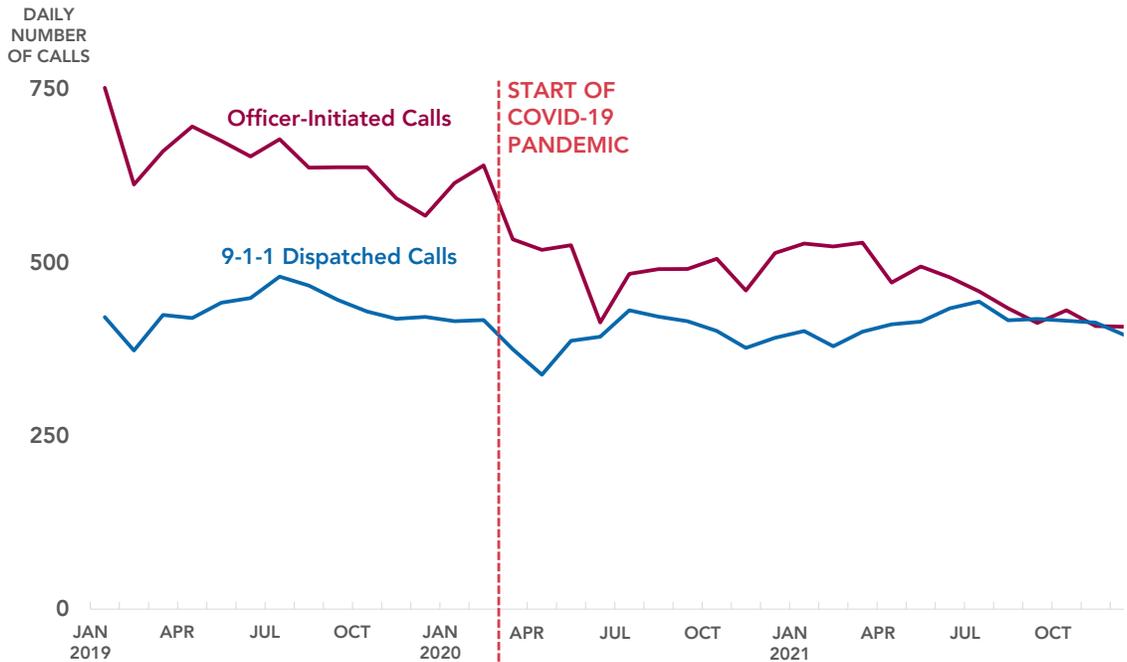
EXHIBIT 3: Calls for service related to Metro Transit and Sound Transit decreased more than calls for contracted areas or unincorporated areas over the past three years.



Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data, 2019–2021

The number of dispatched calls decreased in the first few months of the pandemic but have been largely stable since then. In 2021, there were 5 percent fewer dispatched calls for service than in 2019. The number of officer-initiated calls, however, has decreased more substantially over the past three years. See exhibit 4 below for more detail on the relative decrease in officer-initiated and dispatched calls for service over time. In 2021, there were 29 percent fewer officer-initiated calls than in 2019. The steepest monthly decrease in the past three years occurred between May and June of 2020, during the racial justice protests in the wake of George Floyd’s murder. According to the Sheriff’s Office, recent legislation may have also decreased the number of officer-initiated calls for service. One of the most common officer-initiated calls is traffic stops, which have declined. We discuss the decrease of traffic stops in more detail in our 2022 audit report titled “Traffic Enforcement: Strategies Needed to Achieve Safety Goals.”

EXHIBIT 4: Officer-initiated calls for service have decreased more than 9-1-1 dispatched calls for service over the past three years.



Source: Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office data, 2019-2021

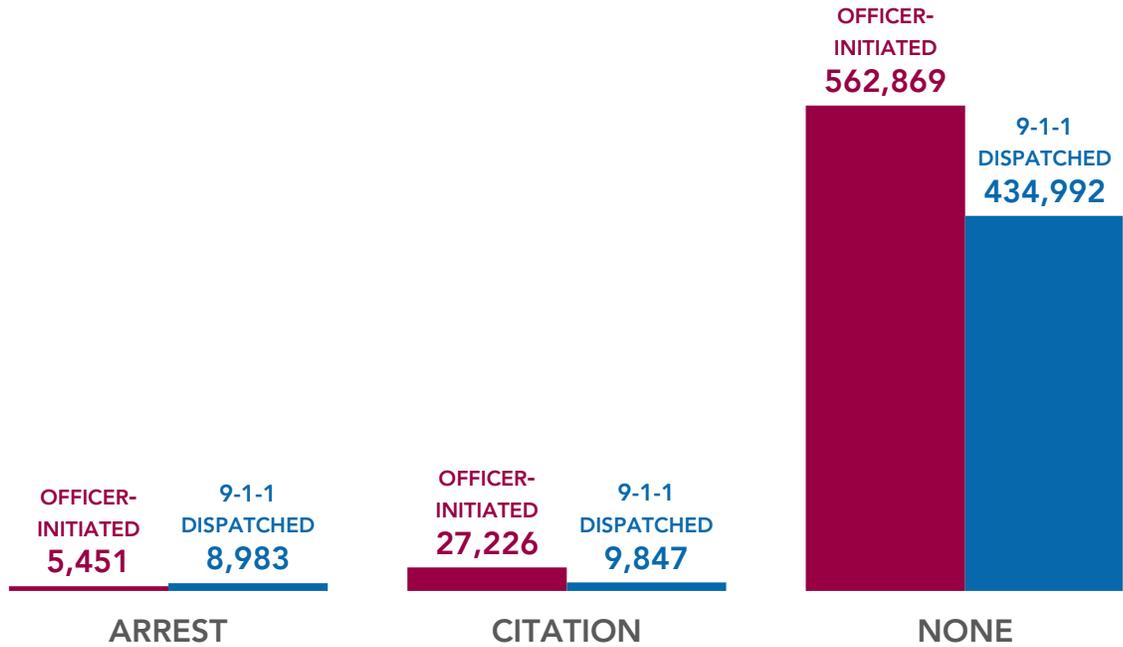
### OUTCOMES: ARRESTS AND CITATIONS

The CAD data includes an indicator of whether the Sheriff's Office made an arrest at the scene before the officer clears the call. CAD does not include all arrests made by the Sheriff's Office, since it excludes arrests based on investigations made after clearing the call. CAD also does not indicate how many arrests the Sheriff's Office made for each call, only that at least one arrest was made.

In the absence of an arrest, the CAD data indicates whether officers issued one or more citations during the call.<sup>17</sup> Less than 5 percent of calls resulted in at least one arrest or citation at the scene. Dispatched calls were more likely to result in an arrest than officer-initiated calls, while officer-initiated calls were more likely to result in a citation. The call type that led to the most arrests was domestic violence, which resulted in an arrest in around 10 percent of calls. See exhibit 5 below for more detail on the outcomes of officer-initiated and dispatched calls for service.

<sup>17</sup> In other words, if on the same call, the Sheriff's Office makes an arrest and issues a citation; only an arrest will be recorded in CAD.

EXHIBIT 5: Dispatched calls are more likely to result in an arrest than officer-initiated calls, while officer-initiated calls are more likely to result in a citation.

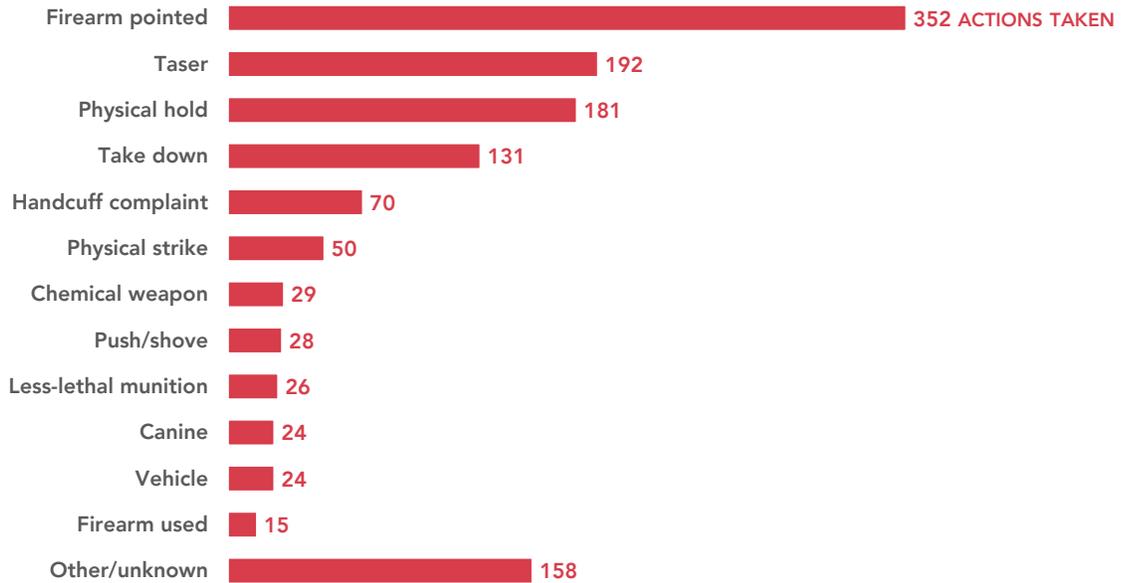


Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data, 2019–2021

### USES OF FORCE

As discussed in the report, a use of force incident involves any act reasonably likely to cause physical pain or injury or any act in which a person reports feeling pain. Actions tracked in the Sheriff’s Office use of force data include pointing a firearm, using a taser, and using a chemical weapon, among other types. A single use of force incident can involve multiple types of force. See exhibit 6 below for more detail on the most common force-related actions. To see which call types most commonly involved a use of force, see exhibit 7 below.

EXHIBIT 6: Between 2019 and 2021, the most common force-related actions were pointing a firearm and using a taser.



Note: Sheriff’s Office leadership states that pointing a firearm is not considered a technical use of force for reporting purposes, but something it still tracks this in the database.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data, 2019–2021

EXHIBIT 7: Uses of force occur most commonly during domestic violence calls for service.

Call Type	Use of force incidents	Percent of use of force incidents
Domestic violence	67	11%
Suspicious circumstances	44	8%
Vehicle recovery	37	6%
Disturbance	31	5%
Trespass	27	5%
Assist citizen/agency	26	4%
Traffic stop	23	4%
Shooting	21	4%
Larceny	20	3%
Person with weapon	17	3%

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Sheriff’s Office data, 2019–2021

# Appendix 2

## Risk Index

One consideration when developing alternative response models is the safety of the person responding to the call for service. Like other types of interactions, any call for service has the potential to be dangerous. Because responders may arrive on the scene with limited information, it is difficult to predict which calls will present dangers to the responder. However, by analyzing data on past calls for service it is possible to develop a rough estimate of the level of risk associated with each type of call.

Using King County Sheriff’s Office data from the past three years, we developed a risk index that categorizes each call type in King County on a five-point scale, from low risk to high risk. We based our risk index on how frequently the outcome of each call type in the past had resulted in one or more of the following risk factors:

- arrest at the scene
- use of force at the scene
- non-officer shooting at the scene
- average number of officers responding to the call
- officer-reported hazards, such as armed suspects, suspects resisting arrest, domestic violence, and assaults on officers.

Each of these factors adds to the risk of injury to the responder. This is especially true of hazards, such as assaults on officers, which we weighted more heavily when designing the index.

We calculated risk scores for all types of calls for service in the Sheriff’s Office data. While a data-driven index can give a rough sense of risk to the responder by call type, there are limitations. For example, based on our risk index, suicide attempts have a risk score of 5 since they are more likely than the average call to involve an armed person at the scene or a non-officer related shooting. That said, other jurisdictions still consider some suicide attempt calls to be appropriate for alternative crisis response, based on the specific details of the call. In other words, an algorithm is not a suitable replacement for experienced dispatchers who are able to tailor an appropriate response to specific calls.

The following table lists the different types of calls, the associated risk score, and the number of calls during 2019 through 2021.

EXHIBIT 8: Sheriff’s Office call types in order of risk score and frequency.

Call Type	Risk Score	Number of Calls
<b>Shooting</b>	5	4,700
<b>Warrant attempt/pickup</b>	5	4,048
<b>Suicide attempt</b>	5	3,271
<b>Person with weapon</b>	5	1,584

Unknown trouble	5	1,487
Fight – in progress	5	1,312
Stake out	5	1,125
Burglary – in progress	5	968
Vandalism – just occurred	5	958
Court order violation – in progress	5	768
Robbery – just occurred	5	722
Burglary – just occurred	5	503
Robbery	5	500
Narcotics violation	5	360
Court order violation – just occurred	5	322
Emergency alarm	5	153
Stabbing	5	148
Residential burglary – in progress	5	104
Car jacking	5	98
Bomb threat	5	62
Robbery – in progress	5	61
Help the officer	5	39
Rape – just occurred	5	26
Bank robbery – in progress	5	24
Electronic tracking system activation	5	15
Bomb disposal	5	12
Traffic pursuit	5	7
Subject pursuit	5	1
Domestic violence – in progress	4	17,692
Vehicle recovery	4	5,872
Domestic violence	4	3,193
Assault	4	2,779
Assault – just occurred	4	2,236
Domestic violence – just occurred	4	1,330
Prowler – in progress	4	979
Larceny – in progress	4	729
Vandalism – in progress	4	520
Driving under influence	4	400
Rape	4	393

<b>Fight</b>	4	380
<b>Assault – in progress</b>	4	241
<b>Drug violation</b>	4	86
<b>Forgery – in progress</b>	4	86
<b>Suspicious package</b>	4	6
<b>Rape – in progress</b>	4	4
<b>Suspicious circumstances</b>	3	34,473
<b>Follow up</b>	3	21,938
<b>Assist citizen/agency</b>	3	19,579
<b>Trespass – in progress</b>	3	16,111
<b>Disturbance – in progress</b>	3	11,942
<b>Disturbance</b>	3	5,547
<b>Vandalism</b>	3	5,507
<b>Threats</b>	3	4,024
<b>Larceny – just occurred</b>	3	3,384
<b>Accident, injury</b>	3	3,382
<b>Residential burglary</b>	3	3,060
<b>Subject stop</b>	3	3,043
<b>Prowler</b>	3	2,857
<b>Sex offense</b>	3	2,614
<b>Medical problem</b>	3	2,608
<b>Court order violation</b>	3	1,690
<b>Fare evasion</b>	3	1,639
<b>Fire related</b>	3	1,290
<b>Death investigation</b>	3	1,274
<b>Shoplift</b>	3	887
<b>Metro transit related</b>	3	800
<b>Overdose</b>	3	783
<b>Case-related tasks</b>	3	629
<b>Vehicle theft – just occurred</b>	3	621
<b>Pedestrian violation</b>	3	616
<b>Undescribed event</b>	3	565
<b>Metro Transit follow up</b>	3	554
<b>Sound transit related</b>	3	449
<b>Illegal dumping – in progress</b>	3	180

<b>Bombing</b>	3	155
<b>Lojack activation</b>	3	138
<b>Vice, gambling</b>	3	126
<b>Accident</b>	3	92
<b>Abduction/kidnap</b>	3	39
<b>Arson investigation</b>	3	36
<b>K9 bomb sweep</b>	3	36
<b>Vehicle theft – in progress</b>	3	34
<b>Verified burglary alarm</b>	3	22
<b>Traffic stop</b>	2	61,779
<b>Welfare check</b>	2	25,252
<b>Larceny</b>	2	19,415
<b>Accident, non-injury</b>	2	14,619
<b>Hazardous condition</b>	2	12,819
<b>Transport</b>	2	11,866
<b>Directed patrol mission</b>	2	7,227
<b>Vehicle theft</b>	2	6,968
<b>Audible commercial alarm</b>	2	6,535
<b>Civil problem</b>	2	6,031
<b>Hit and run</b>	2	5,879
<b>Transit sleeper</b>	2	5,399
<b>Property lost, found, recovered</b>	2	5,074
<b>Trespass</b>	2	4,982
<b>Animal problem</b>	2	4,455
<b>Officer flagged down</b>	2	3,974
<b>Narcotics activity</b>	2	3,000
<b>Harassment</b>	2	2,613
<b>Drunk subject</b>	2	2,327
<b>Residential contact</b>	2	2,189
<b>Subject down</b>	2	2,143
<b>Commercial burglary</b>	2	2,038
<b>Abuse/neglect</b>	2	1,895
<b>Civil standby</b>	2	1,371
<b>Eviction</b>	2	1,247
<b>Silent commercial alarm</b>	2	1,007

<b>Burglary</b>	2	995
<b>Mental complaint</b>	2	980
<b>Custody interference</b>	2	968
<b>Liquor violation</b>	2	838
<b>Metro Transit fare evasion</b>	2	792
<b>Silent hold-up alarm</b>	2	765
<b>Metro Transit flagged down</b>	2	667
<b>911 open line</b>	2	510
<b>Search and rescue</b>	2	405
<b>Info broadcast</b>	2	361
<b>Smoking violation</b>	2	248
<b>Transit removal</b>	2	222
<b>Juvenile gathering</b>	2	219
<b>Stalking incident</b>	2	186
<b>Gang related</b>	2	121
<b>Hate crime</b>	2	105
<b>Off duty work</b>	2	100
<b>Problem solving project</b>	2	99
<b>Child Protective Services referral</b>	2	84
<b>Special detail</b>	2	65
<b>Possible drowning</b>	2	52
<b>Plane crash</b>	2	32
<b>Bad conduct</b>	2	27
<b>Metro Transit accident, injury</b>	2	25
<b>Obstructing</b>	2	1
<b>Area check</b>	1	361,987
<b>Scheduled park closure check</b>	1	71,468
<b>Business check</b>	1	30,527
<b>911 cell phone phase 2</b>	1	18,455
<b>Transit ride</b>	1	15,218
<b>Parking violation</b>	1	13,584
<b>Audible residential alarm</b>	1	12,767
<b>Abandoned vehicle</b>	1	10,128
<b>Traffic related</b>	1	7,982
<b>Noise disturbance</b>	1	6,300

<b>Sound Transit track check</b>	1	5,519
<b>Fraud</b>	1	5,247
<b>House check</b>	1	4,449
<b>Metro Transit coach check</b>	1	4,295
<b>School resource officer</b>	1	3,690
<b>Message for officer</b>	1	3,429
<b>Assigned court security</b>	1	3,001
<b>Neighbor problem</b>	1	2,907
<b>Fireworks complaint</b>	1	2,321
<b>Metro Transit coach escort</b>	1	2,184
<b>Person lost, found, missing</b>	1	2,105
<b>Assigned warrant</b>	1	1,826
<b>Party disturbance</b>	1	1,710
<b>Sex offender registration</b>	1	1,593
<b>911 disconnect</b>	1	1,481
<b>Marine incident</b>	1	1,298
<b>Broadcast info</b>	1	1,145
<b>Trees down</b>	1	1,144
<b>Animal control event</b>	1	1,061
<b>Lines down</b>	1	1,057
<b>Juvenile runaway</b>	1	893
<b>911 hang up call</b>	1	722
<b>Silent residential alarm</b>	1	707
<b>Community meeting</b>	1	693
<b>Escape from custody</b>	1	503
<b>Boat stop</b>	1	361
<b>Illegal dumping</b>	1	320
<b>Explorer activity</b>	1	311
<b>Audible vehicle alarm</b>	1	168
<b>Metro Transit accident</b>	1	162
<b>Public presentation</b>	1	157
<b>Forgery</b>	1	139
<b>Department business</b>	1	61
<b>Storefront time</b>	1	44
<b>Citizen's academy</b>	1	43

<b>Medical and residential alarm</b>	1	35
<b>Metro Transit coach escort</b>	1	31
<b>Obscene phone call</b>	1	31
<b>Forgery – just occurred</b>	1	24
<b>Adult Protective Services referral</b>	1	23
<b>Commercial security survey</b>	1	18
<b>Test detail</b>	1	15
<b>Residential security survey</b>	1	10
<b>Snow related</b>	1	7
<b>Weapon surrender</b>	1	5
<b>Memory impaired assistance</b>	1	4
<b>In-service</b>	1	2
<b>Metro Transit standby</b>	1	1

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Sheriff's Office data

# Executive Response



## King County

### Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 810  
Seattle, WA 98104

206-263-9600 Fax 206-296-3462  
TTY Relay: 711  
www.kingcounty.gov

June 7, 2022

KyMBER Waltmunson  
King County Auditor  
Room 1033  
COURTHOUSE

Dear Ms. Waltmunson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed final report "Sheriff's Office Data Shows Racial Disparities, Potential for Alternative Policing". I appreciate the work your office has done on this subject as we continually work to improve our public safety system and ensure that the King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) is a premier law enforcement entity. I also appreciate the report's thoughtful acknowledgement of KCSO's involvement in the development and review of the audit and your willingness to modify the report to reflect our feedback.

We agree that disparities exist in the criminal legal system and although KCSO rarely uses force, 619 times in over a million calls for service over a three-year period, KCSO is committed to understanding and addressing the racial disparities identified by your analysis. We concur with your recommendations and believe they will result in better law enforcement practices.

KCSO seeks to have equitable interactions with all members of the King County community. While KCSO agrees the data show racial disparities, both data limitations and the exclusion of incident context mean further analysis is needed. KCSO is in the early stages of procuring a new Computer Aided Dispatch system and the recommendation to be able to capture race data is reasonable. However, it is also important to note that no single system will be able to provide all the necessary data to understand the demographics of calls for service.

Additionally, in both this audit and the one focused on Traffic Stops, the recommendations include the collection of perceived demographic data for traffic stops and service calls. As we discussed with your office, King County Code Title 2.15.010.G restricts any King County employee from collecting demographic information not necessary to provide services or required by federal or state law. While KCSO agrees that it is perceived race / ethnicity that is at the core of the biased and disproportional policing conversation, the King County Council will need to consider whether to alter King County code to allow for collection of this information.

As your report accurately notes, KCSO does not currently have the staff capacity to complete additional data analysis on racial disparities. Additionally, having such analysis completed by a third party would add validity to the results. Consequently, KCSO will consider how best to procure an outside entity to review demographic data on calls for service.

Finally, we appreciate the audit identifies the opportunity for alternative policing strategies to improve community outcomes. As we discussed at length, KCSO already operates several co-response programs that match law enforcement with behavioral health professionals. Excellent models exist in our region and throughout the country and KCSO looks forward to working with community to expand alternate policing programs.

Thank you again for your important work on behalf of King County. If you have any questions regarding our audit response, please contact Dwight Dively, Chief Operating Officer and Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget at 206-263-9687.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Dively", is positioned above the typed name.

Dwight Dively  
Chief Operating Officer

### Recommendation 1

The King County Sheriff's Office should ensure the Computer Aided Dispatch system can capture race data.

Agency Response	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	TBD
Responsible agency	King County Sheriff's Office / KCIT
Comment	KCSO is beginning the process of procuring a new CAD system, which is dependent on system requirements and budget.

### Recommendation 2

The King County Sheriff's Office should develop, document, and implement a policy that officers collect data on perceived race for people who are stopped when those interactions are logged in the Computer Aided Dispatch system. Leadership should provide sufficient guidance to officers on how to collect this data.

Agency Response	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	TBD
Responsible agency	KCSO / King County Council
Comment	Compliance with this issue will need Council action to modify existing code prohibiting the collection of demographic data.

### Recommendation 3

The King County Executive Office should designate an entity to work with the King County Sheriff's Office to analyze race data collected from interactions between officers and members of the public to identify and reduce racial disparities.

Agency Response	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	12/31/2023
Responsible agency	KCSO
Comment	This is dependent on budget and procurement.

**Recommendation 4**

The King County Executive should integrate relevant best practices and lessons learned from other jurisdictions as the County develops its pilot program for alternative police response.

Agency Response	
Concurrence	<b>CONCUR</b>
Implementation date	In Process
Responsible agency	KCSO, Partner Behavioral Health Entities, Contract Cities
Comment	



# Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objectives & Methodology

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## Statement of Compliance with Government Auditing Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## Scope of Work on Internal Controls

We assessed internal controls relevant to the audit objectives. We assessed the extent to which the King County Sheriff's Office has controls in place to ensure equitable outcomes across its calls for service, specifically through the collection and use of demographic data to identify disparities. We also reviewed selected state laws, county ordinances, and department policies that may permit or restrict collection of demographic data.

## Scope

This audit examined Sheriff's Office calls for service, which include both 9-1-1 calls and officer-initiated calls, within the 2019–2021 timeframe.

## Objectives

- What are the types, numbers, and outcomes of calls for service responded to by the Sheriff's Office?
- To what extent does the Sheriff's Office collect and use data to identify disparities in outcomes of calls for service?
- What are the opportunities and limitations in how the county responds to calls for service?

## Methodology

For this audit, we interviewed the King County Sheriff, the Sheriff's executive leadership team, the Sheriff's Office Crime Analysis Unit, the King County Communications Center that handles 9-1-1 calls, selected precinct commanders, selected city managers for cities that contract with the Sheriff's Office for policing services, the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight and its Community Advisory Committee, and the Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget. We read also documents such as the Sheriff's Office General Orders Manual and sought legal advice from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office on the applicability of King County Code restrictions on collecting or sharing data on race for the purposes of reducing racial disparities.

We obtained and reviewed data for all calls for service from the Sheriff's Office Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for the period from 2019 through 2021. Rather than taking a sample, we incorporated all 1,873,223 records into our analysis. We consolidated, standardized, and corrected data fields where possible. From this data we pulled descriptive statistics, primarily using Microsoft Power Query and Microsoft Excel.

Since CAD does not include information on race (either of the officer or of persons stopped by officers), we also obtained employment records from the county's PeopleSoft system and all case file records from the Sheriff's Office Mark43 record management system. We merged these records into the CAD data set to determine the racial categorizations of the people involved in calls for service to the extent possible. Similarly, we also obtained data on officer uses of force, which are kept by the Sheriff's Office Internal Investigations Unit and stored in a separate data system called IAPro.

We used US Census Bureau data from the 2020 Redistricting Census to determine the race and ethnic origin of the population in the areas where the Sheriff's Office is the primary police force. We obtained population data at the census block level, which is smallest geographic unit available. However, the boundaries of census block areas do not align with the patrol reporting areas used by the Sheriff's Office. To combine these disparate areas together, we performed an interpolation operation using Geographic Information System software to estimate the population for each of the Sheriff's Office patrol reporting districts. Some census blocks cross patrol area boundaries, which required splitting the population of those blocks between two or more patrol areas. The interpolation operation assumes that the population of each census block is evenly distributed, which means these census blocks were split based on how much they overlapped with each patrol area. It is possible that the population of these census blocks was concentrated on one side or the other, in which case the geographic-based split would not be accurate. We mitigated this risk by using the smallest possible areas for both census and patrol areas. This means these overlapping areas are comparable to the size of a few city blocks, rather than entire neighborhoods.

For the purpose of our analyses on racial disparities, we were primarily concerned with the relative proportions of racial groups within each area, rather than estimating an exact count of people who live in those areas. We determined the relative share within each area for six racial groups, which correspond to US Census Bureau and Sheriff's Office data: American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic (of all races), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and White. Since the US Census Bureau allows people to select multiple racial categories, we used a process known as equal fractional assignment to distribute these people across the six racial groups in our data. For example, for people who selected both Asian and Black, these people's share of the population would be split equally between the Asian and Black racial groups. This method assumes that each person identifies equally with each of the racial categories they selected; however, there are studies which indicate many multiracial people identify more strongly with one racial group over others.<sup>18</sup> We will continue to research whether data on individual preferences is available so that we can use a more sophisticated methodology in future audits. Where we did not have information about which racial groups people identified with, we allocated these groups based on the existing racial proportions for that area; this method left the existing proportions unchanged. We also incorporated adjustments to the population counts of each racial group based on a study published by the US Census Bureau that suggest racial categories may have been systemically undercounted or overcounted.

As noted in the report, we did not analyze whether any individual use of force was appropriate or how the number or types of uses of force performed by Sheriff's Office deputies compared to any benchmarks. Our analysis and findings were focused on whether there were racial disparities with regards to the officers using force and the people who experienced uses of force.

To determine whether the number of uses of force varied based on the race of the officer, we first obtained the counts of how many times officers from each of the six racial groups used force. Since

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<sup>18</sup> Allen, J.P., Turner, E. Bridging 1990 and 2000 census race data: Fractional assignment of multiracial populations. Population Research and Policy Review 20, 513–533 (2001). <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015666321798>

multiple officers can be involved in a single use of force incident, this count exceeded the 619 total use of force incidents from 2019–2021. Using the combined CAD and PeopleSoft data set, we next counted how many times officers from each of the six racial groups responded to a call for service. We identified the ratio of uses of force compared to call responses for each racial category. We created a benchmark for each racial group by calculating the same ratio for all other racial groups combined. For example, we compared the ratio for White officers against the ratio for the other five groups combined, and the ratio for Black officers against the ratio for the other five groups combined, and so on for each group. Exhibit D shows the comparison of these ratios, where zero represents the weighted average ratio of all other groups combined. In other words, we compared the actual observed uses of force for each group against how many uses of force we would expect given their number of call responses (assuming that they had the same ratio as all other officers). For each comparison, we used an exact test (binomial distribution) to determine whether the differences between the observed and expected uses of force were statistically significant. We considered the difference significant if there was less than a one-in-a-thousand probability of a difference of the same magnitude occurring due to random chance (a stricter level than the more common one-in-twenty chance). We found that the differences for White, Black, and Asian officers were statistically significant. Based on this, we also separately compared the rates of White officers to Black officers and White officers to Asian officers. While the use of force ratio for White officers was 52 percent more than all other officers combined, it was over twice as much as the ratios for Black or Asian officers specifically.

To determine whether the number of uses of force varied based on the race of the person experiencing the force, we used a similar methodology as described above. First, we counted how many times a person in each of the six racial groups experienced a use of force. Using the combined CAD and Mark43 data set, we then counted how many suspects in each racial category were involved in a call for service that resulted in an arrest at the scene. Next, we determined the ratio of uses of force to arrests for each racial group, as well as the ratio of the five other racial groups combined. We then compared how many uses of force we observed in the data and compared it to the number we would expect to see if the people in that group experienced force at the same rate as other races. Again, we used an exact test (binomial distribution) to determine the statistical significance of the differences between the observed and expected uses of force. Exhibit E shows these differences.

To determine whether there were any racial disparities when looking at both the race of the officer and the race of the person experiencing force, we first counted the number of uses of force between each combination of the six racial groups. White officers were the only group that had a sufficient number of uses of force to analyze when broken out at this level (i.e., the small number of uses of force for officers of other races prevented any differences from being statistically significant). For White officers, we determined how many uses of force there were for each racial group of people experiencing force, and compared that number to the number of uses of force by White officers against people in the other five groups. We used this comparative ratio rather than a simple proportion since we assumed that the number of uses of force was not a constant (i.e., if an officer were to use force less frequently against one racial group, we did not assume the officer would start using force more against other groups in order to keep the total number the same). In other words, we did not assume that the total number of uses of force was necessarily zero-sum. We then calculated these same comparative ratios for each racial group based on uses of force by officers in the other five racial groups combined (i.e., all groups except for White officers). We then compared the ratios for White officers by racial group against the ratio of other officers by racial group to see if there were any differences. In this way, we were able to determine whether White officers used force more or less frequently against specific racial groups when compared

to all other officers. Since our methodology did not hold the total number of uses of force constant, this made testing for statistical significance more complicated. Therefore, we replicated the analysis using a simple proportional method that did hold the total number of uses of force constant, which allowed us to use an exact test (binomial distribution) to determine statistical significance. For each racial group, the differences between observed and expected uses of force were at least as large in the original reported analysis as in the replicated analysis. Based on this fact, as well as additional testing, we were able to conclude that the larger differences in the original analysis were statistically significant. Exhibit F shows these differences.

To determine whether people in certain racial groups were arrested more or less frequently than their proportion in the population, we first determined the racial makeup of areas where the Sheriff's Office is the primary police force using census data. Using the combined CAD and Mark43 data sets, we then counted how many times people in each of the six racial groups were recorded as a suspect on a call for service that resulted in an arrest at the scene. For each racial group, we determined the ratio of arrests to their estimated population, and we also determined the average ratio of the five other racial groups combined. We then compared the observed arrests for each racial group to the number we would expect to see if they were arrested at the same rate as all other racial groups combined. Again, we used an exact test (binomial distribution) to determine the statistical significance of the differences between the observed and expected arrest numbers. Exhibit G shows these differences. Considering the large difference between the number of Black people arrested and their proportion of the population, we replicated this analysis by jurisdiction to see whether this difference existed in each jurisdiction separately or only in the aggregate. Exhibit H shows this breakdown by jurisdiction. We also split the same analysis to compare 9-1-1 dispatched calls for service with officer-initiated calls. Exhibit J shows those differences.

To determine whether being reported as a suspect and the type of offense correlated with the racial disparities identified in arrest numbers, we first counted the number of times a person in each racial group was identified as a suspect for each of the 153 offense types (e.g., aggravated assault, simple assault, residential robbery, highway robbery, etc.). We next counted how many times a person in each racial group was identified as a suspect for those 153 offense types and the call led to an arrest at the scene. Using the ratio of arrested suspects to total suspects, we were able to determine an expected arrest rate for each offense type (since, for example, an assault is more likely to result in an arrest at the scene than fare evasion). We then calculated the expected number of arrests for each racial group based on how many times that racial group had been reported as a suspect for those specific offense types. We compared the observed arrest counts to the expected arrest counts, and we then used an exact test (binomial distribution) to determine whether the differences were statistically significant for each racial group. Exhibit I shows that many of the differences are not statistically significant, which means that there are large racial disparities between how frequently people are reported as suspects and the proportion of their racial group in the population.

We hired a consultant to research alternative models and strategies for responding to calls for service that have been or are being pursued in jurisdictions across the United States and to gather information on those strategies, including outcomes, challenges, and lessons learned, as well as associated legal barriers and constraints, both nationally and in Washington state. The consultant selected programs from four jurisdictions for detailed review: the Community Safety Department from Albuquerque, New Mexico, The Expanded Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (EMCOT) from Austin, Texas, the Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) program from Denver, Colorado, and the call center operations and mobile response teams from Phoenix, Arizona. The primary sources of information were interviews with officials and personnel in selected jurisdictions, as well as document review. These programs were selected in part

based on (1) the extent to which the program includes elements of an effective crisis response system as defined by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and (2) the types of calls for service included in the program scope.



# List of Recommendations & Matter for Council Consideration

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## Recommendation 1

**The King County Sheriff's Office should ensure the Computer Aided Dispatch system can capture race data.**

## Recommendation 2

**The King County Sheriff's Office should develop, document, and implement a policy that officers collect data on perceived race for people who are stopped when those interactions are logged in the Computer Aided Dispatch system. Leadership should provide sufficient guidance to officers on how to collect this data.**

## Recommendation 3

**The King County Executive Office should designate an entity to work with the King County Sheriff's Office to analyze race data collected from interactions between officers and members of the public to identify and reduce racial disparities.**

## Recommendation 4

**The King County Executive should integrate relevant best practices and lessons learned from other jurisdictions as the County develops its pilot program for alternative police response.**

## Matter for Council Consideration 1

**In order to facilitate research and mitigation of the causes for racial disparities, the King County Council should consider amending King County Code 2.15.010.G to allow for the collection of race data.**



# Advancing Performance & Accountability

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## KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

KYMBER WALTMUNSON, KING COUNTY AUDITOR

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