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Audit REPORT

Inadequate 9-1-1 Staffing and Outdated Beat Boundaries Lead to Slow and Inequitable Police Emergency Response Times

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RE: Performance Audit of Police Emergency Response Times

Residents of Oakland, Mayor Lee, Council President Jenkins, Members of the City Council, City Attorney Richardson, and City Administrator Johnson:

Our Office has completed an audit of the City's Police emergency response times. The audit report, titled *Inadequate 9-1-1 Staffing and Outdated Beat Boundaries Lead to Slow and Inequitable Police Emergency Response Times*, is enclosed. This is the first of two reports, with another audit of fire and medical response times in progress.

The objective of this audit was to assess the timeliness of the Police Department in responding to calls for emergency services. This audit reviews data from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2024 and complements the Police Staffing Study that the Office of the Inspector General commissioned in 2023, and presented to the City Council on June 3, 2025.[1]

We found that the Police Emergency Communications Center within the Police Department has struggled to meet state targets for 9-1-1 call answering speeds due to insufficient staffing levels. State performance targets require local 9-1-1 centers to answer 90 percent of calls within 15 seconds and 95 percent of calls within 20 seconds. In 2024, Oakland answered 54 percent of calls within 15 seconds and 57 percent of calls within 20 seconds, with nearly a third of calls waiting more than 60 seconds to be answered.

The Police Department's answering times are slowed by insufficient staffing levels and minimum staffing standards that are not calibrated to call volume. Like other jurisdictions, the Oakland Police Department continues to experience difficulties filling dispatcher vacancies. The Communications Division has experienced persistent vacancies since 2020, which hinder the Police Emergency Communications Center from regularly meeting the Department's minimum staffing standards. Although overall staffing remains a challenge, the Department can better allocate its existing staff to reflect current call volume. We recommend that the Police Department revisit its minimum staffing standards, which have not been recently updated. As part of this process, the Department should use a call volume-based model like the one offered by the State of California, to ensure the efficient allocation of existing staff.

[1] https://oakland.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7397055&GUID=C4D0CC62-3C39-40C3-A294-46AFA52F9DFA

In addition, the Police Department can improve response times and language accessibility for limited English speakers, whose calls take longer when a third-party interpreter is used, rather than a bilingual call taker. In 2024, the Police Department used outside interpreters to handle over 17,000 calls from limited English speakers, 96 percent of which were in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish. Relative to the average 9-1-1 call, the average interpreted call lasted 5 minutes longer. According to the City's Equal Access to Services Ordinance, the City must provide the same level of service in those languages as it does in English. The Police Department can reduce this inequity, increase compliance with the Equal Access to Services Ordinance, and improve overall emergency call and response times by maximizing the coverage of bilingual call takers at its Emergency Communications Center, and establishing a practice of transferring interpreters for callers with fire and medical emergencies to the Fire Department.

Finally, the Police Department should establish response time targets to set goals and expectations around its performance, which will in turn inform patrol staffing needs and updates to Police beat boundaries. We found that in 2022, the median police response time citywide was 9 minutes for Priority 1 calls, which are incidents that involve an immediate threat to life. Greater call workload results in lower officer availability to immediately respond to calls, creating a backlog of Priority 2 calls, or calls for incidents that have just occurred or threaten property. Police patrol beats, which the Department seeks to staff by at least one officer per shift, do not reflect call volume associated with those beats or the higher number of violent calls in the East Bureau. These outdated beat boundaries result in fewer officers to handle greater call workload. Consequently, the East Bureau's response times to Priority 2 calls were two hours longer than the West Bureau's. The Police Department should define response time targets and report on its progress towards these targets. The Department can improve response times by activating GPS (global positioning system) in patrol cars to dispatch the nearest unit and redesigning its police beat boundaries.

Slow police response times increase the risk of harm to residents. This audit provides 10 recommendations to improve the City's emergency response times with the aim of enhancing public safety.

We thank the City Administration, including staff in the Police and Fire departments, for their cooperation and insight during the audit process.

Sincerely,

Michael C. Houston
City Auditor

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Inadequate 9-1-1 Staffing and Outdated Beat Boundaries Lead to Slow and Inequitable Police Emergency Response Times

Background

The Oakland Police Department runs the City's Emergency Communications Center, which receives and handles 9-1-1 calls within Oakland. A 2017 audit identified how persistent vacancies contributed to slow call answering speeds, and in 2023, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) notified the Police Department that it was not in compliance with state timeliness standards, which require agencies to answer 90 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds.

What We Found

We found that the Police Department's Emergency Communications Center has not met state timeliness standards for 9-1-1 calls in 10 of the past 11 years we reviewed. Like other jurisdictions, the Oakland Police Department continues to experience difficulties filling vacancies. While overall staffing remains a challenge with persistent vacancies since 2020, the Police Emergency Communications Center's current minimum staffing standards are not based on recent call volume. By adjusting the minimum staffing standards to align with call workload, the Department can more efficiently use its existing staff. In addition, limited English speakers experience longer response times due to a shortage of bilingual communications staff. Using an interpretation service extends a call due to the time needed to obtain an interpreter and to repeat information in two different languages. Moreover, interpreters are not consistently transferred to the Fire Department with callers reporting fire and medical emergencies. These practices do not accomplish the goals of the City's Equal Access to Services Ordinance, which requires City departments to provide the same level of service to limited English speakers who speak certain languages. Finally, the Department lacks overall response time targets, which prevents the public from knowing what reasonable and equitable response times are. In 2022, the most recent and complete year of Police response time data, the median Priority 1 response time was nine minutes citywide, and median Priority 2 response times were two hours longer in the East Bureau than the West Bureau. This disparity is in part because Police beat boundaries have not been recently updated, and do not reflect current call workload. Last, we found that the Department should activate existing GPS technology in patrol cars, which can promote faster response times.

What We Recommend

We made 10 recommendations to improve the allocation of existing staff, promote more equitable and timely service to limited English speakers, develop and report on progress toward response time targets, redraw beat boundaries to improve officer availability, and activate GPS in patrol cars to enable the dispatch of the nearest available officers.

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Introduction

Since the Oakland City Auditor's 2017 audit of the City's 9-1-1 call operations, the Alameda County Grand Jury and California Governor's Office of Emergency Services have joined residents and business owners in expressing concern over the City's timeliness in answering emergency calls.[1]

In response to these concerns, the City Auditor initiated a series of two audits to assess the timeliness of the Police and Fire departments in responding to calls for emergency services. This report focuses on Police response times and is intended to serve as a complement to the Office of the Inspector General's police staffing study, reviewing data from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2024. The second forthcoming audit will focus on the Fire Department's emergency response times.

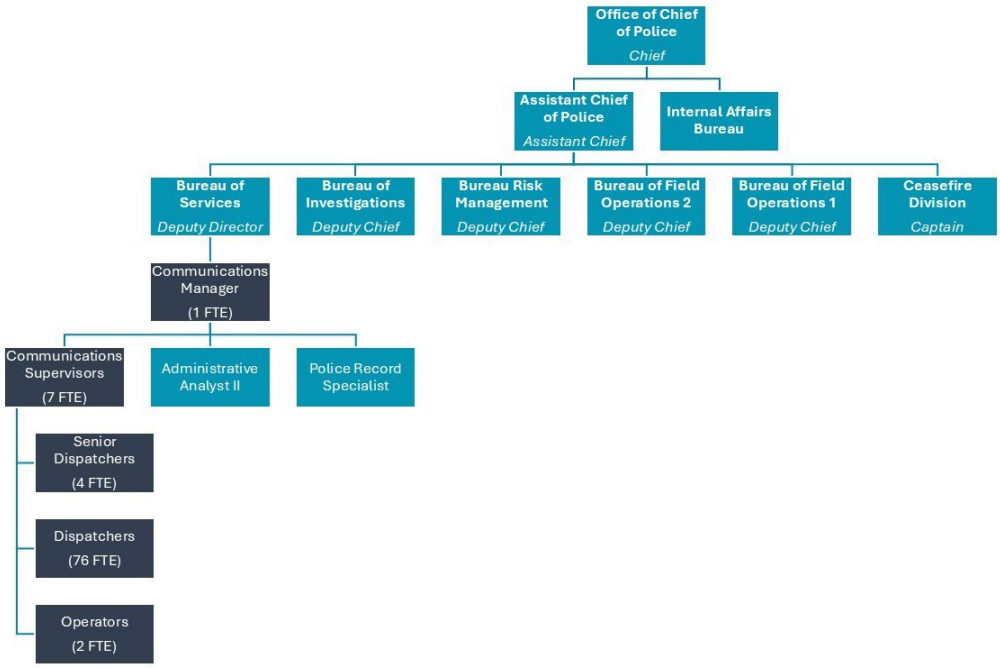
[1] The 2017 audit of 9-1-1 call operations may be found at: https://www.oaklandauditor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/20171102_Performance_OPDCommunicationsDivision911CallOps.pdf. The Alameda County Grand Jury reports are posted to: https://grandjury.acgov.org/reports/.

Background

The Oakland Police Department (Police Department)'s Communications Division runs one of two Emergency Communications Centers for the City of Oakland. As the first point of contact for emergency calls in Oakland, the Police Communications Center receives, processes, and dispatches emergency calls, and transfers fire and medical emergency calls to the Oakland Fire Department (Fire Department)'s Communications Center.[2]

The Police Communications Division is housed within the Department's Bureau of Services (as shown in Exhibit 1). In FY 2023-24, the Division had an adopted budget of $23.6 million and 90 FTE (fulltime equivalent positions), including entry-level and senior dispatchers and communications operators, overseen by communications supervisors and a communications manager.

Exhibit 1: The Police Department's Communications Division, under the Bureau of Services, Runs One of the City's Two Emergency Communications Centers



Source: Auditor summary based on the Police Department's General Order A-03, "Organizational Structure and Responsibility," Office of the Inspector General's police staffing study published in May 2025, and the Oakland Police Department's Emergency Communications Center Assessment and Staffing Study prepared by Federal Engineering (February 2019). Staffing numbers are based on the City's position control report for January 2024.

[2] The Police and Fire Emergency Communications Centers are also known as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), which are entities that receive emergency calls. The Police Emergency Communications Center is a primary PSAP, since it receives all emergency calls and transfers fire and medical-related calls to the Fire Emergency Communications Center, which is a secondary PSAP.

The Police Department Answers All 9-1-1 Calls

In the United States, 9-1-1 is a universal telephone number that allows individuals to request emergency response for police, fire, and medical emergencies. These calls are received by emergency communications centers that direct and communicate with police, fire, and medical staff as they respond to local crises.

Box 1

When should you call 9-1-1?

The 9-1-1 line is the primary line to request police, fire, or medical assistance. Individuals should call 9-1-1 for:

- Medical emergencies
- Crimes in progress
- Fires, suspected gas leaks, or explosions
- Serious accidents with injuries

When call takers pick up, they ask callers to describe their location (address or closest cross streets), phone number, and nature of the emergency. The call taker may also request descriptions of suspects (height, age, gender, build, clothing, armed or unarmed), their vehicle make or model, license plate number, and direction or mode of flight.

The Police Department dispatches officers to emergency calls and civilian police service technicians to certain non-emergency calls.*

*Police service technicians can be dispatched to the following calls without an active disturbance or threat of violence: Auto in a Restricted Zone, Auto on the Sidewalk, Parking on Private Property, Emergency No Parking, Stolen Vehicle, Recovered Stolen Vehicle, Auto Blocking a Driveway, Residential Burglary, Auto Burglary, and Hazard. (See: Special Order 9054-Revised)

9-1-1 callers in Oakland are first connected to the Police Department's Emergency Communications Center, which serves as the initial point of contact for callers reporting emergencies in the city. The Police Emergency Communications Center is responsible for answering 9-1-1 calls in a timely manner and determining the appropriate response. These responses include dispatching sworn patrol officers and civilian police service technicians and transferring calls to the Fire Department or some other agency (see Exhibit 2).

Box 2

Roles in the Police 9-1-1 Center

Communications staff at the Police Emergency Communications Center occupy various positions to support Police emergency response in the following areas:

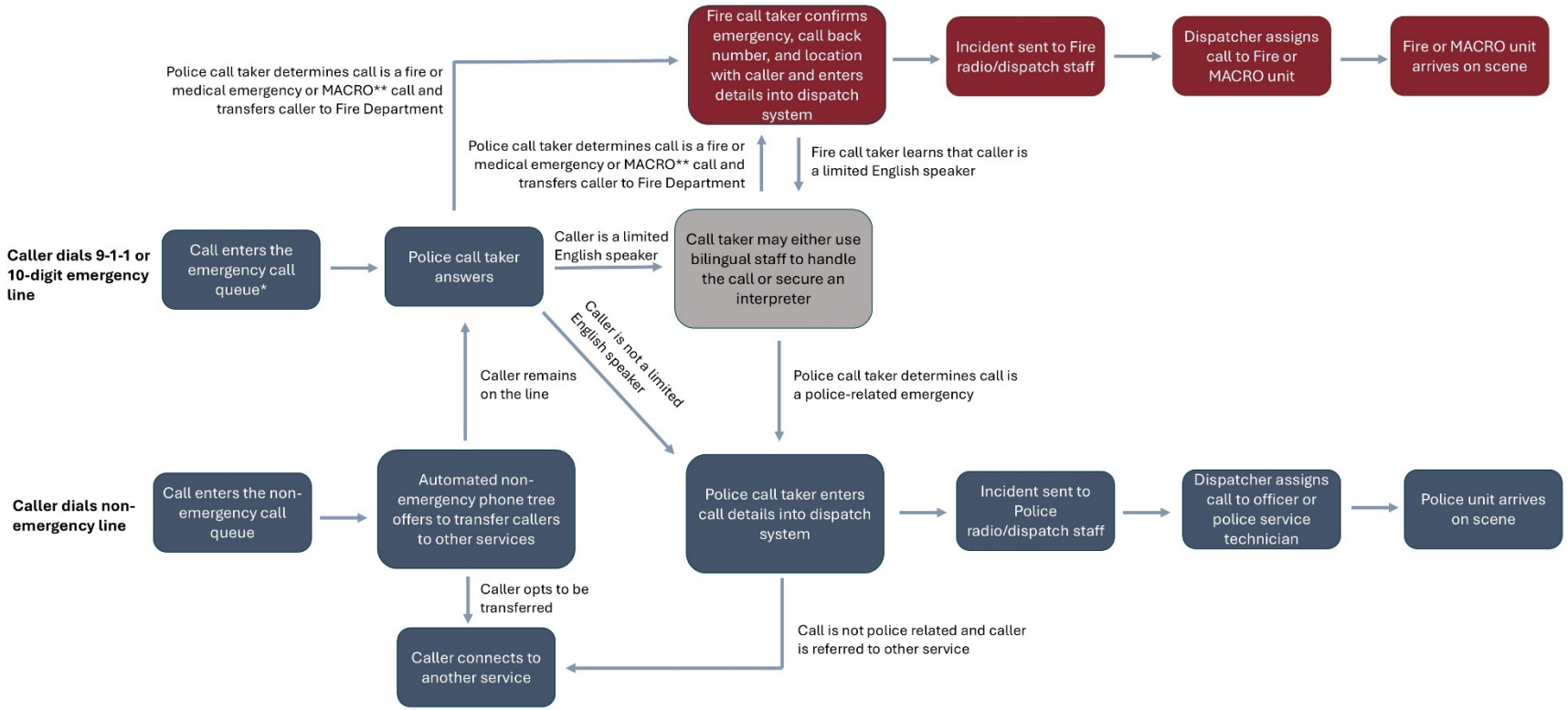
Call taking: Call takers pick up emergency calls and enter call details into the Police Communications Center's Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Based on the urgency, the call taker assigns a priority level to the call and sends the information to dispatch.

Dispatch and radio: Dispatchers assign calls to officers and civilian police service technicians based on the call type and priority level of the call. They also communicate with responding units via radio channels.

Service desk: Dispatchers at the service desk provide administrative support for officers in the field, such as sharing information about warrants, stolen vehicles, and tow requests.

Police communication operators primarily serve as call takers, while fully trained dispatchers typically rotate between positions every two hours.

Exhibit 2: Call Takers at the Police Emergency Communications Center Answer 9-1-1 Calls, Dispatch Patrol Officers and Police Service Technicians, and Transfer Calls to the Oakland Fire Department and Other Agencies



Source: Auditor summary of Police call taking and dispatch process based on observation, Department policies, and interviews with Police staff.

*Staff report that calls received on the 9-1-1 line are prioritized for pickup before calls received on the 10-digit emergency line.

**MACRO stands for Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland. The program is housed within the Fire Department. As mentioned in Box 1, civilian police service technicians may be dispatched to certain types of non-emergency calls.

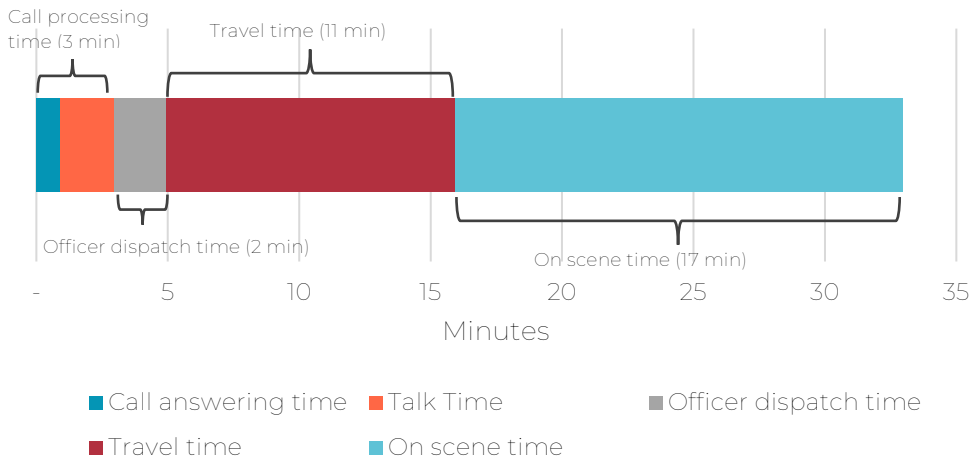
Communications Staff Enter Call Details into the Department's Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) System

Response time consists of call processing, officer dispatch time, and travel time. When a Police call taker answers a 9-1-1 call, they enter call details from the caller into the Department's Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. We define the time it takes from a dispatcher creating an incident in the CAD system to sending it to be dispatched as **call processing time,** which includes call answering and talk times. The staff responsible for dispatching calls then assigns them to officers based on call priority (see Box 3). The time it takes to assign a call to an officer we define as **officer dispatch time**, and it is largely dependent on officer availability to respond (i.e., not busy addressing other calls).

For Police Emergencies, Dispatchers Assign Calls to Patrol Officers

Once a dispatcher dispatches a call to a unit, the officer is expected to begin traveling to the scene. The time it takes from when a call is dispatched to when an officer arrives is a call's **travel time**. An officer's arrival marks the end of a call's response time and the beginning of **on scene time**. Exhibit 3 shows these various components.

Exhibit 3: Response time consists of call processing, officer dispatch, and travel times



Source: Auditor analysis of Person Screaming for Help Call (Priority 1) that occurred on January 1, 2023 based on data from the Police Department's Computer-Aided Dispatch System. Note: Call processing time (sum of call answering and talk times) is based on the overall average for 2023, based on reports from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System. Call answering time is the amount of time it takes for a call to be answered by a call taker. Talk time is the amount of time the caller spends on the phone with the call taker. More analysis of these times are in Finding 1.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) Requires Call Centers to Answer 9-1-1 Calls Quickly

As the primary call center that handles 9-1-1 calls within Oakland, the Police Emergency Communications Center is overseen by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

(CalOES).[3] CalOES requires local 9-1-1 emergency communications centers to meet call answering standards from the National Emergency Number Association to receive state funding. These standards require emergency communications centers to:

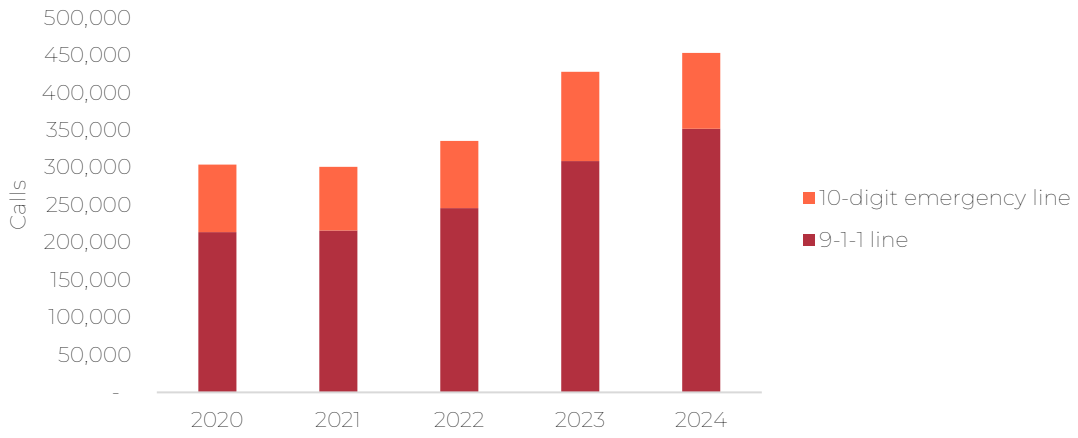
- Answer 90 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds
- Answer 95 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 20 seconds

CalOES uses the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) to track the performance of local emergency communications centers.

On average, Oakland receives 52 calls per hour through 9-1-1

Oakland's emergency call volume has increased in recent years. As shown in Exhibit 4, 9-1-1 call volume has increased an average of 10 percent each year from 2020 to 2024. In 2024, the Police Emergency Communications Center received 352,191 calls on its 9-1-1 line and 101,161 calls on its 10-digit emergency line, as shown in Exhibit 4. On average, that translates to 52 calls per hour coming through the emergency lines (9-1-1 and 10-digit emergency line) in 2024.[4]

Exhibit 4: Incoming Call Volume to Oakland's Emergency Phone Lines Has Increased Since 2020



Source: Auditor analysis of reports from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) provided by the Police Department for January 2020 through December 2024. Note: This data represents calls received by the Police Emergency Communications Center.

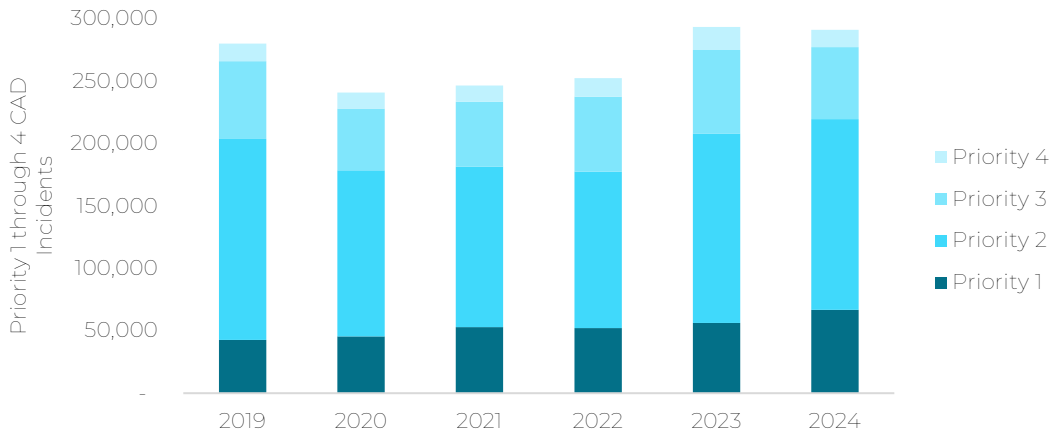
Although community members can dial both the 9-1-1 and the 10-digit emergency lines to report emergencies, staff state that the Police Emergency Communications Center prioritizes calls on the 9-1-1 line for pickup. However, call takers generally assign a priority level for calls from both lines. Priority 1 calls include in-progress violent crimes or other situations that pose immediate threats to individuals, while Priority 2 calls include urgent but not immediate emergencies, in-progress

[3] As the first point of contact for 9-1-1 callers in Oakland, the Police Emergency Communications Center is considered a "primary" Public Safety Answering Point (i.e., 9-1-1 call center). The Fire Emergency Communications Center is considered a "secondary" Public Safety Answering Point since it receives 9-1-1 calls from the Police Emergency Communications Center.

[4] This value was calculated by dividing the number of calls to the 9-1-1 and 10-digit emergency lines in 2024 (453,352) by the total number of hours in a year (8,736).

misdemeanors, and crimes that have just occurred. Priority 3 and 4 are non-emergency calls (see Box 3). In 2024, the Police Department recorded 291,193 Priority 1 through 4 incidents, slightly higher than the number of Priority 1 through 4 calls in 2019 (as shown in Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5: Priority 1 through 4 Incidents are Back to Pre-2020 Levels



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) System from 2019 through 2024. Note: This data represents incidents logged into the Police CAD system as Priority 1 through 4.

Box 3

Call Priority Descriptions

Police calls are dispatched by priority, which reflect the urgency of the situation.

Priority 0 calls are the highest priority and used for natural or man-made catastrophes, as well as situations related to officer safety. These calls are relatively uncommon.

Priority 1 calls involve immediate threat to life, involving violence and/or weapons. Any officer in Oakland can respond to a Priority 1 call. Officers may be pulled from lower priority calls to respond to Priority 1 incidents.

Priority 2 calls involve in-progress situations with the potential for violence or damage to property, as well as incidents that have just occurred. Common Priority 2 calls include 9-1-1 hangups, disturbing the peace, alarms, and stolen vehicles.

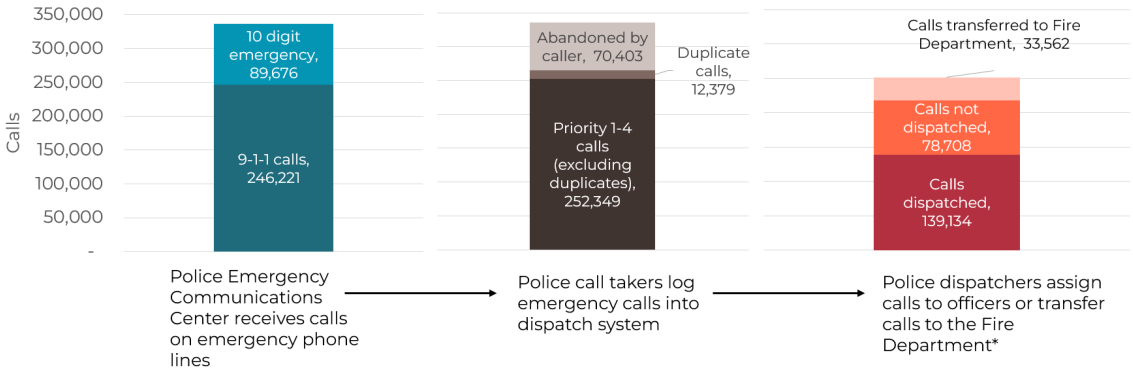
Priority 3 calls are police non-emergency incidents, such as auto burglaries, autos blocking driveways, cold reports, and other situations not posing a threat to life or property.

Priority 4 calls are non-emergencies or administrative calls, such as abandoned vehicles, 9-1-1 misdials, and calls that are "not a 9-1-1 call matter," which generally do not involve a dispatched police response.

See Appendix D for more information on common call types by priority.

In 2022, 40 percent of incoming calls received by the Police Department resulted in a dispatched Police response. Not every single call results in a separate dispatch because the Department may receive multiple calls for the same incident, or calls may not warrant a police or fire response. Examples include calls that are outside of the City's jurisdiction, 9-1-1 misdials, or calls that are not a 9-1-1 call matter (see Box 3).[5] Callers can also cancel responses to calls.

Exhibit 6: In 2022, About 40 Percent of Incoming Emergency Calls Resulted in a Dispatched Police Response



Source: Auditor analysis of 2022 data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system and reports from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) provided by the Police Department. Descriptions are based on interviews with Police staff and observations at the Police Emergency Communications Center. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller. *In 2022, the Police Department dispatched its own units to 946 fire and medical calls. The Department will also dispatch a response to these calls if they involve a police-related matter (e.g., firearms, violence or threat of violence).

As shown in Exhibit 6, the Police Department dispatched 55 percent of Priority 1 through 4 incidents in 2022, which was about 40 percent of total calls received by the Police Department on its emergency phone lines.[6] An additional 13 percent of Priority 1 through 4 incidents were categorized as misdials, not a 9-1-1 call matter, or 9-1-1 hangups from either a landline or a cell phone.[7] Overall, 19 percent of Priority 1 through 4 incidents were canceled and 5 percent were duplicates in the system.[8]

These calls include those responded to by civilian police service technicians, who can respond to certain non-emergency calls. Although civilian responses may reduce workload for sworn officers,

[5] Misdials occur when the caller calls 9-1-1 accidentally and reaches a Police call taker. Most misdials are not dispatched since the caller can confirm there is no emergency.

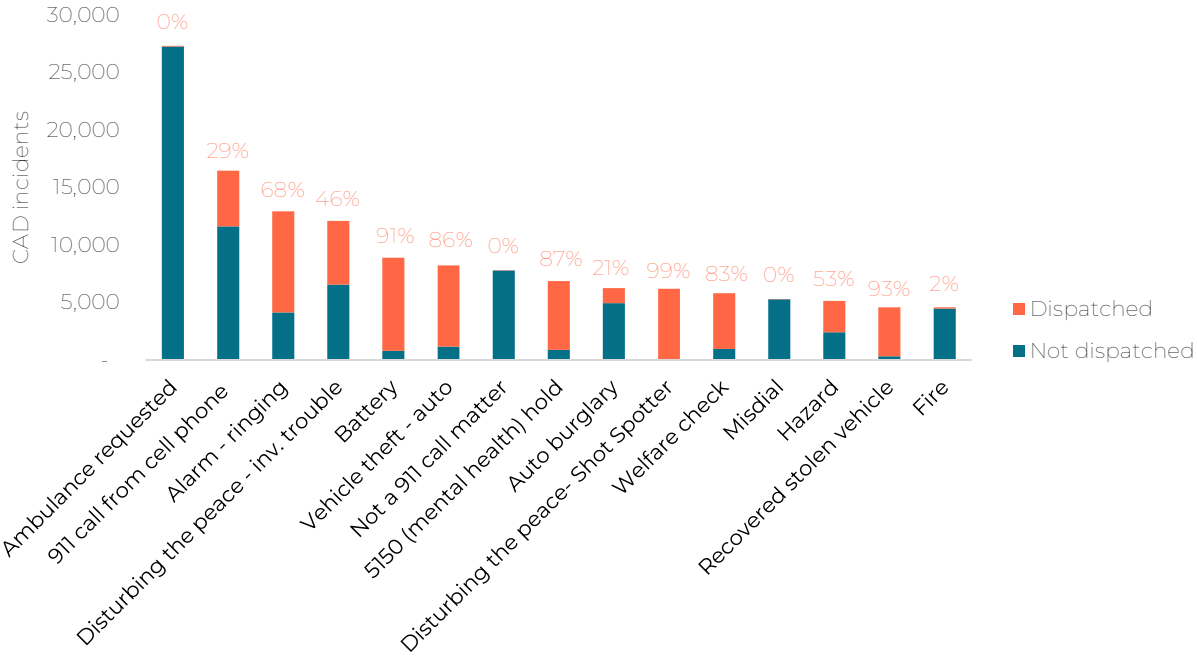
[6] We use 2022 data since data on dispatch and arrival times were much lower in 2023 and 2024. For more information, see Box 4.

[7] The Police Department's policy is to dispatch officers to investigate 9-1-1 hangups if the caller does not answer a call back and the CAD system records a landline address or an approximate location within 25 meters of a cell tower. In 2022, 27 percent of 18,300 9-1-1 hangups from a cell phone were dispatched and 34 percent of 9-1-1 hangups from a landline were dispatched to an officer to investigate.

[8] Although staff try to keep data about each incident within a single CAD event, duplicate CAD events can occur if multiple call takers simultaneously process calls for a single incident. According to staff, dispatchers responsible for assigning calls will typically consolidate duplicates to prevent dispatching duplicate calls.

they do not necessarily reduce workload for the Police Emergency Communications Center, since they still involve dispatch and radio support.

Exhibit 7: The Most Common Emergency Call Type is Request for Ambulance



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for 2022. This graph shows the 15 most common call types for Priority 1 through 4 calls (duplicates excluded). Percentages indicate the proportion of CAD incidents that received a dispatched police response. Some incident types have low officer dispatch rates due to being a fire or medical-related emergency which are transferred to the Fire Department. Misdials and "Not a 911 call matter" received very few police responses and generally do not require police to be dispatched.

Police call takers also answer calls to the Department's non-emergency line as well as calls on the City's 3-1-1 line after hours.[9] Staff report that they prioritize answering calls on the emergency line over those on the non-emergency line, and that call takers can place a non-emergency call on hold to take an incoming call from the emergency lines. This practice means that callers on the non-emergency line may experience extended wait times.

Oakland's Emergency Response Times have Received Increased Attention

Concerns from residents, businesses, and various state and local bodies have increased public scrutiny of Oakland's emergency response times over the past several years:

> **November 2017:** The Oakland City Auditor published an audit of Police 9-1-1 call operations, which found that the Police Department was not answering 9-1-1 calls within state timeliness standards (described earlier). The audit recommended regular reporting

[9] The City's 3-1-1 line allows individuals to report blight, housing, or zoning violations, including trash, graffiti, electrical issues, faulty plumbing, unapproved businesses in a residential neighborhood, and construction outside of standard hours.

of performance metrics, improvements to the hiring process, ongoing monitoring of staff performance, and updated technology to enhance reporting. Three out of the audit's four recommendations are partially implemented and one is fully implemented.[10]

February 2019: The Police Department completed a staffing study of its Emergency Communications Center, which reviewed the Communications Division's organizational structure, staffing trends, hiring, training, technology, and workload. The study recommended that the Division increase its staffing by 25 FTE (fulltime equivalent positions), and made 14 other recommendations relating to performance monitoring, supervision, training, quality assurance, updating policies, and shifting certain responsibilities to other Police divisions.

June 2020: The Alameda County Grand Jury published a report on Oakland's 9-1-1 Communications Center, concluding that the Police Department was not answering calls within state standards and attributing the underperformance to understaffing, inefficient hiring processes, and outdated technology.

June 2023: The Alameda County Grand Jury published a follow up report on the City's 9-1-1 Communications Center, finding that Oakland was still not meeting state standards and facing similar challenges identified in the Grand Jury's June 2020 report.

July 2023: The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) notified the Police Department that the Department's 9-1-1 call center was not in compliance with state standards and was at risk of losing funding.

June 2024: Recognizing the Police Department's efforts to improve its 9-1-1 call answering times, CalOES informed the City that it would not take further action so long as the Department was making continuous progress.

August 2024: The Director of CalOES met with the Oakland Police Chief and requested monthly meetings for the Police Department to provide updates on dispatcher hiring, training, staff retention, technology to address non-emergency workload, and other steps the Department is taking to improve staffing and performance.

The Police Department has Updated its Technology to Increase Dispatch Efficiency

In September 2024, the City announced that it successfully upgraded its Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, which had not been updated in the last 20 years. The implementation of the PremierOne CAD system allowed the City to shift from the previous CAD system, which was no longer supported by Motorola. Staff report that this new system streamlines some workflows and

[10] With the Police Department's new 9-1-1 phone system, the recommendation for the Department to update its technology was considered fully implemented. See our Office's Audit Recommendation Follow Up Report for December 2024: https://www.oaklandauditor.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20250328_Audit-Recommendation-Follow-Up-Report-as-of-December-31-2024.pdf

provides additional features, such as the Automatic Resource Locator (which uses GPS) described in Finding 3.

Other Measures to Reduce Call Volume through Violence Prevention Also Support Emergency Response Times

Although this audit's objective is limited to evaluating emergency response times, emergency response times are also impacted by prevention efforts that can reduce the number of calls for service in the community. As this report discusses, emergency response times are largely determined by the workload of emergency calls and the capacity of the City to address these calls. For instance, the City's Ceasefire Strategy aims to reduce gun violence among high-risk populations, which staff say could decrease the overall need for police response.[11]

In addition, Oakland voters passed Measure Z in 2014, which allocated funding to maintain sworn police staffing and violence prevention initiatives. This measure was succeeded by Measure NN, which was passed in November 2024 and provides funding to reduce emergency response times and prevent future homicides, robberies, gun-related violence, domestic violence, and other crimes.

Box 4

A Note on Data in this Report

The Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system has experienced issues with maintaining complete response time data for 2023 and 2024. Possible causes include the cyberattack on City systems in February 2023, which impacted the Police and Fire CAD systems, and the transition to the new Police CAD system in July 2024. Data over this period appeared to lack information on call dispositions, responding unit information, and response times. This issue was also noted in the police staffing study issued by the Office of the Inspector General.

For this report, we use the most reliable and relevant year of data to present our analysis on response times, call volume, and call types. For instance, when presenting information on response times, we use 2022 data. When presenting trends in call volume, we include 2024 data, as we determined that data to be sufficiently reliable and complete.

In addition, the most recent year included in our data request for benchmark jurisdictions from the California Office of Emergency Service (CalOES) was for 2023. We requested this data before we revised the audit scope to include 2024.

[11] Oakland's Ceasefire Strategy involves a partnership between the Department of Violence Prevention and the Police Department. See https://www.oaklandca.gov/topics/oaklands-ceasefire-strategy.

FINDING 1: Insufficient Staffing and Outdated Minimum Staffing Standards at the Police Emergency Communications Center Led to the City Missing State Targets for 9-1-1 Call Answering Speeds

Summary

The Police Emergency Communications Center has struggled to meet state targets for 9-1-1 call answering speeds for more than a decade (since 2014). In 2024, the Center answered 54 percent of calls within 15 seconds and 57 percent of calls within 20 seconds, with nearly a third of calls waiting more than 60 seconds to be answered in 2023. The Department also substantially underperforms its peers in 9-1-1 call answering time and frequently does not meet its minimum staffing standards due to persistent vacancies. Moreover, the Department can allocate its existing staff more efficiently in its Emergency Communications Center by using current call volume to determine appropriate minimum staffing. We recommend that the Department adjust its minimum staffing standards to reflect recent call volume and other factors. Slow response times can also frustrate callers. The Department should regularly inform callers that their call has been sent to dispatch.

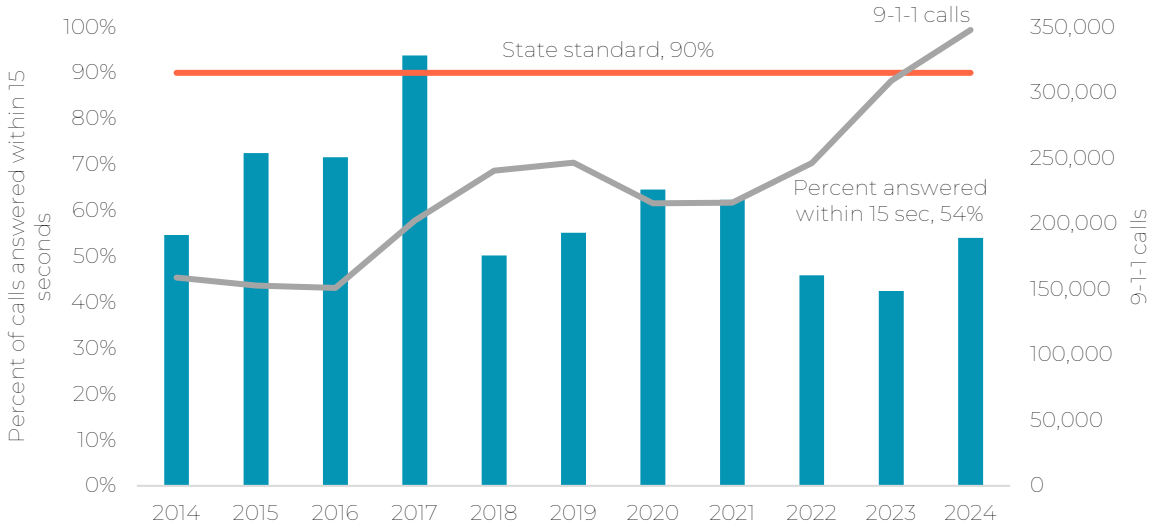
The Police Department Has Not Met State Targets for Answering 9-1-1 Calls in 10 of the Past 11 years

As the first point of contact for 9-1-1 calls in Oakland, the Police Emergency Communications Center is responsible for picking up 9-1-1 calls in a timely manner. As described in the Background, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) oversees local 9-1-1 centers and sets targets for call answering speeds based on standards by the National Emergency Number Association. These standards require local 9-1-1 centers to:

- Answer 90 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds
- Answer 95 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 20 seconds

The Police Department has not met state targets in 9-1-1 call answering speeds in ten of the past eleven years. In 2024, the Police Emergency Communications Center received 352,191 calls on the 9-1-1 line. Based on reports from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS), which CalOES uses to track the performance of local 9-1-1 call centers, the Police Emergency Communications Center answered 54 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds and 57 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 20 seconds in 2024 (see Exhibit 8.)

Exhibit 8: The Police Department Did Not Meet State Targets for 9-1-1 Calls Answered Within 15 Seconds in 10 of the Past 11 years



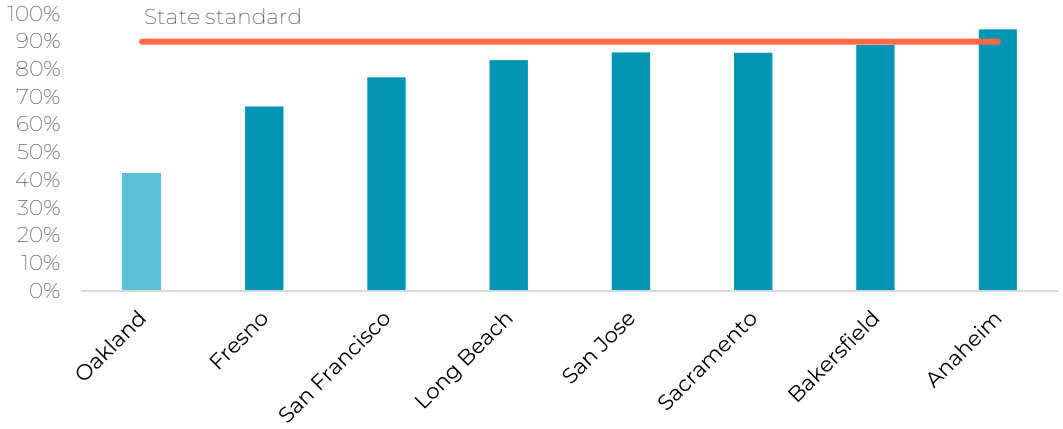
Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports from 2014 to 2024 obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and the Police Department. Note: The exhibit shows the state standard set by CalOES for the proportion of 9-1-1 calls answered within 15 seconds, which is based on standards published by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA).

Except in 2017, the Police Department did not meet state standards from 2014 through 2024. Over this period, the Police Department's highest rate of calls answered within 15 seconds was 94 percent (in 2017) and the Department's lowest rate occurred in 2023, when it answered only 42 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds.

Oakland also underperforms when compared to other California jurisdictions, as shown in Exhibit 9. In 2023, Oakland's rate of calls answered within 15 seconds was 24 percentage points lower than the next lowest performing agency we surveyed, the Fresno Police Department, which answered 67 percent of calls within 15 seconds.[12]

[12] These jurisdictions were selected based on having similar characteristics to Oakland, such as population size, demographics, land area, crime rates, and proximity to Oakland, as well as input from the Police Department. Comparison data is for 2023, since that was the most recent full year of data available during our analysis.

Exhibit 9: The Police Department Answered a Lower Proportion of 9-1-1 Calls Within 15 Seconds Compared to its Peers in 2023



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Notes: We compared the Oakland Police Department to police or equivalent emergency communications centers in these cities, selecting these cities based on similar populations, crime rates, proximity (shared labor market), and input from the Police Department. As described within Appendix A, Long Beach and San Francisco have consolidated emergency communications centers that handle police, fire, and medical emergency calls. The graph shows the state standard set by the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for the proportion of 9-1-1 calls answered within 15 seconds, which is based on standards published by the National Emergency Number Association. Benchmarking data uses 2023 data since we submitted our request to CalOES before adjusting the audit scope to include 2024.

Compared to its peers, the Police Department also had the highest proportion of 9-1-1 calls that waited more than 60 seconds before being answered. In 2023, nearly a third of calls waited more than a minute, as shown in Exhibit 10.

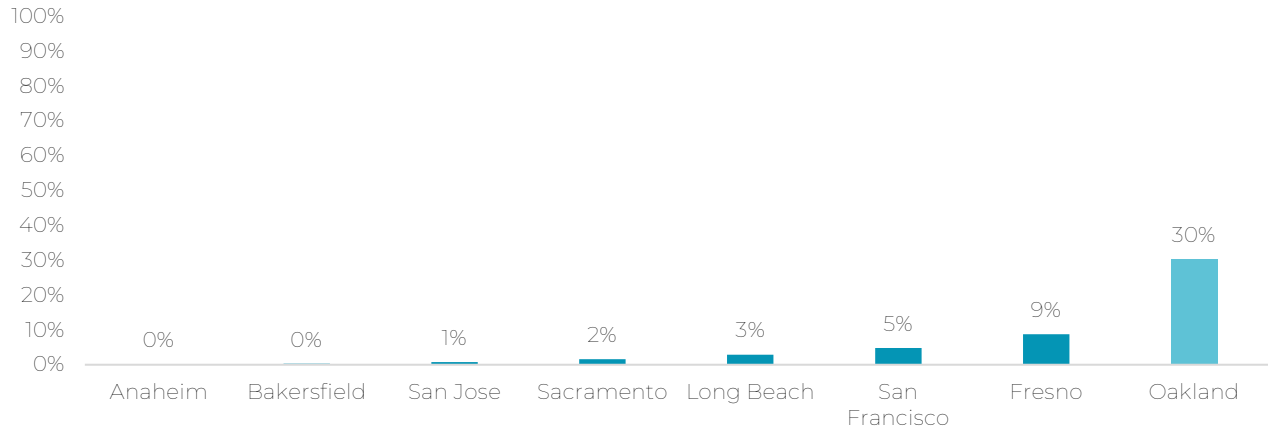
Box 5

Factors that Affect Emergency Call Answer Speeds

There are several factors that affect the City's ability to answer emergency calls. These include:

- Call volume – How many calls are coming in at a given point of time
- Call duration – How long it takes for a call taker to collect information from a caller.
- Number of call takers – How many call takers are taking calls on a given shift
- Call taker availability – The proportion of time call takers are either taking a call or are available to take a call

Exhibit 10: In 2023, 30 percent of 9-1-1 Calls Waited More than a Minute before Being Answered by the Police Department, More than Other Benchmark Jurisdictions



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Note: Values were rounded to the nearest whole number. We compared the Oakland Police Department to police or equivalent emergency communications centers in these cities, selecting these cities based on similar populations, crime rates, proximity (shared labor market), and input from the Police Department. As described within Appendix A, Long Beach and San Francisco have consolidated emergency communications centers that handle both police and fire/medical emergency calls. Benchmarking data uses 2023 data since we submitted our request to CalOES before adjusting the audit scope to include 2024.

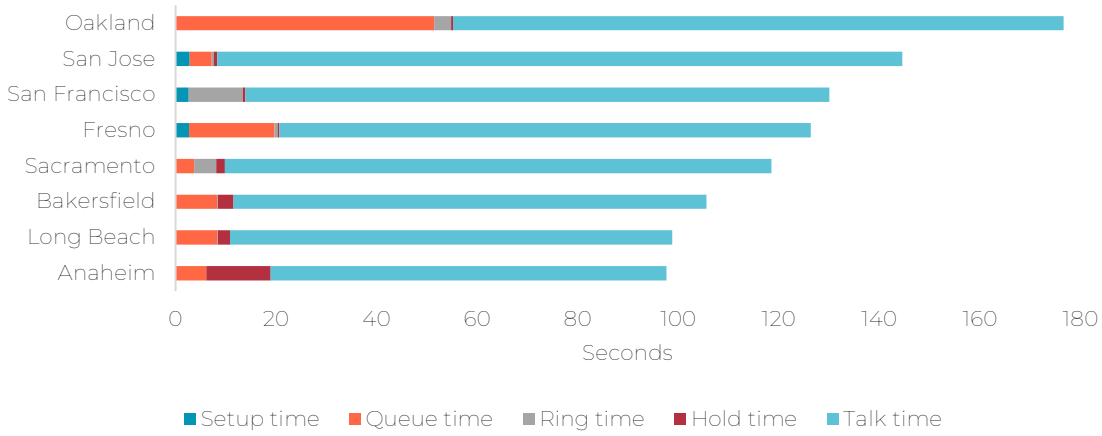
As a result, the Police Department has a longer overall call answer time on average, compared to other agencies.[13] In 2023, Oakland 9-1-1 calls had an average call answer time of 55 seconds. By comparison, a 9-1-1 call to the Fresno Police Department, the agency with the next longest wait time, waited an average of 20 seconds before being answered.

Longer Wait Times Result in Longer Overall 9-1-1 Call Durations for Oakland

Call duration of a 9-1-1 call consists of the following components: setup time, queue time, ring time, hold time, and talk time.[14] On average, the total time a caller spent on a 9-1-1 call to the Police Department lasted half a minute or more than Oakland's peers in 2023, as shown in Exhibit 11.

[13] We define "call answer time" as the period before a call is picked up, or the sum of setup, queue, and ring times, as recorded in the state's Emergency Call Tracking System.
[14] These times are based on components recorded in the ECaTS system.

Exhibit 11: Oakland Took Longer to Pick Up 9-1-1 Calls than Other Jurisdictions in 2023

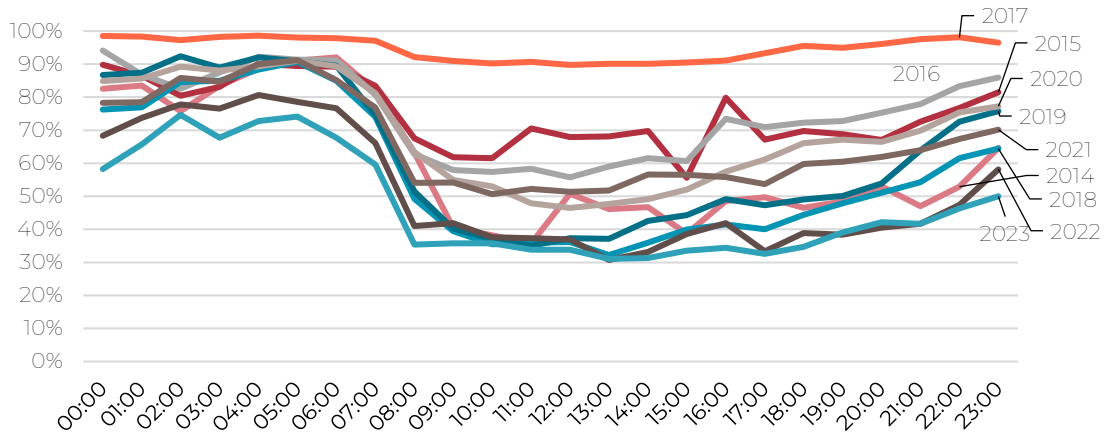


Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Note: We compared the Oakland Police Department to police or equivalent emergency communications centers in these cities, selecting these cities based on similar populations, crime rates, proximity (shared labor market), and input from the Police Department. As described within Appendix A, Long Beach and San Francisco have consolidated emergency communications centers that handle both police and fire/medical emergency calls. Benchmarking data uses 2023 data since we submitted our request to CalOES before adjusting the audit scope to include 2024. Setup, queue, ring, hold, and talk times are based on components recorded in the ECaTS system.

Calls Take Longer to Answer After 5:00 AM

The proportion of 9-1-1 calls the Police Department answered within 15 seconds decreased after 5:00 AM. In 2023, during the 5:00 AM hour, the Department answered an average of 74 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds, decreasing to 35 percent at 8:00 AM. As Exhibit 12 shows, this drop has occurred consistently since 2015.

Exhibit 12: The Proportion of 9-1-1 Calls the Police Department Answered Within 15 Seconds Varies by Time of Day

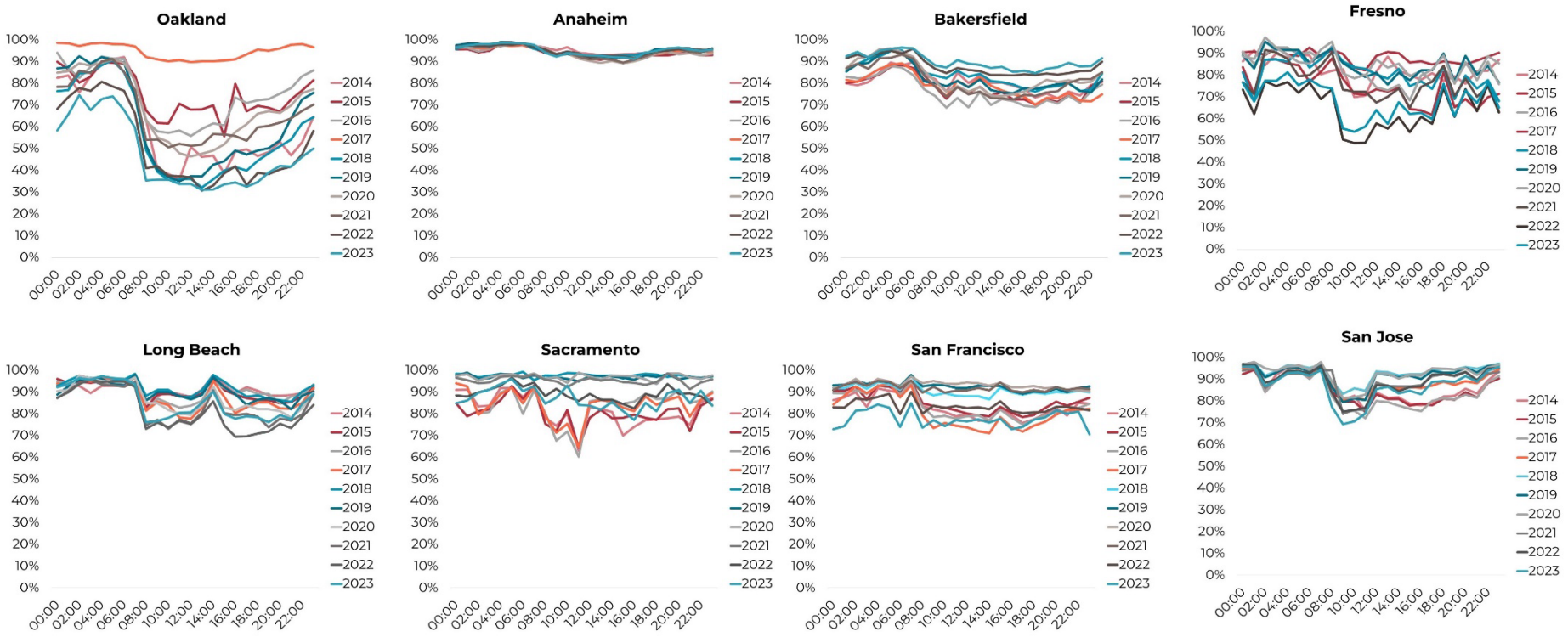


Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) from 2014 to 2023. Note: This graph uses 2023 data since we submitted our request to CalOES before adjusting the audit scope to include 2024.

Oakland's Performance Fluctuates More than Other Jurisdictions

Compared to other jurisdictions, Oakland's performance varies more throughout the day, as shown in Exhibit 13.

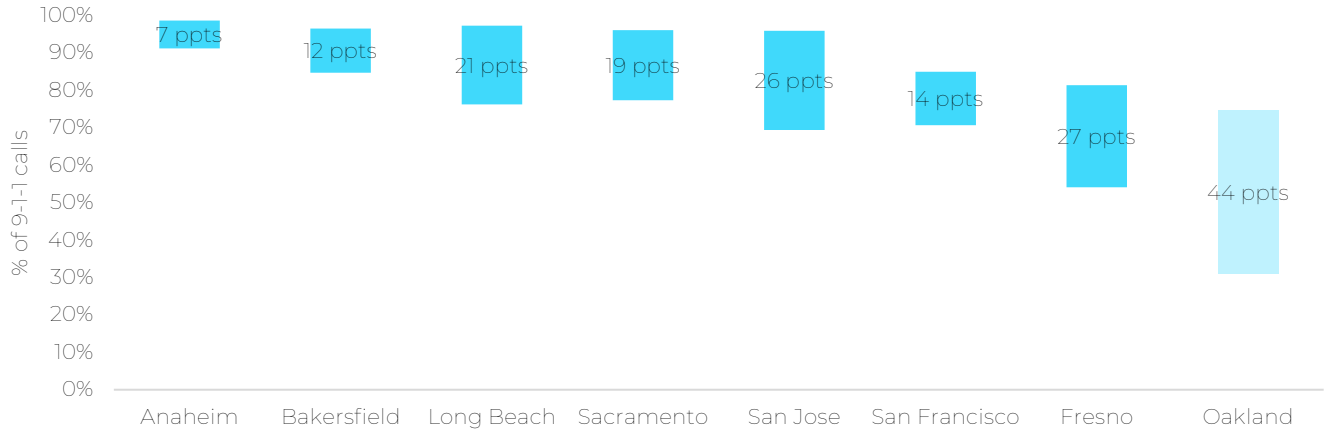
Exhibits 13: Oakland's Percent of 9-1-1 Calls Answered Within 15 Seconds Drops Dramatically and Fluctuates throughout the Day More than Other Jurisdictions



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) from 2014 to 2023. Notes: We compared the Oakland Police Department to police or equivalent emergency communications centers in these cities, selecting these cities based on similar populations, crime rates, proximity (shared labor market), and input from the Police Department. As described within Appendix A, Long Beach and San Francisco have consolidated emergency communications centers that handle both police and fire/medical emergency calls. Benchmarking data uses 2023 data since we submitted our request to CalOES before adjusting the audit scope to include 2024.

In 2023, San Francisco answered between 71 and 85 percent of 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds. San Jose ranged between 69 and 96 percent. Oakland, however, experienced the largest range in performance, with a minimum of 31 percent and a maximum of 75 percent, or a range of 44 percentage points. Exhibit 14 displays these ranges.

Exhibit 14: In 2023, the Police Department's proportion of 9-1-1 Calls Answered Within 15 Seconds Varied the Most Compared to Peer Agencies.



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Notes: We selected benchmark cities based on similar populations, crime rates, proximity (shared labor market), and input from the Police Department. As described within Appendix A, Long Beach and San Francisco have consolidated emergency communications centers that handle both police and fire/medical emergency calls. Benchmarking data uses 2023 data since we submitted our request to CalOES before adjusting the audit scope to include 2024.

Slower Response Times are Associated with Higher Likelihood of Canceled Calls, Officers Unable to Locate a Suspect or Caller, and Callers Disconnecting before Reaching a Call Taker

Emergency 9-1-1 communications is a vital service for residents seeking law enforcement support to respond to situations that involve violence or the potential for harm to life and property. Timely processing of 9-1-1 calls enables officers to respond as soon as possible. Delays in picking up 9-1-1 calls lead to delays in officer response.

These longer response times are associated with higher occurrences of canceled calls, as well as calls resulting in the officer being unable to locate the reporting party, situation, or suspect. In 2022, Priority 2 calls that were ultimately canceled had a median response time 2.2 hours than calls for which officers arrived and took reports for a reported crime.[15] Similarly, Priority 2 calls

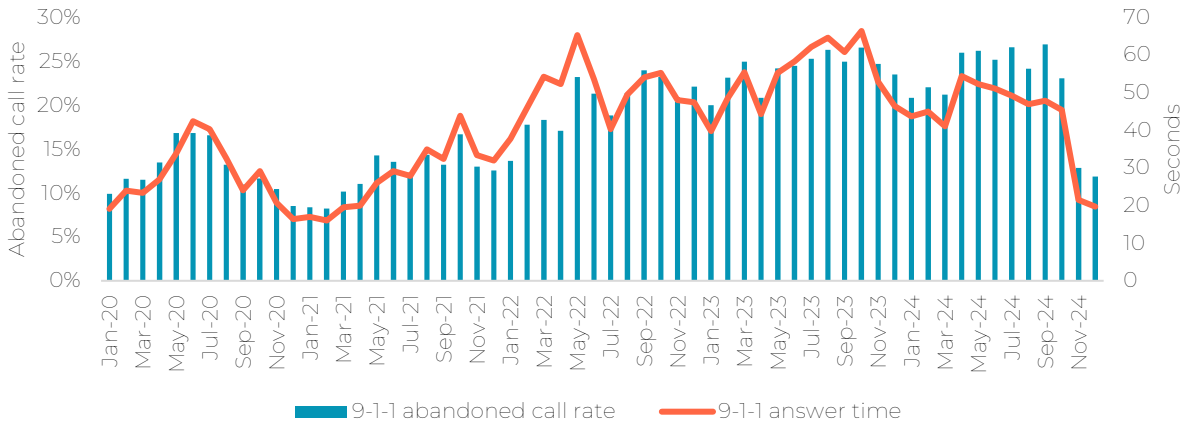
[15] Calls with the dispositions "Canceled," "Unable to Locate" and "Gone on Arrival" were compared to the disposition "Report Taken – Arrest," which indicates that a report was taken and an arrest was made. We use 2022 data because that was the most recent year with complete data on dispositions. Notably, there are likely other factors that affect the differences in call dispositions; for instance, calls that result in the arrest of a suspect may also be due to the nature of a call, in addition to officers showing up more quickly than calls that pose less urgent threats. Causal analysis that accounts for these other factors is needed to estimate the impact of response times on determining the outcome of a call.

for which officers were unable to locate the reporting party or situation, or the suspect was gone on arrival had median response times of 11 and 24 minutes longer than calls for which officers took a report.

These delays can also cause frustration. During a sit along at the Police Emergency Communications Center, one caller expressed frustration while waiting for an officer to arrive, having previously called 9-1-1 to report the incident. The dispatcher reported that it had taken about 11 minutes for the officer to arrive. Staff report that people frequently redial 9-1-1 to check on the status of their call. This increases call volume.

In addition, slower answering speeds reduce callers' ability to request emergency response in the first place. As shown in Exhibit 15, the rate of "abandoned calls"—calls that are disconnected before reaching a 9-1-1 call taker—tends to increase with longer wait times (i.e., when the proportion of calls answered within 15 seconds is smaller).[16] This relationship means that longer call answering times reduce the Department's ability to respond to emergencies within the community.[17] While some calls may disconnect due to misdials, others may be related to actual emergencies.

Exhibit 15: 9-1-1 Callers are More Likely to Hang Up Before Answer When There are Longer 9-1-1 Call Answer Times



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports obtained from the Police Department from January 2020 to December 2024. Note: Abandoned call rate is the percent of calls that are disconnected before they are answered by a call taker.

The Police Department Has Experienced Persistent Vacancies

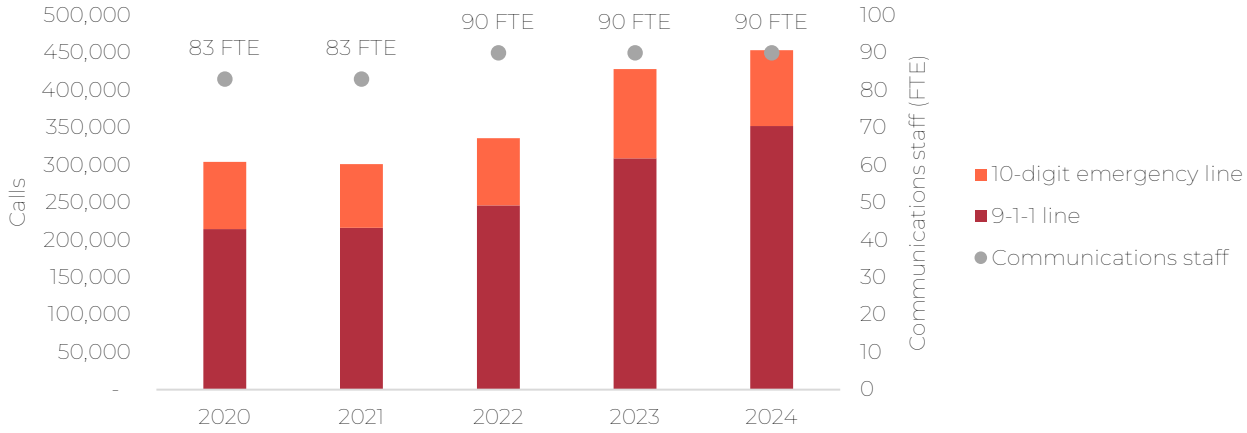
The Police Department does not have enough staff to answer 9-1-1 calls within state standards. In 2019, a staffing study projected that the Department's Emergency Communications Center

[16] We calculated Pearson's R, or correlation coefficient, to assess the strength of the relationship between abandoned 9-1-1 calls and call answer times. This statistical metric ranges from -1 to 1, with 1 indicating the two terms are perfectly correlated and -1 indicating they are perfectly negatively correlated. The correlation coefficient between the rate of abandoned 9-1-1 calls and 9-1-1 call answer times from January 2020 to December 2024 was 0.92.

[17] According to the Department, the Police Emergency Communications Center conducts call backs for abandoned calls and in some cases may dispatch an officer to investigate.

needed a minimum of 105 fulltime positions—15 supervisors and 90 dispatchers—to handle call and dispatch workload. Since then, overall call volume has increased but the Department's authorized staffing levels for Communications staff remain below the staffing study's original recommendation of 105 FTE (fulltime equivalent positions) of dispatchers and supervisors.

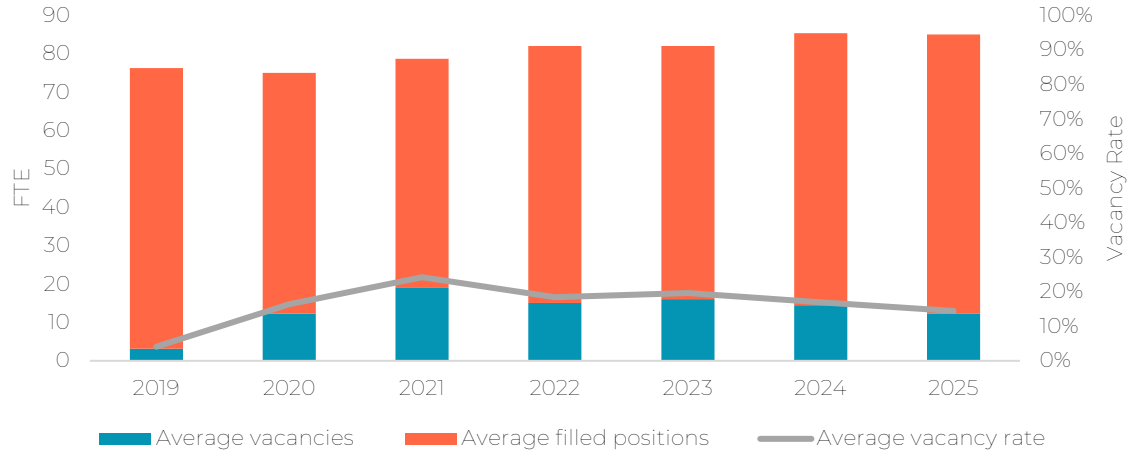
Exhibit 16: Incoming Call Volume on Emergency Phone Lines has Increased while Authorized Communications Fulltime Equivalent Positions (FTE) have Remained Relatively Constant.



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the Police Department and Citywide staffing reports from 2020 through 2024. Staffing numbers include dispatchers, operators, senior dispatchers, supervisors, and the Police Communications manager.

Vacancy rates, defined here as the proportion of unfilled authorized positions (including frozen positions), have slightly declined since 2021 but are still higher than in 2019. From 2019 to 2020, the Communications Division experienced a rise in vacancy rates in entry-level and senior dispatcher positions, from 4 percent to 16 percent. From 2020 to 2025, the rate has ranged between 14 and 24 percent. In 2021, when the vacancy rate was at its peak, nearly one in four entry-level and senior dispatcher positions were vacant.

Exhibit 17: The Vacancy Rate among Dispatchers Peaked in 2021



Source: Auditor analysis of Citywide staffing reports from 2019 to 2025. Note: Positions include entry-level and senior-level positions as well as frozen positions. Yearly estimates are averages of monthly values.

Vacancies in Dispatcher Positions Hinder the Police Emergency Communications Center from Meeting its Minimum Staffing Standards

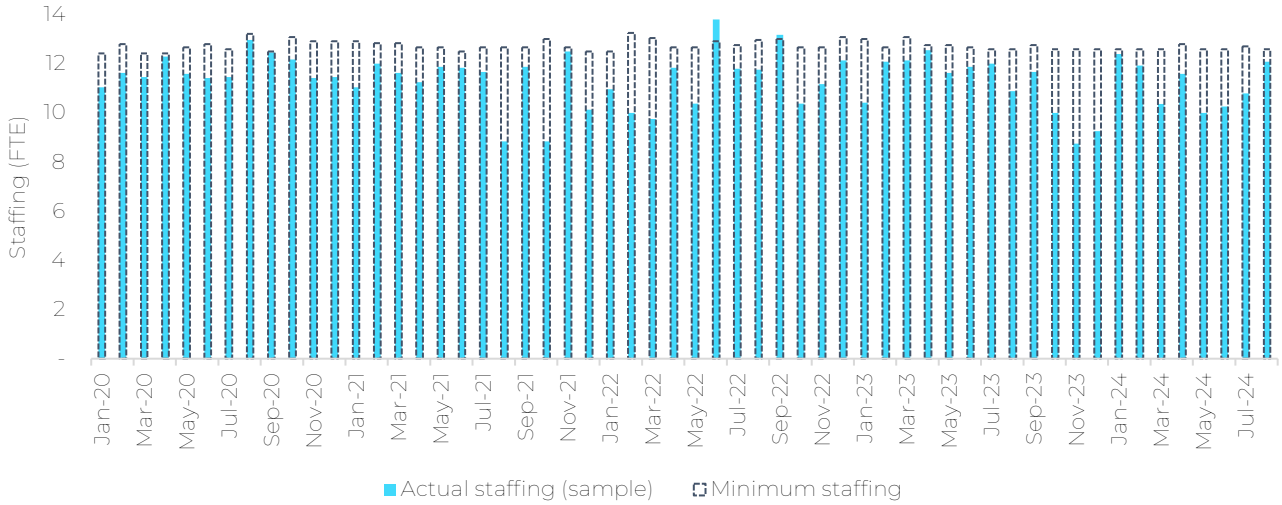
Vacancies mean there are fewer dispatchers to meet the minimum staffing standards of the Police Emergency Communications Center. These standards inform how the Emergency Communications Center assigns staff to shifts throughout the day. Generally, minimum staffing ranges from 9 to 14 dispatchers, which allows Communications staff to rotate among two radio positions, two service positions, and call taking roles, with support from the on-shift Communications Supervisor.[18] Dispatchers and operators typically work four 10-hour shifts that are staggered to provide different levels of staffing throughout the day.

Since 2020, actual staffing in the Emergency Communications Center has consistently been below minimum staffing levels. On average, actual staffing for a given hour was 1.4 FTE (fulltime equivalent positions) below minimum staffing.[19]

[18] The two positions for radio and service desk each support the Bureaus of Field Operations 1 (West) and Bureau of Field Operations 2 (East).

[19] Based on auditor analysis of a sample of shift sheets of the Emergency Communications Center. This sample was created by randomly selecting one day per month from January 2020 to August 2024 and comparing actual to minimum staffing levels for each hour throughout the day for all selected days. While a single day may not necessarily be representative of the entire month, the results suggest at times the Emergency Communications Center is unable to meet the minimum staffing standards.

Exhibit 18: Even with Overtime, the Emergency Communications Center is Consistently Not Able to Meet its Minimum Staffing Standards



Source: Auditor analysis of a sample of shift sheets at the Police Emergency Communications Center. Note: This sample was created by randomly selecting one day per month from January 2020 to August 2024. We recorded actual and minimum staffing levels for each two-hour period for all selected days. A single day may not necessarily be representative of the entire month.

The Police Emergency Communications Center has had Insufficient Staffing Levels

Staffing has been a historical challenge for the Police Emergency Communications Center. The 2017 Audit of the Police Department's 9-1-1 Call Operations highlighted staffing difficulties as a driver of the Department's low performance and recommended that the Department take steps to improve the hiring process.[20] Subsequent reports by the Alameda County Grand Jury in 2020 and 2024, as well as a 2019 police staffing study, also found that the Emergency Communications Center was continuing to experience staffing shortages.

Vacancies May Result in Overtime to Fill Shifts, Increasing the Likelihood of Staff Burnout

In 2017, entry-level and senior-level dispatchers worked an average of 10 hours of overtime per dispatcher per week, resulting in 521 total hours of overtime. The number of overtime hours tends to decrease when there are more dispatchers; in 2021, 59 dispatchers worked a total of 452 hours of overtime, or 8.7 hours of overtime per dispatcher per week. In 2023, 72 dispatchers accumulated 361 total hours of overtime, or 6.9 hours of overtime per dispatcher per week.

[20] These recommendations include having the Police Department take on hiring functions with oversight, establishing and tracking recruiting timelines, offering hiring and retention incentives, and developing flexible staffing options, such as on-call and part-time positions to reduce overtime. The Police Department reports that dispatchers receive a $500 bonus once they successfully complete probation and that the City Administrator has authorized the Department to hire 10 more dispatchers in addition to authorized positions to maintain sufficient staffing.

Using overtime can result in higher costs, with the overtime pay rate being 1.5 times the rate of one's regular pay. Moreover, using mandatory overtime tends to reduce job satisfaction and increase turnover. Longer shifts result in fatigue, which can slow productivity and make staff susceptible to human error, which can present safety risks to the public. Dispatchers at both the Oakland Police and Fire Emergency Communications Centers cited overtime as a significant factor affecting their job satisfaction. One dispatcher stated that the current levels of overtime lead to "no work-life balance" and "a lot of burned-out dispatchers."

Staff at multiple jurisdictions reported that high rates of overtime had significantly negative impacts on staff. To address this issue, one agency aims to limit the number of hours a staff member is asked to stay beyond their regular shift to 1.5 to 2 hours. Another agency allows staff to commit to longer 12-hour shifts for a month in voluntary overtime, which is preferred to mandatory overtime.[21] One agency restructured their vacation bidding process to limit the amount of overtime it used to fill in for staff on vacation. Each of these approaches seek to build predictability for both staff and management.

Insufficient Staffing Levels Also Affect Dispatch and Service Functions

In addition to affecting 9-1-1 call answering speeds, insufficient staffing levels impact other roles in the Emergency Communications Center. The Police Department typically divides service, dispatch, and radio functions by assigning different dispatchers to support the East and West Bureaus. However, lack of staffing has sometimes led the Department to merge these responsibilities citywide. For instance, the Emergency Communications Center may staff only one service desk, rather than two, which creates a bottleneck for officers to complete calls.[22] In these situations, Police communications staff must handle essentially double the workload.

Other Jurisdictions have Difficulty Maintaining Sufficient Levels of Communications Staff

Bakersfield, Sacramento, San Jose, and San Francisco also report experiencing or having experienced difficulties hiring and retaining dispatchers. In a 2024 national survey published by the National Emergency Number Association, 82 percent of surveyed emergency communications centers reported struggling with vacancies. However, despite common staffing challenges, benchmark jurisdictions have done better than Oakland (see Exhibit 13), suggesting that other factors may be affecting the Police Department's performance.

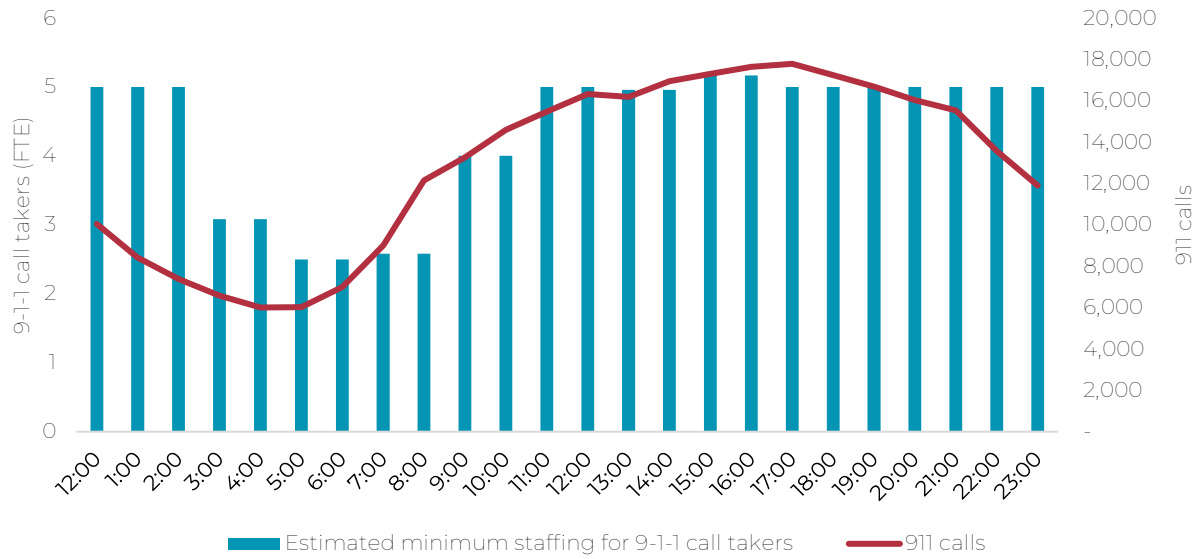
[21] Voluntary overtime tends to be preferable for both staff and management, as it allows both to plan ahead and for staff to earn more by willingly working overtime hours. Mandatory overtime, on the other hand, offers less flexibility in scheduling and may arise suddenly due to unexpected absences.

[22] As described in the Background, staff at the service desk provide administrative support to officers, such as sharing information about warrants, stolen vehicles, and tow requests.

Minimum Staffing Standards of the Emergency Communications Center are Not Based on Current Call Volume

Staff report the Emergency Communications Center's current minimum staffing standards were set several years ago and have not been updated to reflect current call volume. For instance, Exhibit 19 shows Police call taker staffing is at its highest levels from 12:00am to 2:00am, during which 9-1-1 calls are about 8,000 calls lower than the average day's peak call volume.

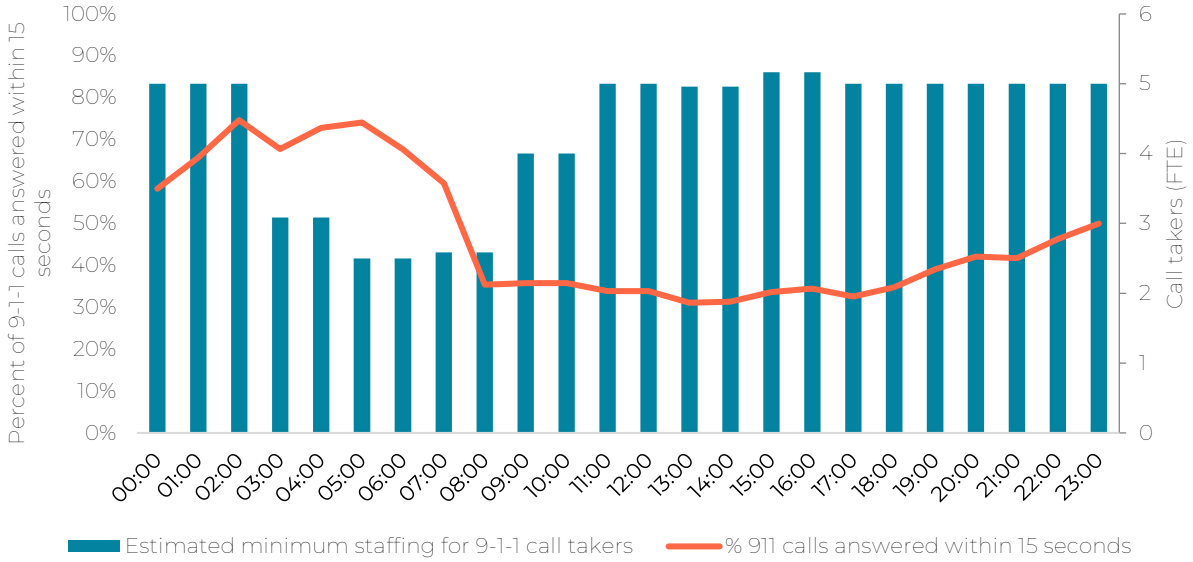
Exhibit 19: Minimum Staffing at the Emergency Communications Center is Not Consistently Calibrated to Call Volume, Resulting in Uneven Performance



Source: Auditor analysis of minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers based on shift sheets and reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Note: The Department did not offer a breakdown of minimum staffing by role so we estimated minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers by subtracting four FTE (fulltime equivalents)—two for dispatch, two for service desks—from total minimum staffing and dividing the remaining number by half, since non-emergency call volume was roughly half of emergency call volume in 2023.[23]

[23] Non-emergency call volume has since declined with the implementation of the Police Department's automated non-emergency phone tree in February 2024. See Exhibit 29.

Exhibit 20: Performance Drops Dramatically from 5:00AM to 8:00AM, When Minimum Staffing Levels are the Lowest



Source: Auditor analysis of minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers based on shift sheets and reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Note: The Department did not offer a breakdown of minimum staffing by role so we estimated minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers by subtracting four FTE—two for dispatch, two for service desks—from total minimum staffing and dividing the remaining number by half, since non-emergency call volume was roughly half of emergency call volume in 2023.

Staff note that there are other factors in addition to call volume that determine appropriate staffing levels. For instance, the Police Emergency Communications Center may open additional radio channels for critical incidents during evening hours, which would need additional staff to adequately support these radio functions.

The outdated standards affect the performance of the Emergency Communications Center. Exhibit 20 shows how a mismatch between minimum staffing and call volume reduces the rate of calls answered within state standards. From 5:00AM to 8:00AM, minimum staffing is at the lowest levels while call volume increases. And despite higher levels of minimum staffing later in the day (i.e., 11:00AM onwards), performance remains consistently low. These disparities suggest that the Communications Division can better calibrate minimum staffing standards to 9-1-1 call volume.

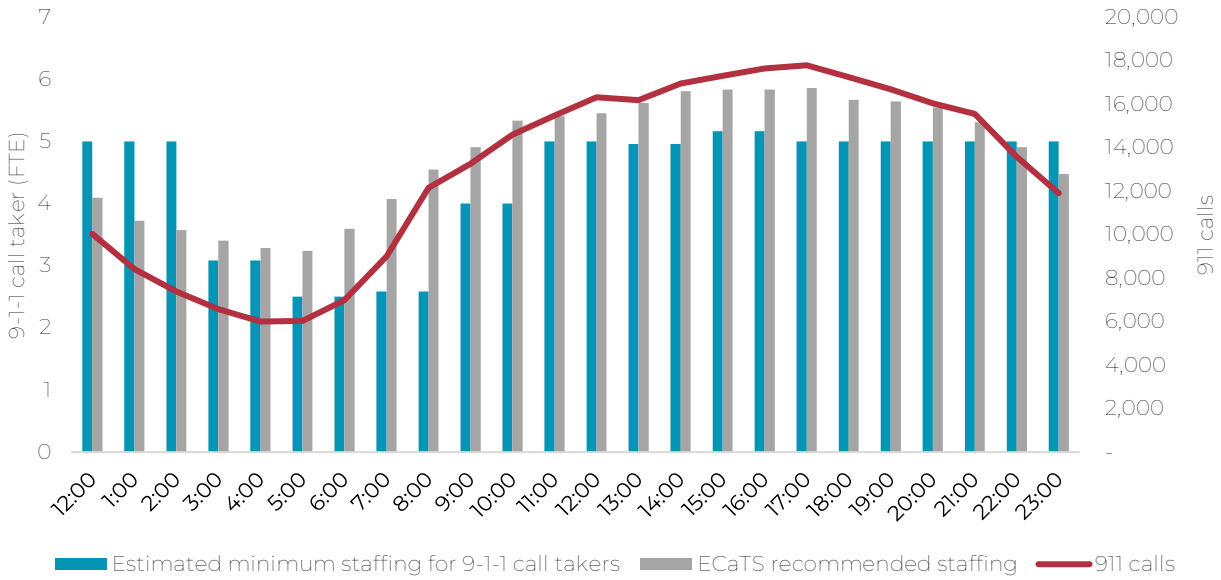
The State's Staffing Software Provides Better Staffing Predictions Free of Charge

Oakland should use a minimum staffing model that considers call volume, such as the one included in the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS). The state's model uses an agency's historical 9-1-1 call volume to predict staffing levels needed to maintain call answering

speeds within state standards and is free to local agencies.[24] The Sacramento and San Jose police departments reported using this model to determine appropriate call taker staffing. Other jurisdictions, like San Francisco, report using call volume to set schedules and minimum staffing.

As shown in Exhibit 21, as compared to the minimum staffing standards of the Police Emergency Communications Center, the staffing levels recommended by the state's model are a smoother fit with 9-1-1 call volume. The model proposes higher levels of staffing from 3:00AM to 9:00PM and lower levels of staffing from 10:00PM to 2:00AM.

Exhibit 21: Staffing Recommendations from State-Provided Software Fits Call Volume Better Than the Minimum Staffing Standards of the Police Emergency Communications Center



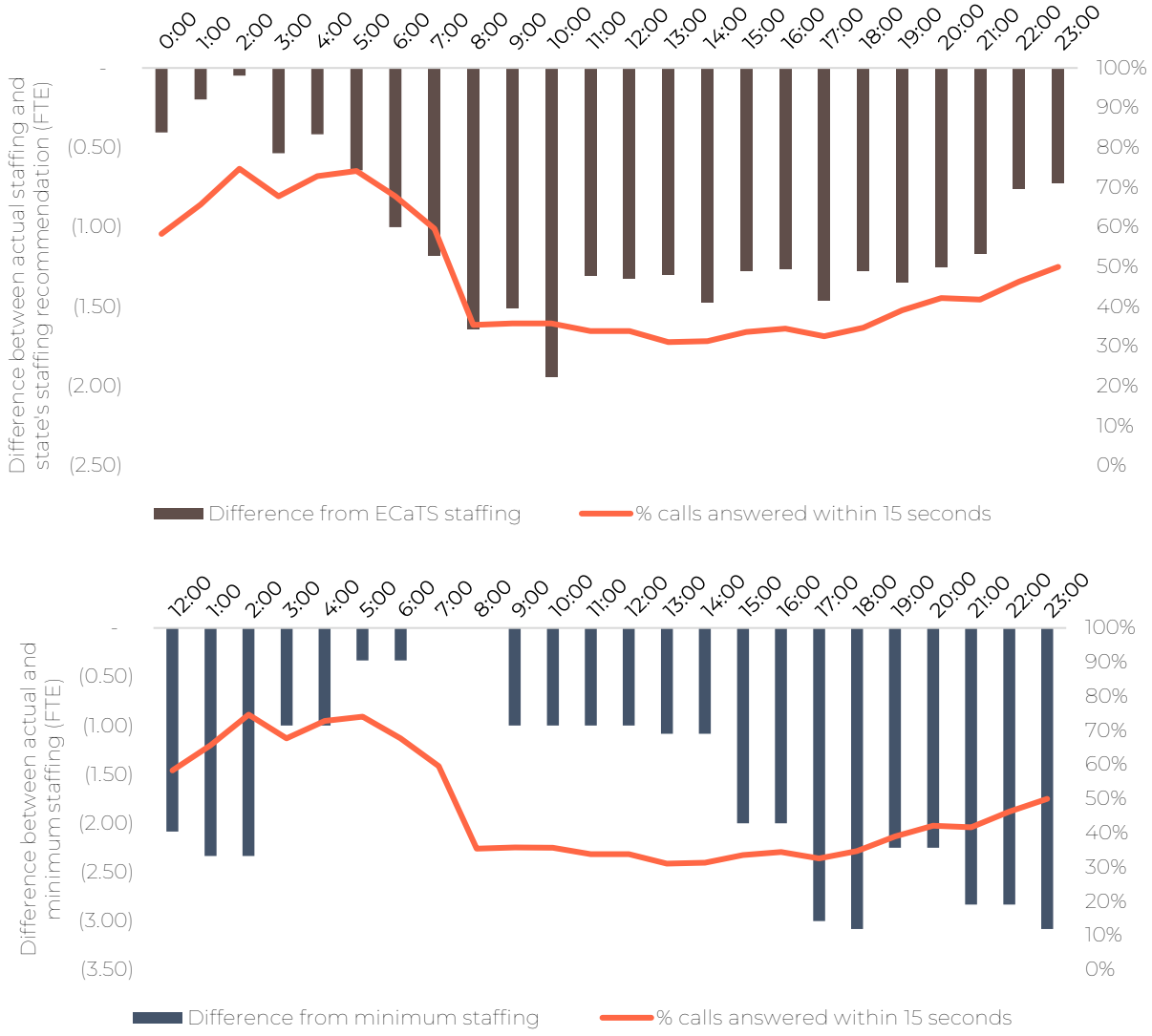
Source: Auditor analysis of minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers based on shift sheets and reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Note: The Department did not offer a breakdown of minimum staffing by role so we estimated minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers by subtracting four FTE—two for dispatch, two for service desks—from total minimum staffing and dividing the remaining number by half, since non-emergency call volume was roughly half of emergency call volume in 2023.

The staffing levels recommended by the state's model is also more predictive of Oakland's performance, with greater deviations from the state's recommendations associated with lower performance. For instance, at 8:00AM, the Police Emergency Communications Center answered an average 35 percent of calls within 15 seconds, 25 percentage points below state standards. According to the state's model, the Emergency Communications Center was understaffed by 1.64

[24] The state's Emergency Call Tracking model only provides estimates for staff needed to handle incoming 9-1-1 calls and does not include other phone lines (i.e., 10-digit emergency and non-emergency lines). However, a call volume-based approach would apply to these as well.

FTE (fulltime equivalent positions), but the Police Department's minimum staffing standards indicated that the Emergency Communications Center was not understaffed.[25]

Exhibit 22: State Software Staffing Recommendations Were More Predictive of Actual Performance than Minimum Staffing Standards in 2023



Source: Auditor analysis of actual, minimum, and recommended 9-1-1 call taker staffing levels based on shift sheets and reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Note: For visual consistency, the bars for 7:00 AM and 8:00 AM were not included but slightly positive (0.08 FTE). The Department did not offer a breakdown of minimum staffing by role so we estimated minimum staffing for 9-1-1 call takers by subtracting four FTE—two for dispatch, two for service desks—from total minimum staffing and dividing the remaining number by half, since non-emergency call volume was roughly half of emergency call volume in 2023.

[25] For both 7:00AM and 8:00AM, the Police Emergency Communications Center was actually slightly overstaffed by 0.08 FTE.

Overall, the state's model recommends a higher level of staffing by an average of 0.44 FTE per hour. Based on this model, the Communications Division can reallocate shifts to better match forecasted call volume.

Given its staffing challenges, the Communications Division should continue prioritizing hiring dispatchers to fill existing vacancies, as recommended in the 2017 audit and 2019 staffing study. In addition, the Division should revise its minimum staffing standards to be based on call volume, using the state's staffing recommendations as guidance. The Division should also use relevant workload measures to determine minimum staffing for other positions as well, such as dispatch/radio and service desk positions.[26]

Recommendation 1: The Police Communications Division should adjust minimum staffing to reflect call volume, using the staffing recommendations from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) as guidance. As part of this, the Division needs to revisit the current shift structure and adjust as needed to ensure that schedules reflect call volume and staffing needs to achieve state 9-1-1 call answering targets.

Call Takers Do Not Consistently Let Callers Know that Their Incident Was Sent to Dispatch

According to staff, factors that increase talk time include the nature of a call, callers not knowing what information to provide, or providing extraneous detail. Talk time increases when callers become agitated. While dispatchers are trained to deescalate and obtain essential pieces of information to assess situations, we observed callers becoming upset when they did not know when police would arrive. Increased talk time can have cascading effects on subsequent calls, as it reduces call taker availability to answer other calls in the queue.[27]

Unlike dispatchers in other jurisdictions, like San Francisco and Berkeley, Oakland's dispatchers do not consistently inform callers when their call has been sent to dispatch. To improve customer service and minimize talk time, the Police Emergency Communications Center should establish a practice of letting callers know when their call has been sent to the dispatch desk.

Recommendation 2: The Police Communications Division should establish a practice of letting callers know when their incident has been referred to dispatch.

[26] The Department's 2019 staffing study of its Emergency Communications Center discusses factors to consider in assessing the number of positions on radio dispatch, including number of emergencies and radio talk-groups.

[27] We also observed callers call into 9-1-1 again to check on the status of their call, due to the length of time it takes for officers to attend to calls for service. Dispatchers do not have this information (in part because they do not have visibility into an officer's location, as discussed in Finding 3).

FINDING 2: Limited English Speakers Encounter Service Delays Due to a Limited Number of Bilingual 9-1-1 Call Takers

Summary

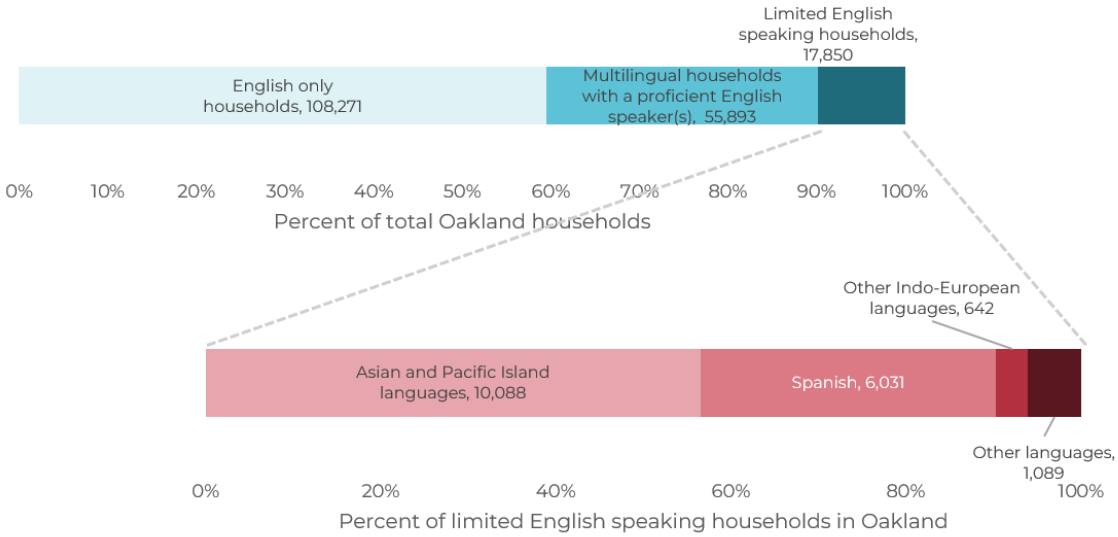
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 41 percent of Oakland's over 180,000 households speak a language other than English. About 10 percent of Oakland households were limited English speaking households in 2024. The City's Equal Access to Services Ordinance (Ordinance) requires City departments to ensure the same quality of service to limited English speakers of major languages in Oakland—currently Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin. The Oakland Police Department currently uses both bilingual-certified call takers and third-party interpreters to handle calls from limited English speakers. The number of 9-1-1 calls the Emergency Communications Center receives from limited English speakers is not reviewed or reported. Based on data from the third-party interpretation provider contracted by the state, the Emergency Communications Center requested interpreters for more than 17,000 9-1-1 calls in 2024. Most calls—96 percent—were for Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin interpreters. Emergency calls that use interpreters are longer than the average 9-1-1 call by five minutes. Not only does this delay impact response to the caller's emergency, but it also delays response times for other calls in the queue. To address this inequity, the Police Department should track and report on the number of calls it receives from limited English speakers, adjust its targets of bilingual dispatchers in the Emergency Communications Center, maximize coverage of current bilingual dispatchers, and update its language access policy.

One in Ten Oakland Households Do Not Have an Adult that Is English Proficient

Oakland is a diverse city, with 41 percent of its over 180,000 households speaking a language other than English. Of these multilingual households, a quarter are limited English speaking. This means that one in ten Oakland households do not have an adult over 14 years old that identify as English proficient. [28] About a third of Oakland's limited English speaking households speak Spanish and 57 percent speak an Asian or Pacific Island language. (See Exhibit 23.)

[28] The U.S. Census Bureau defines limited English speaking household as "one in which no member 14 years old and over: (1) speaks only English, or (2) speaks a non-English language and speaks English 'very well'."

Exhibit 23: One in Ten Oakland Households Are Limited English Speaking



Source: Auditor analysis of American Community Survey 1-year estimates for 2023 (US Census Bureau). Limited English speaking households are households in which there is no member over 14 years old that speaks English "very well."

Living in a limited English speaking household can pose a barrier for residents to access City services, including emergency services. Limited English speakers may sometimes have a member of their household who is English proficient call 9-1-1 on their behalf; however, limited English speaking households do not have this option.

The Equal Access to Services Ordinance Requires City Departments to Ensure the Same Level of Service for Limited English Speakers of Certain Languages

To reduce barriers to accessing City services, the City Council passed the Equal Access to Services Ordinance (Ordinance) in 2001 which requires City departments to ensure language accessibility in public-facing services to limited English speaking residents. The ordinance specifies:

> *Utilizing sufficient Bilingual Employees in Public Contact Positions, Departments shall provide information and services to the public in each language spoken by the Substantial Number of Limited English Speaking Persons Group(s). Departments comply with their obligations under this Section if they provide the same level of service to members of the Substantial Number of Limited English Speaking Persons Group(s) as they provide English speakers.*

The Ordinance defines "Substantial Number of Limited English Speaking Persons Group" as populations of at least 10,000 Oakland residents who speak a common language other than English. In FY 2023-24, these were Spanish and Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin).

To accomplish the goal of providing "the same level of service" to limited English speakers, the Ordinance outlines several measures departments should take, including hiring bilingual staff, translating materials, and providing oral interpretation. In addition, the Ordinance requires the City Administrator to submit an annual report to the City Council regarding the City's compliance with the Ordinance. City administrative policy (Administrative Instruction 145) provides details on the implementation of the Ordinance across the City.

The Police Department Is Making Efforts to Recruit Spanish and Chinese-Speaking Staff but Falls Short of the Number of Chinese-Speakers It Seeks to Employ

According to the City's Equal Access to Services Ordinance Annual Compliance Report (Compliance Report) for FY 2023-24, the Police Department's goals for the proportion of Spanish and Chinese-speaking employees in its public contact positions were 11 percent and 5 percent, respectively. The Compliance Report indicated that the Department exceeded its goal for bilingual Spanish-speaking staff at 20 percent of public contact positions (175 fulltime equivalent positions). However, the Department did not meet its goal for Chinese-speaking staff, as only 4 percent of public contact positions were filled by staff who spoke Chinese.[29]

The Department cited a low number of Chinese-speaking applicants as a challenge to achieving its targets. To address this hurdle, the Department conducted outreach by distributing translated recruiting materials in certain areas of the city, such as Oakland's Chinatown; attending cultural and community events, such as the Chinatown Parade and Chinatown Safety Resource Fair; and collaborating with patrol officers assigned to the Fruitvale area, East Oakland, and Chinatown to expand community awareness of recruitment.

The Police Department Uses Both Bilingual Dispatchers and Third-Party Interpreters to Process 9-1-1 Calls from Limited English Speakers

When the Police Department receives a 9-1-1 call from a limited English speaker, the Department uses either a bilingual dispatcher or a third-party interpreter to process the call. The Compliance Report stated that the Communications Division had two Cantonese-speaking dispatchers, 15 Spanish-speaking dispatchers, and 1 Laotian speaking dispatcher.[30] Police dispatchers obtain these interpreters through a state-contracted vendor (CyraCom International, Inc.) by hitting a button to dial the vendor's phone number and requesting an interpreter.

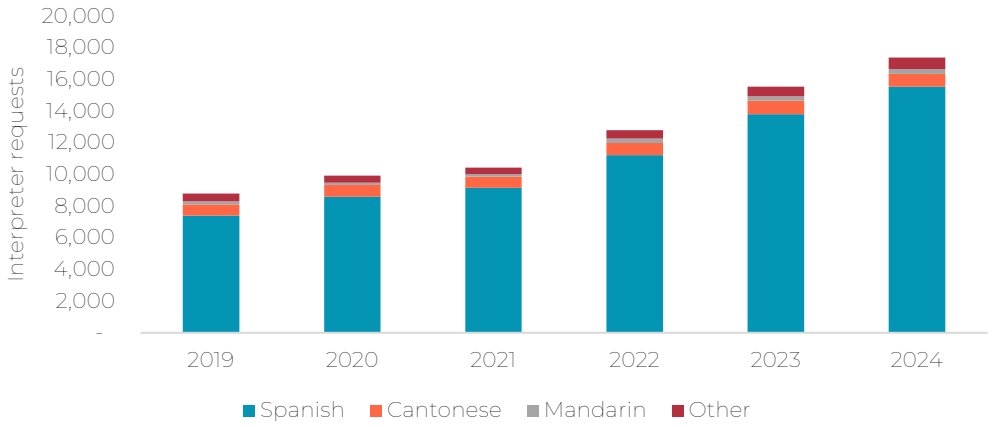
According to staff, dispatchers record in the call notes if a 9-1-1 call is from a limited English speaker. However, the Communications Division does not systematically track the total number

[29] Chinese-speakers include Cantonese and Mandarin speakers.

[30] All bilingual dispatchers except the Laotian speaker were reported as bilingual certified, meaning that they are permitted to interact with members of the public and receive bilingual pay for passing a written and oral exam given by the City. According to the labor agreement between the City and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 active from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2025, bilingual-certified Police and Fire dispatchers receive an additional $0.60 per hour for Level 1 skills (being able to communicate effectively with the public in a non-English language) or $1.20 per hour for Level 2 skills (for being able to translate conversations and written materials into a non-English language).

of these calls. The increase in the number of interpretation requests over time suggests that the number of calls from limited English speakers is growing (see Exhibit 24). From 2019 to 2024, the interpretation requests from the Police Department increased at an average annual growth rate of 15 percent.

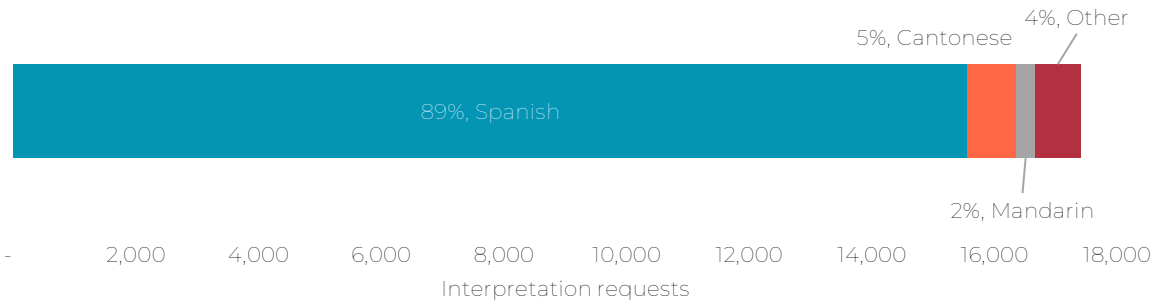
Exhibit 24: The Number of Interpreter Requests for 9-1-1 Calls Have Increased Since 2019



Source: Auditor analysis of yearly data from CyraCom International, Inc., the state's contracted vendor for 9-1-1 call interpretation. This data reflects all Police requests for third-party interpreters for 9-1-1 calls.

In 2024, the Police Emergency Communications Center used interpreters to handle more than 17,000 calls in 41 languages. Most of these requests (89 percent) were for Spanish interpretation, 5 percent for Cantonese, and 2 percent for Mandarin, as shown in Exhibit 25. The number of interpretation requests is equivalent to 6 percent of total Priority 1 through 4 calls in 2024.

Exhibit 25: Most 9-1-1 Interpretation Requests in 2024 Were for Spanish



Source: Auditor analysis of 2024 data from CyraCom International, Inc., the state's contracted vendor for 9-1-1 call interpretation. This data reflects all Police requests for third-party interpreters for 9-1-1 calls.

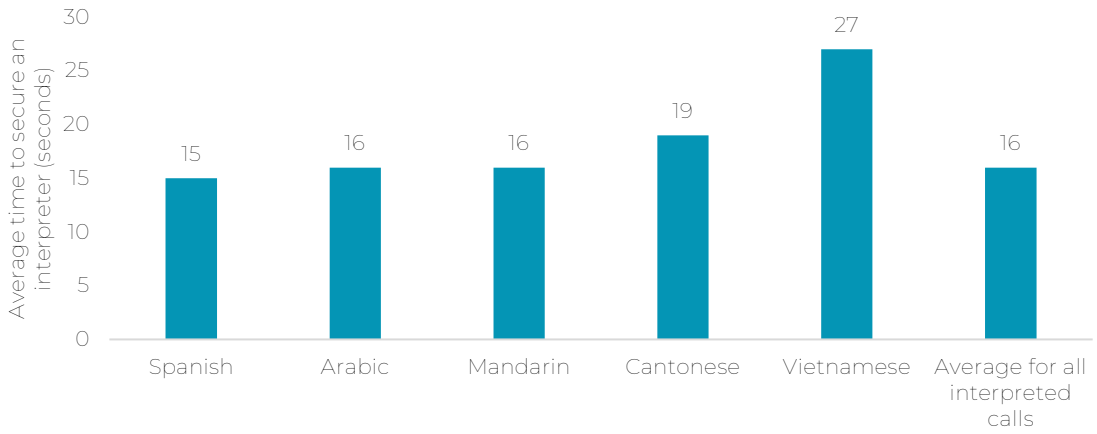
Using Interpreters Results in Longer 9-1-1 Calls

Interpretation creates delays because a dispatcher must first call the interpretation line to obtain an interpreter. The process of requesting an interpreter can take multiple steps, including

identifying the language and waiting for the interpreter to come on the line. The State contract with the third-party interpretation service requires the service to start interpretation within 60 seconds for certain languages (Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Russian) and 120 seconds for all other languages after the language has been identified.

Some languages take longer to secure an interpreter than others. For instance, in 2024 it took on average 15 seconds to connect to a Spanish interpreter and nearly half a minute (27 seconds) to secure a Vietnamese interpreter (Exhibit 26).[31]

Exhibit 26: It Took Nearly Twice as Long to Obtain a Vietnamese Interpreter as it did to Obtain a Spanish Interpreter

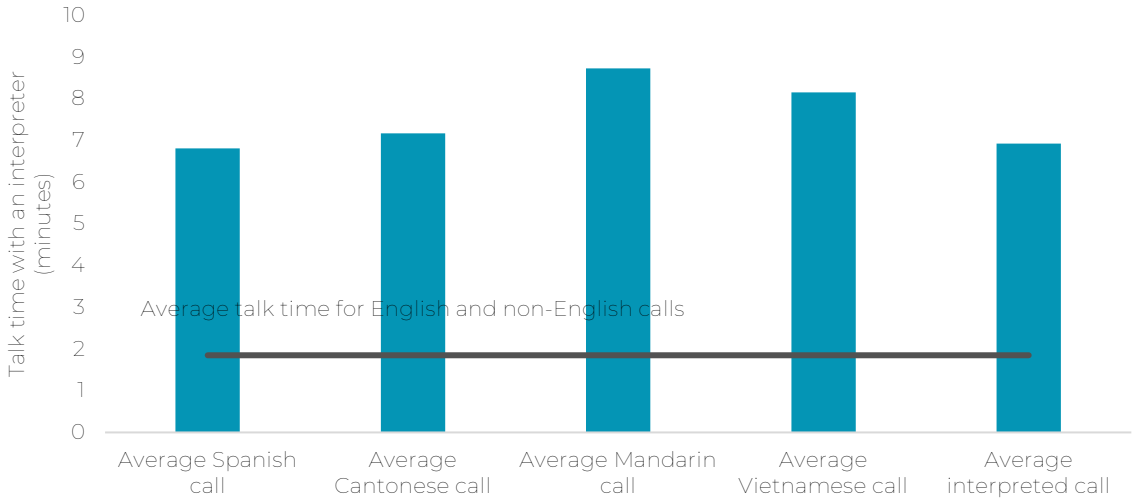


Source: Auditor analysis of 2024 data from CyraCom International, Inc., the state's contracted vendor for 9-1-1 call interpretation. This graph shows the five most common languages the Police Department requested third-party interpretation for 9-1-1 calls.

Interpretation itself causes delays as information must be repeated in both languages. In 2024, the average talk time for all 9-1-1 calls was about one minute and fifty seconds.[32] By comparison, interpreted calls lasted an average of six minutes and 55 seconds, longer than the average call by five minutes, as shown in Exhibit 27.

[31] After Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin, Vietnamese was the most commonly requested language for interpretation. In 2024, the Police Department made 200 requests for Vietnamese interpretation.
[32] This value was calculated by taking the weighted average of talk time per hour as reflected in monthly ECaTS reports for 2024, then taking the average of the monthly averages.

Exhibit 27: In 2024, Interpreted Calls Lasted Five Minutes Longer Than the Average 9-1-1 Call



Source: Auditor analysis of 2024 data from CyraCom International, Inc., the state's contracted vendor for 9-1-1 call interpretation. This data reflects all Police requests for third-party interpreters for 9-1-1 calls.

Various studies have found that using interpretation causes delays in 9-1-1 response. A 2012 study by the University of Washington that reviewed responses to 9-1-1 medical calls found that using an interpreter increased response time to medical calls by as much as 125 percent. Another study in 2021 found that limited English speakers experienced statistically significant delays in dispatch times for emergency services in England compared to callers that did not experience a language barrier, likely due to the use of third-party interpretation.

Another disadvantage to using an interpreter is the potential to lose information in translation. Dispatchers who spoke another language but who were not City-certified as bilingual employees reported instances when interpreters did not convey information consistent with a dispatcher's understanding. A lack of precise interpretation can have implications for officer safety. For example, officers will respond differently to a car theft that has just occurred (a Priority 2 call) versus an in-progress carjacking (a Priority 1 call).[33]

We observed that dispatchers experienced difficulties when using interpreters. For instance, a Cantonese-speaking caller called 9-1-1 multiple times but repeatedly hung up before an interpreter was secured. The dispatcher was only able to instruct the caller in English to not hang up the phone.

Third-Party Interpreters Do Not Always Provide Quality Interpretation

The Police Department and other local agencies across the state obtain third-party interpreters through a contract between the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and

[33] Another study found that calls involving an interpreter are more stressful for dispatchers, and that the stress was related to challenges in assessing the situation for officer safety.

an interpretation service provider (CyraCom International, Inc.). The contract requires interpreters to:

- *Be trained thoroughly to provide 9-1-1 emergency interpretation services, and be prepared to efficiently transfer calls quickly and with a thorough understanding of the techniques that facilitate the transfer of information from one foreign language to another.*
- *Interpret accurately and precisely the message that is relayed in its entirety with the meaning preserved throughout the conversation. Information cannot be edited or deleted which erroneously changes the meaning of the interpretation or intent of the emergency caller.*

However, staff report that they have experienced issues with third-party interpreters. In one observation, one call taker, after using an interpreter for a 9-1-1 call, expressed frustration that the interpreter was creating delays by lingering on less than essential details. Although interpreters may receive some training related to emergency call taking, Oakland staff and staff of at least one other agency reported that interpreters do not perform at the level of fully trained emergency call takers.

The disadvantages of using an interpreter are compounded by delays in dispatch and overall response times, which are described in Finding 3. Using interpreters can also delay response times for other calls in the queue. Using a bilingual dispatcher instead of an outside interpreter would shorten talk time for 9-1-1 calls, as well as ensure more reliable information to dispatchers and in turn, the responding officers.

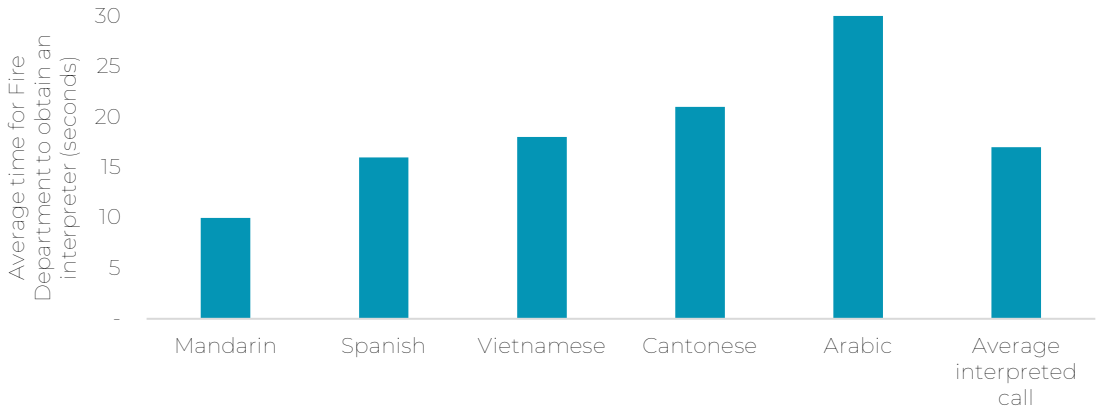
While the Department has certified bilingual dispatchers who can take emergency calls in Spanish and Cantonese, staff report that the annual shift assignment process is based on seniority, which means that there may be shifts when a bilingual call taker is not available. However, the City's labor agreement with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 (active through June 30, 2025) noted that the City may consider operational needs in assigning work schedules. The Department should consider ways to maximize coverage of bilingual call takers to ensure the same level of service for limited English speakers.

Recommendation 3: The Police Communications Division should develop a plan to maximize hourly coverage of bilingual dispatchers.

Disadvantages of Using an Interpreter Are Compounded for Callers with Fire or Medical Emergencies

Using a third-party interpreter creates ripple effects for callers with fire or medical emergencies. Police dispatchers do not routinely transfer interpreters with callers to the Fire Department. This practice means that callers must wait for the call taker at the Fire Emergency Communications Center to obtain another interpreter before proceeding with the call, which further delays emergency response (Exhibit 28).

Exhibit 28: Callers Transferred to the Fire Department May Need to Wait as Long as Half a Minute for Another Interpreter



Source: Auditor analysis of 2024 data from CyraCom International, Inc., the state's contracted vendor for 9-1-1 call interpretation. This graph shows the five most common languages the Fire Department requested third-party interpretation for 9-1-1 calls. In 2024, the Fire Department placed 51 requests for Mandarin, 576 requests for Spanish, 65 requests for Vietnamese, 160 requests for Cantonese, and 18 requests for Arabic interpretation.

Retaining the original interpreter over the course of the entire call (i.e., transferring the interpreter with the caller to the Fire Department) would eliminate the need to obtain a second interpreter, reducing delays.

The Police Department Is Required to Assess the Number of Bilingual Staff Needed to Provide the Same Level of Service in the Most Commonly Spoken Languages in Oakland

City administrative policy (Administrative Instruction 145) implements the Ordinance and requires both the Oakland Police and Fire departments to regularly conduct quantitative assessments to determine whether there are enough bilingual staff to provide the same level of service to members of the public who speak the most common non-English languages, as to English speakers. In addition, the departments are required to conduct a qualitative assessment at least every other year to review whether they are providing an equivalent quality of service to both English and limited English speakers. These assessments are intended to inform targets for sufficient levels of bilingual staff in each threshold language.

As of FY 2023-24, the Police Department's target for the number of bilingual staff in the Communications Division was one (1) FTE for Spanish and Chinese each. Although the Communications Division exceeded that target with two certified Cantonese-speaking and 12 Spanish-speaking dispatchers, the target itself of one dispatcher is not enough to ensure availability twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The number of interpretation requests reflects the unmet need for a bilingual call taker.

Ensuring language access for Chinese speakers is complicated by Cantonese and Mandarin being substantially different dialects. Although Chinese is listed as a single language in the City's annual

Compliance Reports, the City needs bilingual speakers for both dialects to meet community demand.

Recommendation 4: The Police Communications Division should adjust its target for bilingual dispatchers (based on regular assessments required by the City's Administrative Instruction 145) towards an equivalent level of service for emergency calls in languages spoken by limited English speakers with more than 10,000 residents.

The Police Department's Language Access Policy Does Not Describe How Dispatchers Should Handle 9-1-1 Calls from Limited English Speakers

The Police Department's language access policy, Training Bulletin VIII-R, describes that the Department "shall take reasonable steps to ensure timely and accurate communication and access to all individuals regardless of primary language."

This policy describes various situations in which Police staff may need an interpreter, such as during an investigative interview, search, or other interactions with the public. It also identifies various individuals who can serve as potential interpreters, including bilingual certified City staff, third-party interpreters, family members, and neighbors. The policy does not identify 9-1-1 calls among potential scenarios for an interpreter and how a dispatcher would handle an emergency call from a limited English speaker.

Officers Are Not Always Aware When a Caller Is a Limited English Speaker

Dispatchers do not consistently inform officers if the caller is a limited English speaker, which can delay officers from taking timely action to address a call when they are on scene. We observed an officer who was not aware that they were responding to an incident involving a Spanish-speaker. In this case, the officer happened to understand and speak Spanish. If the officer had not fortuitously understood and spoke Spanish, they would not have been able to communicate with the caller when they arrived. Having dispatchers relay a caller's spoken language to the responding officer would help them be more prepared to respond effectively to a call.

Call takers currently employ practices to enhance language accessibility such as prioritizing bilingual dispatchers over a third-party interpreter when possible. The Department's written language access policy should reflect these practices and describe what dispatchers should do if they encounter a limited English speaker. Formalizing these processes can standardize expectations and provide greater assurance that limited English speakers have access to effective emergency response.

The policy should direct dispatch staff to limit interruptions when transferring an emergency call to the Fire Department (i.e., ensuring the interpreter is also transferred with the caller) and informing officers if a caller is a limited English speaker.

Recommendation 5: The Police Department should update its policies to include existing and/or best practices in language accessibility, such as its current practice of prioritizing the use of bilingual dispatchers over third-party interpreters, as well as streamlining the transfer of interpreted calls to the Fire Department so that interpreters are not dropped, and informing officers or police service technicians when they are responding to calls involving limited English speakers.

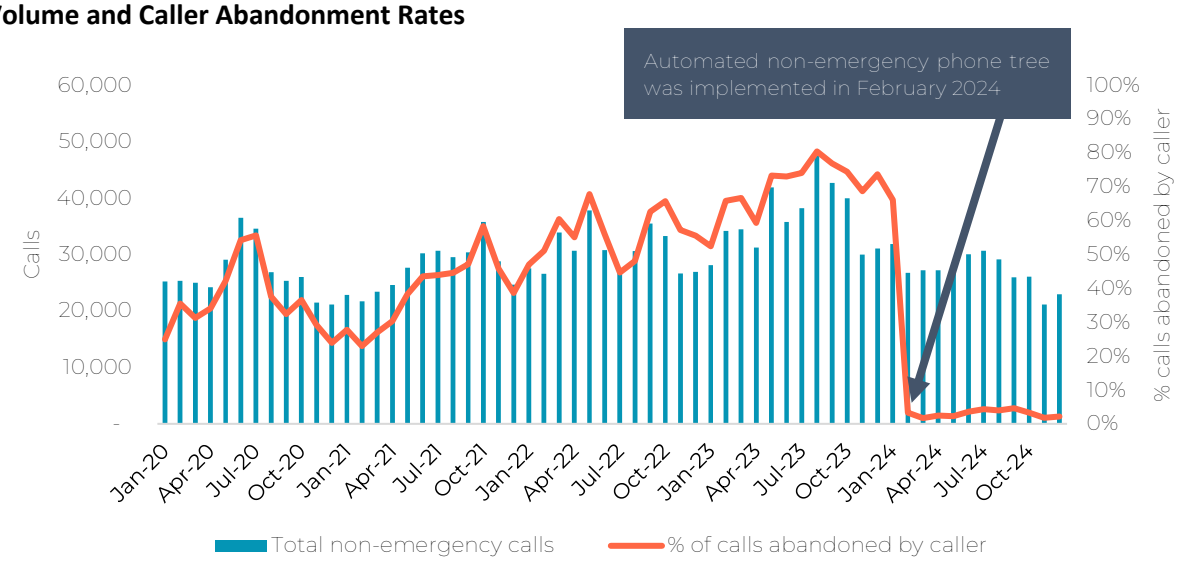
Having bilingual dispatchers handle calls would more closely resemble the service provided to English speaking callers, bringing the Department closer to the City's goal of providing "the same level of service" to limited English speakers. The Department should regularly assess and report on the number of 9-1-1 calls received from limited English speakers, how many were processed by bilingual dispatchers, and how many used an interpreter. Such a report could help the Department monitor language access needs and track its progress towards providing equitable service to Oakland's diverse communities. As part of this effort, there may need to be adjustments to the call taking process to readily collect this information. In addition, the Department notes that its current CAD system does not have a means to systematically track which calls are from limited English speakers, so this functionality may need to wait for the next system upgrade.

Recommendation 6: The Police Department should analyze and report on its progress towards the City's policy goal of providing the same level of service for limited English speaking populations to an appropriate oversight body, such as the City Council's Public Safety Committee. These reports should include the number of 9-1-1 calls from limited English speakers by language and call response times compared to other calls.

The Police Department Implemented an Automated Phone Tree for Non-Emergency Calls but It Is Not Fully Translated

In February 2024, the Police Department implemented an automated phone tree on its non-emergency line that reduced non-emergency call volume. This phone tree provides various options to callers before connecting to a Police dispatcher. The phone tree offers to connect callers to the City's 3-1-1 line, Police Records Division, Animal Control, and MACRO (the Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland). Following the implementation of this automated phone tree, call volume on the non-emergency line dropped by 16 percent from January to February 2024. Over that same period, the rate of non-emergency calls that disconnected before reaching a Police dispatcher (i.e., abandoned calls) decreased from 66 percent to 3 percent, as shown in Exhibit 29.

Exhibit 29: The Police Department's Non-Emergency Phone Tree Successfully Decreased Call Volume and Caller Abandonment Rates



Source: Auditor analysis of Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) reports from January 2020 through December 2024 obtained from the Police Department.

The newly implemented phone tree is not fully translated. Although the description of various options is available in Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin, the initial greeting—which communicates to the caller that the phone tree is available in other languages—is only in English.

The City's Equal Access Ordinance requires departments to "maintain recorded telephonic messages" in each language spoken by more than 10,000 residents and states that these messages should provide basic information, including the availability of language assistance. Staff report that they are taking steps to translate this greeting to ensure that limited English speakers can access the phone tree in Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

Recommendation 7: The Police Communications Division should translate the initial greeting of the Department's non-emergency phone tree into threshold languages as defined by the Equal Access to Services Ordinance.

FINDING 3: A Lack of Response Time Targets and Outdated Beat Boundaries Reinforce Disparities in Overall Response Times

Summary

The Police Department lacks response time targets. Having targets can help the Department define its response time goals, measure its progress, and inform staffing levels. The San Jose Police Department, for instance, defines response time targets for Priority 1 and Priority 2 calls, including call processing, queuing, and travel times, and has reported annually on its performance. Having standards like these can help identify bottlenecks and inequities in response times. We found disparities in police response times between the City's West Bureau of Field Operations (BFO 1) and East Bureau of Operations (BFO 2), with the East Bureau having longer Priority 2 response times than the West Bureau. Due to the City's outdated beat geography, fewer officers in the East Bureau handle a higher call workload. The City should redraw its police beat boundaries for a more equitable workload that can promote more equitable response times across the city. Moreover, the Police Department can further enhance its response times to Priority 1 calls by activating GPS (global positioning system) technology that is currently installed in patrol cars and using this technology to dispatch the nearest officer to an emergency call.

The Police Department Does Not Currently Have Response Time Targets

The Police Department does not currently have targets for its response times. The 2025 Police Staffing Study by the Office of Inspector General analyzed the Department's baseline staffing and staff reported that this baseline staffing was not necessarily reflective of the Department's goals. The Police Staffing Study stated that the next step would be to identify goals and outcomes the Department should achieve.

Setting measurable performance targets enable an organization to assess its progress towards achieving its objectives. Management should define objectives that are measurable so that they can assess progress toward achieving those objectives.[34] These objectives should be "in alignment with the organization's mission, strategic plan, and performance goals," as well as "measurable"—in other words, allow an organization to track their progress towards achieving their objective.

Other jurisdictions set performance targets. The San Jose Police Department (San Jose) defines targets for components of its response times. As seen in Exhibit 30, San Jose sets targets for call processing, queuing, and driving times for both Priority 1 and Priority 2 calls. The Department then reports its progress relative to these targets. San Francisco staff also reported that the San Francisco Police Department has response time targets for different priority calls.

[34] Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government, US Government Accountability Office (updated September 2014).

Exhibit 30: The San Jose Police Department Has Adopted Response Time Targets

Emergency Call Stage	Priority 1 Calls	Priority 2 Calls
Processing Time Target	< 1.5 min	< 1.5 min
Queuing Time Target	< 0.5 min	< 3.5 min
Driving Time Target	< 4 min	< 6 min

Source: Annual Report on City Services, FY 2023-24 (San Jose City Auditor), Police chapter.

Like San Jose, the Police Department could adopt targets for various stages of its response times. With recent scrutiny around response times in Oakland, setting response time targets would provide a benchmark to communicate what is considered a "reasonable" response time.[35]

The Police Department did not confirm if there was a regular, formal process to report on Police response times. Both the San Jose and Berkeley police departments report on response time performance at least annually. Not doing so hinders the ability of the Police Department, the City Council, and the public to track and assess response time performance. Regularly reporting response times would allow the Department to identify potential bottlenecks, their effects, and how to allocate additional resources to reduce response times.[36]

Recommendation 8: The Police Department should adopt targets for each stage of its response times, set a process to revisit these targets as needed, and regularly report on its performance.

Response Times to Priority 2 Calls Are Longer in the East Bureau than in the West Bureau Due to Lower Officer Availability

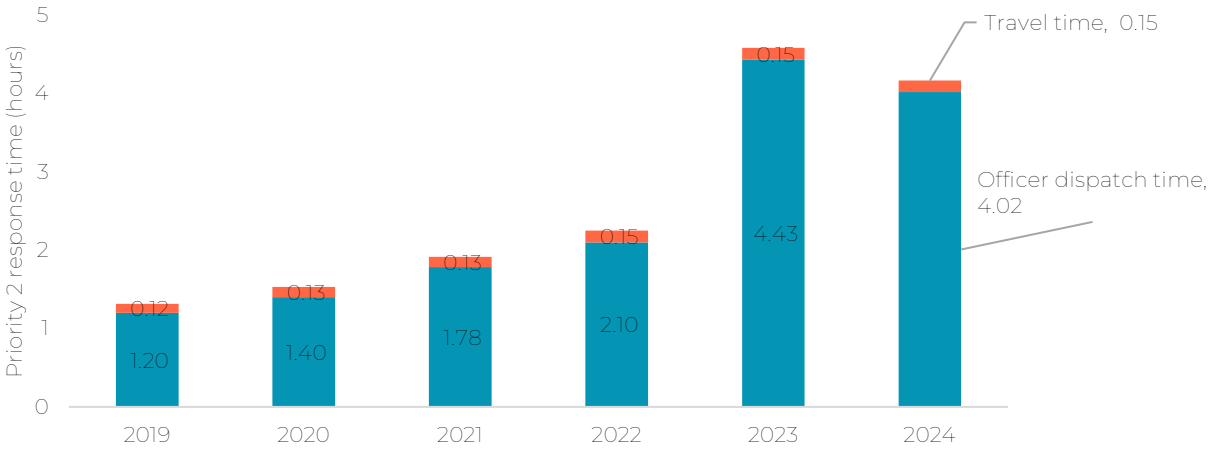
The Bureau of Field Operations (BFO) is divided into two sections: West Bureau (BFO 1) and East Bureau (BFO 2). The West Bureau oversees beats 1 through 19 and the East Bureau is responsible for beats 20 through 35. (See Appendix B for detail).

From 2019 to 2024, the East Bureau experienced longer response times than the West Bureau for Priority 2 calls. Priority 2 calls in 2022 were about half of total Police responses to Priority 1 through 4 calls.[37]

Overall, response times to Priority 2 calls have increased (Exhibit 31). In 2019, the median response time for Priority 2 calls was 2.25 hours. Most of this time is officer dispatch time, which is largely determined by when an officer becomes available to address the call.

[35] The Alameda County Grand Jury released reports on Oakland's response times in June 2020 and June 2023 and this office published an audit of the Oakland Police Emergency Communications Center in November 2017.
[36] For instance, call processing times are driven by communications staff while travel times are driven by sworn officers.
[37] In 2022, the Police Department responded to nearly 65,000 Priority 2 calls, or 53 percent of total officer responses to Priority 1 through 4 calls. CAD data for 2023 and 2024 had relatively low rates of dispatch and arrival times so response times may not be reflective of actual performance. This issue was also noted in the Office of the Inspector General's report on police staffing.

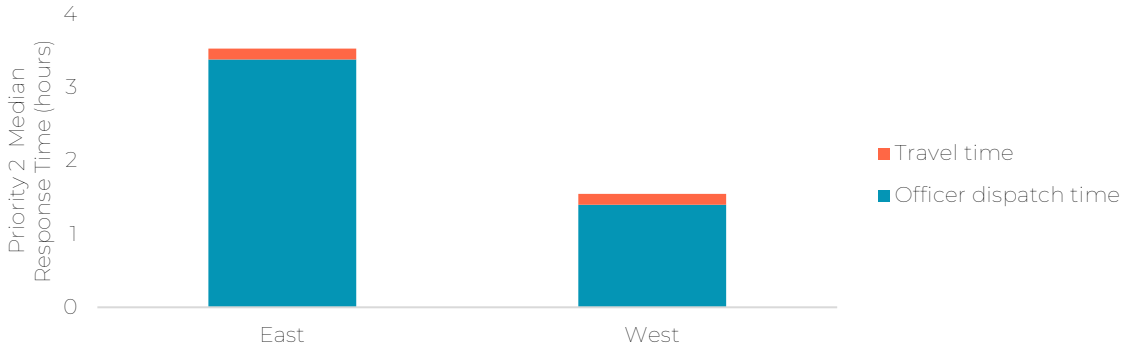
Exhibit 31: Median Response Times to Priority 2 Calls Have Increased



Source: Auditor analysis of data from 2019 through 2024 from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years and may not be reflective of actual performance (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller.

Priority 2 response times vary geographically, with the East Bureau experiencing longer response times than the West Bureau. In 2022, the median time to dispatch for Priority 2 calls in the East Bureau was two hours longer than West Oakland (see Exhibit 32).[38]

Exhibit 32: In 2022, Slow Priority 2 Response Times in the East Bureau Were Driven by Longer Officer Dispatch Times



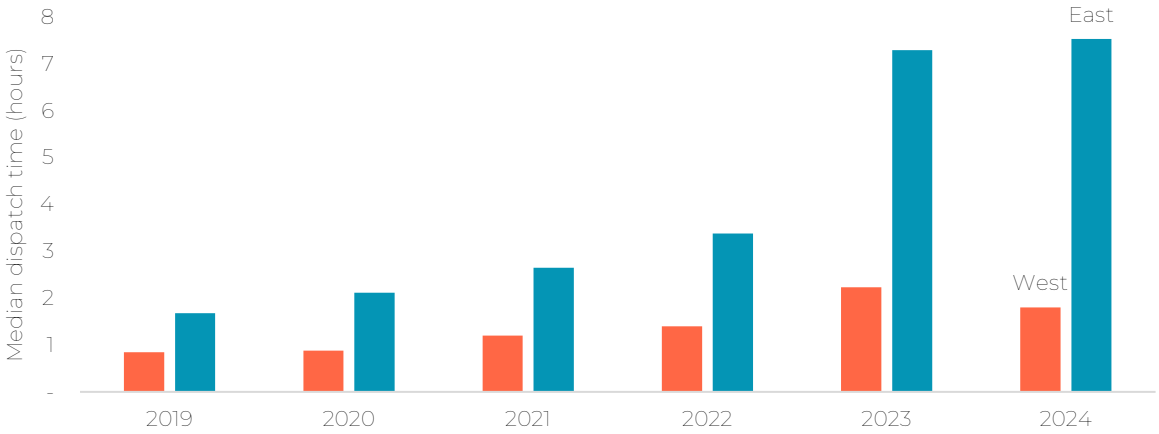
Source: Auditor analysis of 2022 data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller.

[38] The West Bureau had a median time to dispatch for Priority 2 calls of 84 minutes (1.4 hours) and the East Bureau had a median time to dispatch of 203 minutes (3.4 hours).

Differences in Officer Dispatch Time Drive the Disparity between Priority 2 Response Times in the East and West Bureaus

The difference in Priority 2 response times across the East and West Bureaus are driven by a higher officer dispatch time in the East Bureau. Officer dispatch time measures how long it takes for a call to get assigned to an officer and is primarily a reflection of officer availability (i.e., when an officer becomes available to respond to a call). From 2019 to 2022, officer dispatch times increased in the West Bureau by 65 percent, while officer dispatch times in the East Bureau approximately doubled over that same period (Exhibit 33).

Exhibit 33: Disparity in Median Response Times to Priority 2 Calls in the East and West Bureaus Has Grown



Source: Auditor analysis of data from 2019 through 2024 from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years and may not be reflective of actual performance (see Box 4).

Priority 2 Calls Are Generally Dispatched within a Patrol Area Rather than Citywide

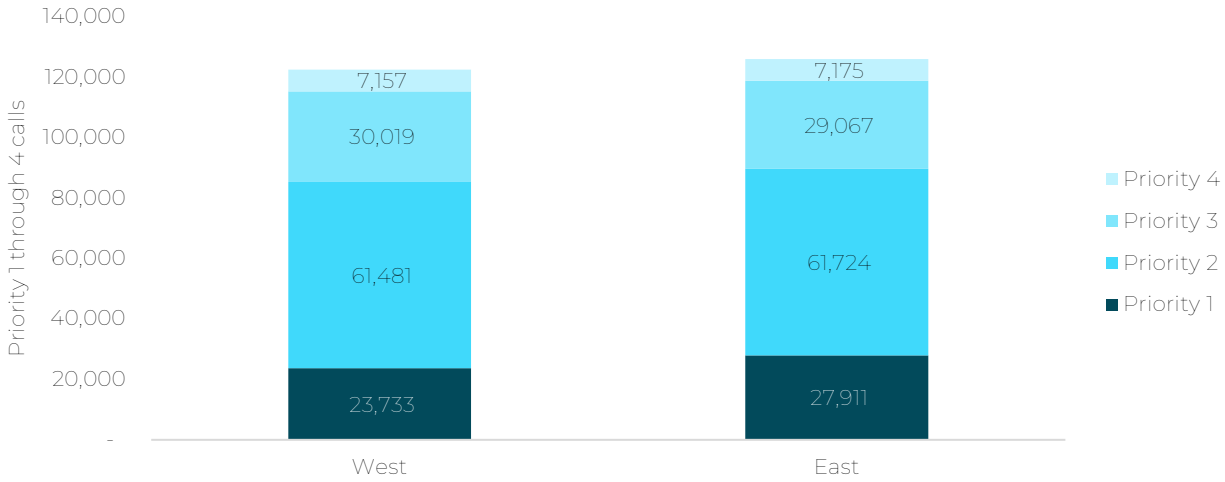
Unlike Priority 1 calls, for which dispatchers can dispatch any officer in the city without needing to obtain authorization from command staff, Priority 2 calls are generally dispatched within a single Patrol Area.[39] When cross-dispatching Priority 2 calls (i.e., dispatching a unit from one Patrol Area to respond to a call in another Patrol Area), dispatchers must obtain authorization from command staff of both areas. This policy means that officer responses to Priority 2 calls are more limited to the capacity of officers within the Patrol Area.

The disparity in dispatch times across the East and West Bureaus can be attributed to a variety of factors, including differences in call volume, the types of calls, number of officers, and a backlog of calls. Although overall call volume in 2022 was similar in the East and West Bureaus, the East

[39] A Patrol Area consists of multiple beats. The West Bureau oversees Patrol Areas 1 through 3, and the East Bureau oversees Patrol Areas 4 through 6. See Appendix B for a map.

Bureau had fewer officers to respond to a greater number of Priority 1 calls and calls involving violence, which typically take longer and more officers to address (Exhibit 34).[40]

Exhibit 34: Though Overall Volume of Priority 1 Through 4 Calls Were Similar in 2022, the East Bureau Had 4,000 More Priority 1 Calls

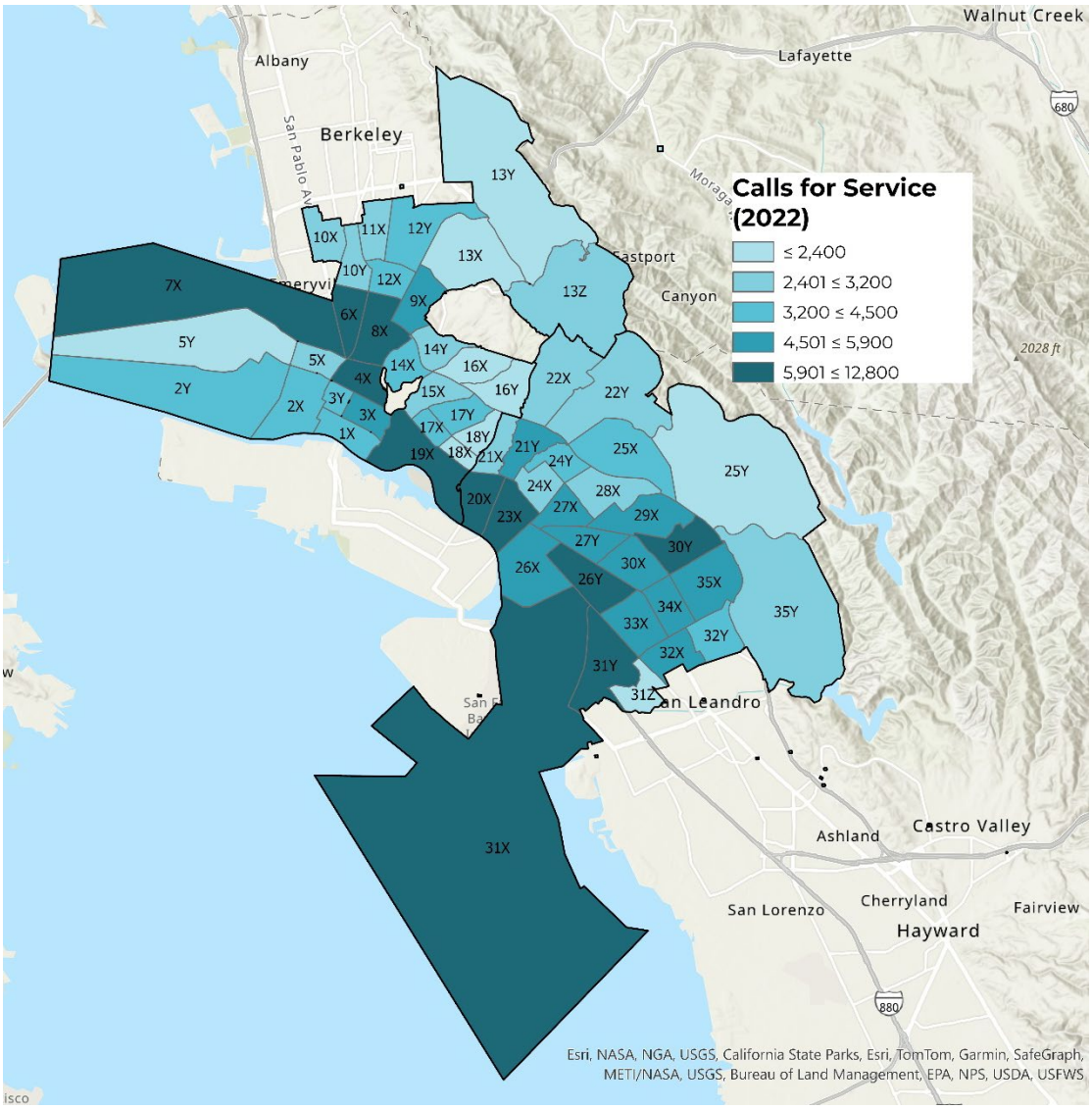


Source: Auditor analysis of 2022 data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller.

The Police Department divides Oakland into 35 geographic beats, with 19 beats under the Department's West Bureau and 16 beats under the Department's East Bureau. The number of police calls (Priority 1 through 4) per beat varies across the city (Exhibit 35).

[40] Police staff note that the difference in call types may partially explained by areas overseen by the East Bureau being more residential than areas under the jurisdiction of the West Bureau.

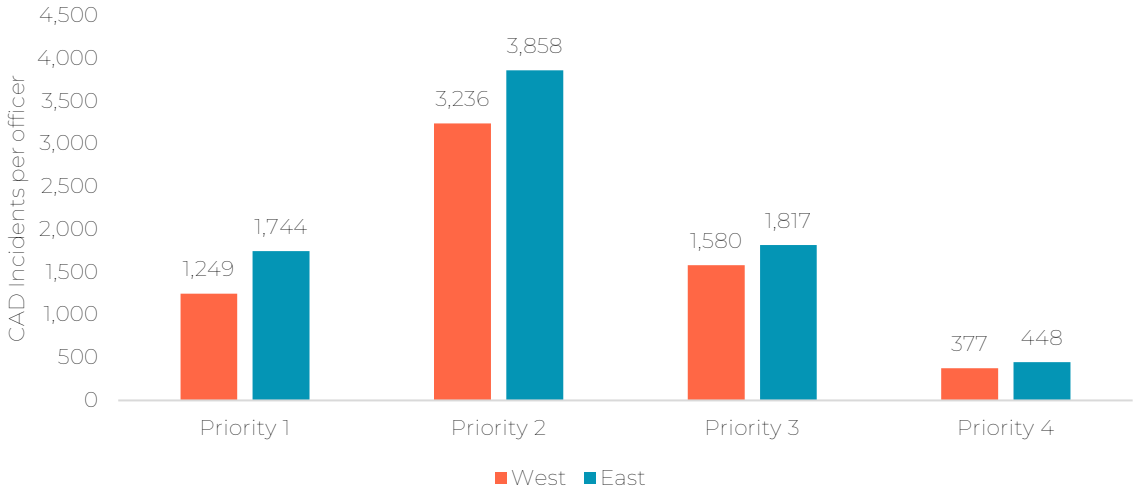
Exhibit 35: Police Calls for Service Varied across Oakland Beats in 2022



Source: Auditor analysis of Police calls for service (Priorities 1 through 4) for 2022 based on data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller. The East Bureau oversees all beats to the east of 20X, 21X, 21Y, 22X, and 22Y.

When adjusting for differences in the number of patrol officers, the East Bureau had 495 more Priority 1 calls and 622 more Priority 2 calls per officer than in the West Bureau in 2022 (Exhibit 36).

Exhibit 36: The East Bureau Had More Priority 1 through 4 Calls per Patrol Officer in 2022



Source: Auditor analysis of 2022 data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). Numbers are based on one patrol officer per beat. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller.

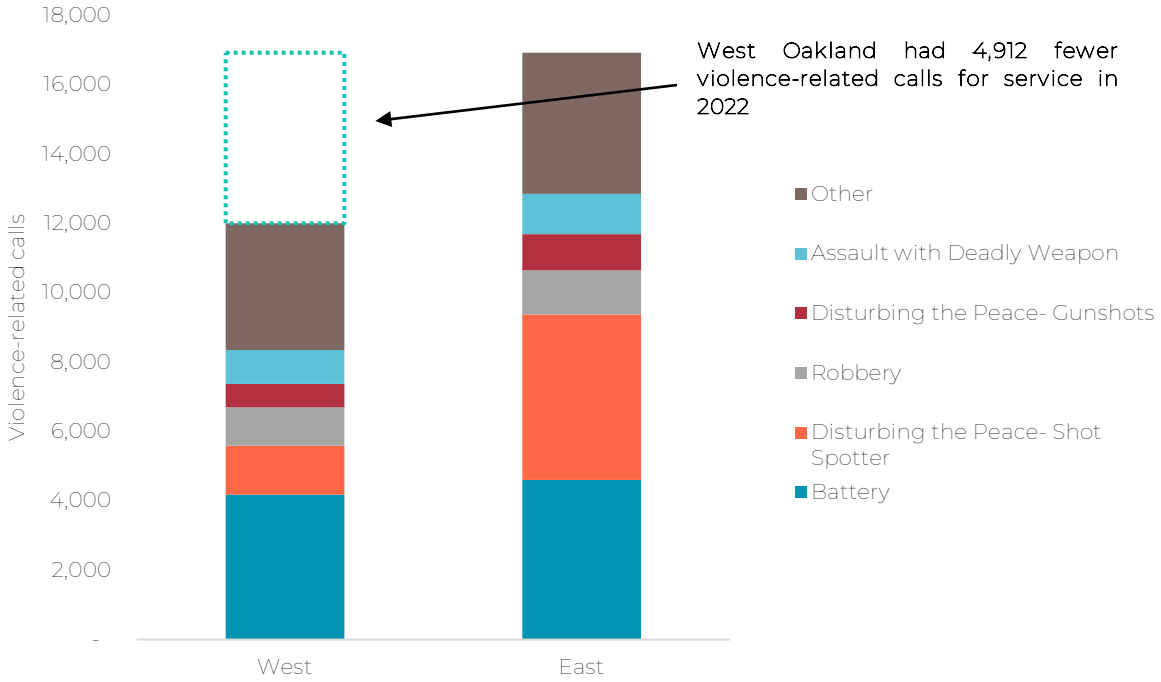
Priority 1 calls often take longer to address than Priority 2 calls. In 2022, Priority 2 calls took a median of 24 minutes to address and Priority 1 calls took a median of 56 minutes. With more calls, the East Bureau had 4.8 hours more of Priority 2 call workload per week per officer, and 8.9 hours of Priority 1 call workload per week per officer.

The East Bureau Has More Incidents Involving Violence

In 2022, the East Bureau had 4,912 more incidents involving violence (as categorized by the Police Department), resulting in an average of 1.7 times more violence-related calls per officer (Exhibit 37). Compared to other types of calls, violence-related calls take a median of 19 more minutes to address.[41] Assuming at least two officers respond to these calls results in an additional 60 hours of officer time per week to address this workload.

[41] The Department categorizes incident types into the following categories: Admin, Alarms, Disorder, Disturbance, Domestic-related, Follow-up/Service, Interpersonal-other, Medical, Mental, Missing Persons, Property, Suspicious, Traffic-related, Vice, and Violence.

Exhibit 37: The East Bureau Had More Violent-Related Calls than the West Bureau in 2022



Source: Auditor analysis of 2022 data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). Numbers are based on one patrol officer per beat. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller.

Appendix D provides a breakdown of calls by priority and call type.

Current Police Beats Contribute to More Workload per Officer in the East Bureau

Existing beat boundaries, with the East Bureau having 16 beats and the West Bureau 19 beats, contributes to a disparity in workload across the bureaus. With the Department seeking to assign at least one patrol officer per beat per shift, officers in the East Bureau must address a higher proportion of calls than officers in the West Bureau. This disparity results in a recurring backlog of calls; a delay in responding to one call affects the timeliness of the next response, and so on.

From an equity perspective, response times should not vary substantially based on where a person lives. Staff did not know when the City's police beats were last revised. The Department should adjust the beat boundaries to reflect current call workload. Ideally, the update should aim to close disparities in response times based on reliable data that considers relevant factors such as volume of violence-related calls, number of units responding, and other factors.

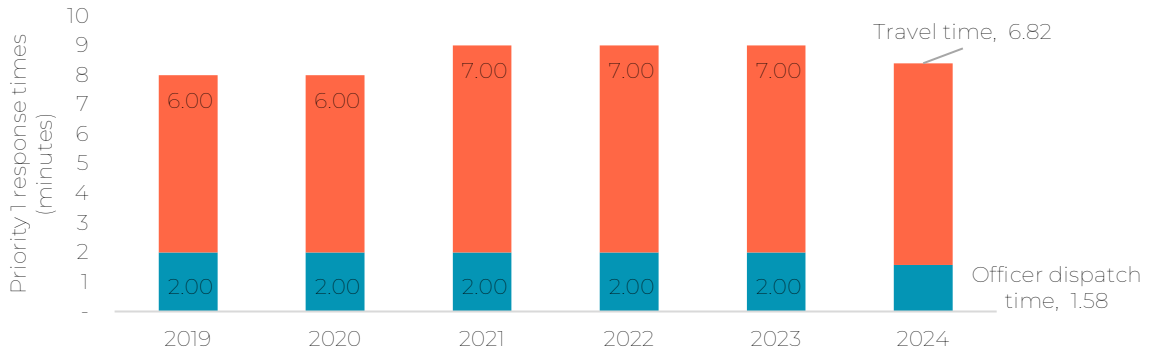
Recommendation 9: The Police Department should update beat boundaries, considering factors such as call volume, call types (e.g., calls involving violence) and priorities, and officer and supervisory capacity.

Police's Median Response Time to Priority 1 Calls Was Nine Minutes

As described in the Background, the Department categorizes Priority 1 calls as urgent situations that pose an immediate threat to life. Although officers are assigned to patrol specific beats, they respond to Priority 1 calls throughout the city as needed.

Since 2021, the Department's overall median response time to Priority 1 calls has been nine minutes: two minutes to dispatch an officer (i.e., when an officer becomes available to respond) and seven minutes for travel time (Exhibit 38).

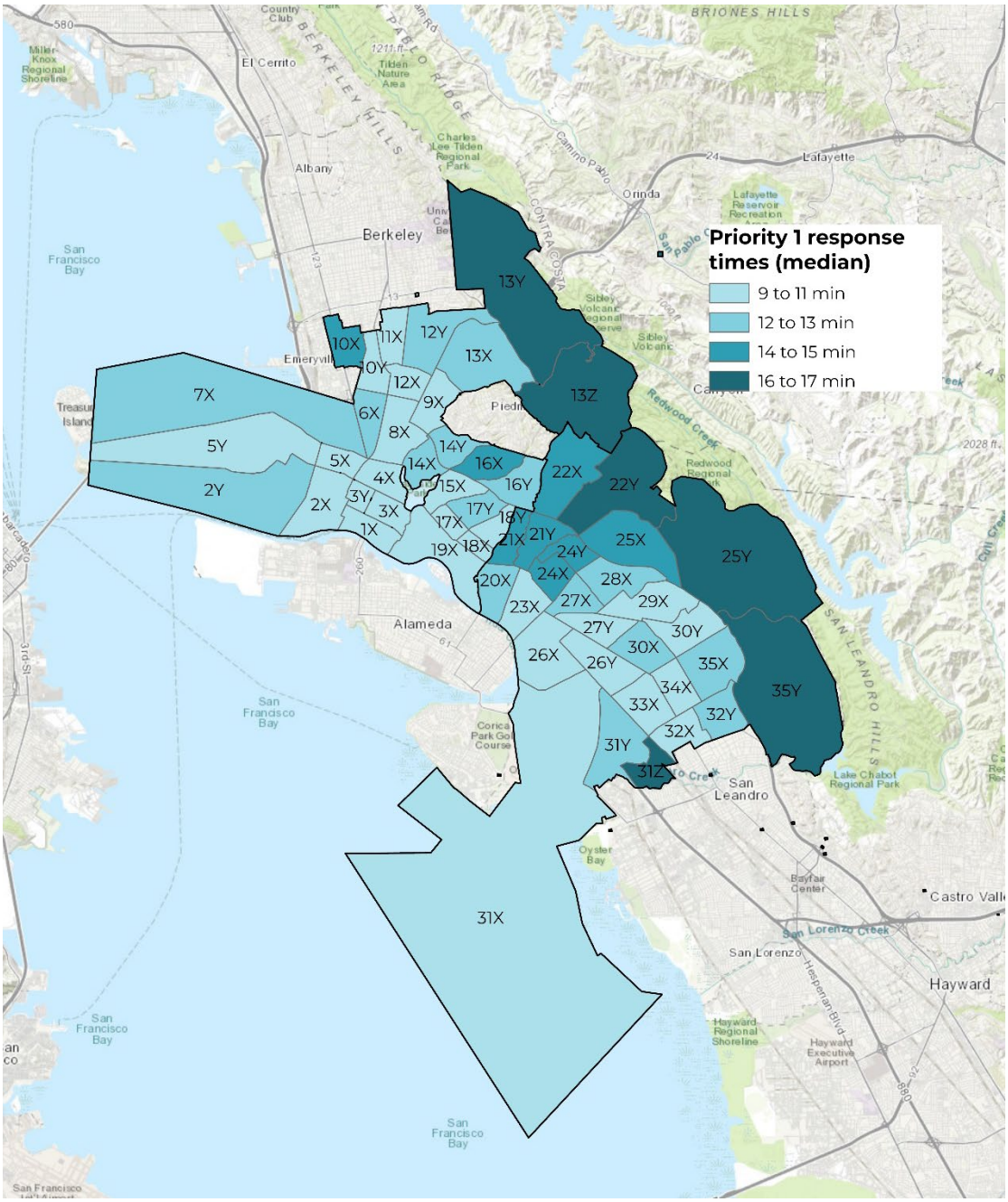
Exhibit 38: Priority 1 Response Times Have Remained About the Same



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, 2019 to 2024. Note: Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). The increased precision in 2024 data (two decimal points) may be due to the Department's new CAD system. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller.

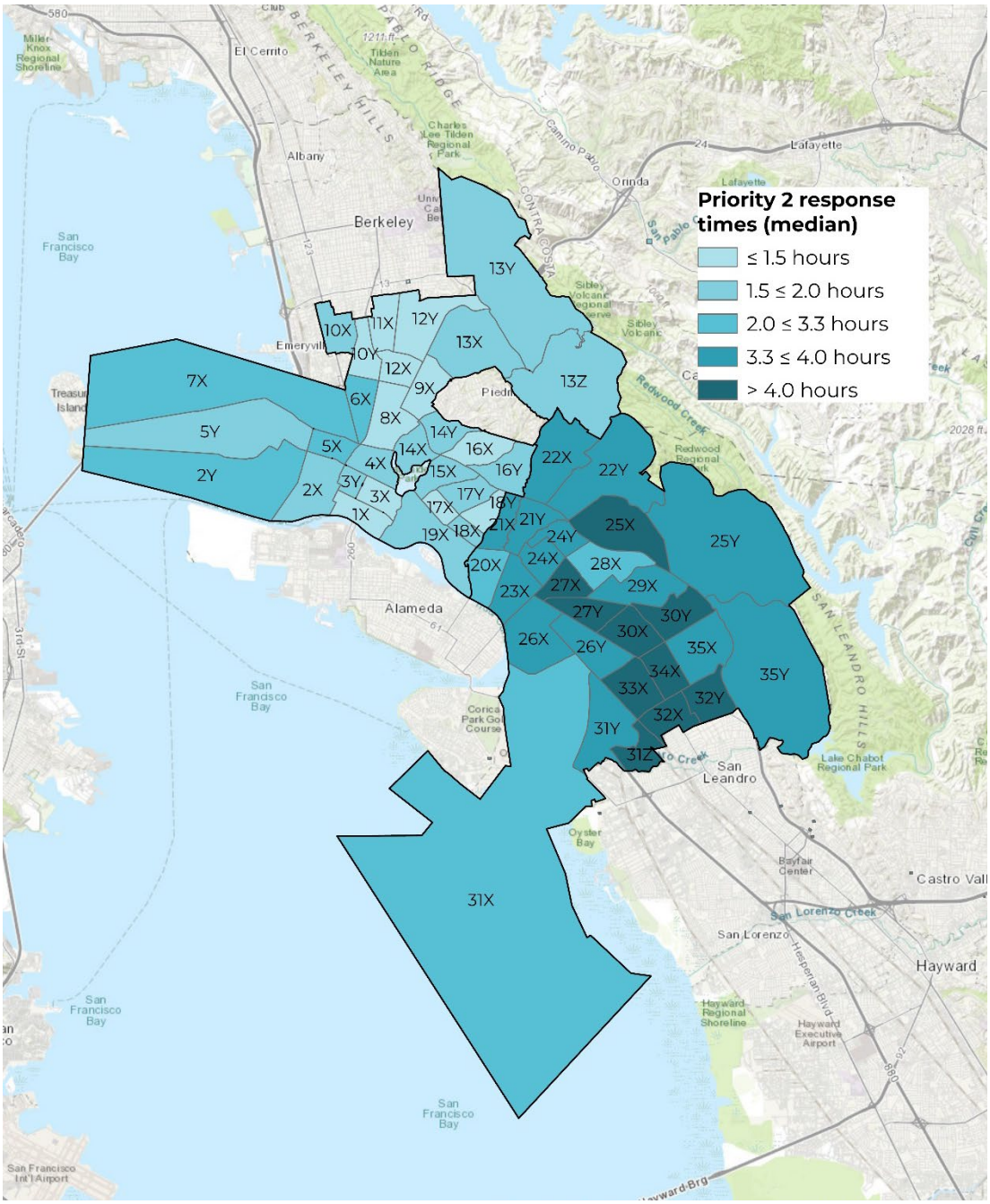
Police response times vary across Oakland overall, with longer response times in the hills for Priority 1 calls and longer in the East Bureau for Priority 2 calls, as shown in Exhibit 39.

Exhibit 39a: Response Times Are Higher in the Hills for Priority 1 Calls and Higher in the East Bureau for Priority 2 Calls



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system for 2022. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller. The East Bureau oversees all beats to the east of 20X, 21X, 21Y, 22X, and 22Y.

Exhibit 39b: Response Times Are Higher in the Hills for Priority 1 Calls and Higher in the East Bureau for Priority 2 Calls



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system for 2022. Note: We use 2022 data because it is the most recent and complete year of data (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates and call types under the Department's "Administrative" category that are not initiated by a caller. The East Bureau oversees all beats to the east of 20X, 21X, 21Y, 22X, and 22Y.

The longer response times for Priority 1 calls in some parts of the city are likely partially due to geography, with hillier parts of the city taking longer to navigate. Differences in Priority 2 calls are largely due to differences in officer dispatch time, which we discuss earlier in this finding.

When assigning a call, dispatchers consider the availability of officers in the Patrol Area the call originates in, followed by the availability of officers in nearby Patrol Areas. For Priority 1 calls, dispatchers are authorized to dispatch any available units across the city, prioritizing units that are assigned to the same Patrol Area as the call.[42]

Officers' locations vary, however, as they often leave their beat areas for a variety of reasons, including to attend to calls for backup in adjacent beats, or to respond to Priority 1 calls elsewhere in the city. Dispatch does not have the ability to see officers' current locations. This means that the closest available unit to a call may not be the unit assigned to that particular beat, and may not be the unit assigned by dispatch.

The Police Department Has Installed GPS Technology in Patrol Cars but Has Not Activated This Function

As described in Finding 1, program performance is driven both by overall staff capacity and how staff are allocated. The Police Department has installed GPS (global positioning system) in its patrol cars but has not activated the technology, the use of which may be subject to meet and confer with the Oakland Police Officers Association. Using GPS to automatically calculate the closest response unit for Priority 1 calls could minimize response times to unfolding emergencies. In addition, it could improve the accuracy of response time data, which the Department currently does manually (officers report to the dispatcher when they arrive on scene). Using GPS to automatically collect arrival times could improve the comprehensiveness and accuracy of response time data.

The Fire Department is currently testing the Automatic Resource Locator function in its new Computer-Aided Dispatch system to send the closest unit by travel time. In San Francisco, dispatchers can see ambulance locations and staff plan to activate GPS for situational awareness during certain emergency situations. Staff at Long Beach also report that the city has activated GPS in its patrol cars to locate response units when backup is requested and other situations, and communications staff at the City of Berkeley report using GPS to direct the nearest officer to an emergency call. [43]

Activating GPS systems in patrol cars offers several benefits: officer safety, for when a unit is unable to respond with its location; improved data collection to track travel times and inform revisions to the existing beat structure; and, in the case of the Automatic Resource Locator function, the ability to identify and dispatch a unit based on minimum travel time. With a police force that must often leave their beats, activating GPS within the patrol cars can help to minimize response times with limited patrol staffing.

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[42] A Patrol Area consists of multiple beats. The West Bureau oversees Patrol Areas 1 through 3, and the East Bureau oversees Patrol Areas 4 through 6. See Appendix B for a map.

[43] Long Beach communications stated that they do not use GPS to dispatch calls for service based on a condition between the Long Beach Police Officers Association and Long Beach Police Department. (Long Beach's 9-1-1 emergency communications center is currently housed in the city's Department of Disaster Preparedness & Emergency Communications.)

Recommendation 10: The Police Department should activate GPS in its patrol cars to enable dispatchers to dispatch the nearest officer to an incident to minimize travel times. This recommendation may be subject to meet and confer.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Police Communications Division should adjust minimum staffing to reflect call volume, using the staffing recommendations from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) as guidance. As part of this, the Division needs to revisit the current shift structure and adjust as needed to ensure that schedules reflect call volume and staffing needs to achieve state 9-1-1 call answering targets.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Police Communications Division should establish a practice of letting callers know when their incident has been referred to dispatch.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Police Communications Division should develop a plan to maximize hourly coverage of bilingual dispatchers.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Police Communications Division should adjust its target for bilingual dispatchers (based on regular assessments required by the City's Administrative Instruction 145) towards an equivalent level of service for emergency calls in languages spoken by limited English speakers with more than 10,000 residents.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Police Department should update its policies to reflect existing and/or best practices in language accessibility, such as its current practice of prioritizing use of bilingual dispatchers over third-party interpreters, as well as streamlining the transfer of interpreted calls to the Fire Department so that interpreters are not dropped, and informing officers or police service technicians when they are responding to calls involving limited English speakers.

RECOMMENDATION 6: The Police Department should analyze and report its progress towards the City's policy goal of providing the same level of service for limited English speaking populations to an appropriate oversight body, such as the City Council's Public Safety Committee. These reports should include the number of 9-1-1 calls from limited English speakers by language and call response times compared to other calls.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Police Communications Division should translate the initial greeting of the Department's non-emergency phone tree into threshold languages as defined by the Equal Access to Services Ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Police Department should adopt targets for each stage of its response times, set a process to revisit these targets as needed, and regularly report on its performance.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Police Department should update beat boundaries, considering factors such as call volume, call types (e.g., calls involving violence) and priorities, and officer and supervisory capacity.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Police Department should activate GPS in its patrol cars to enable dispatchers to dispatch the nearest officer to an incident to minimize travel times. This recommendation may be subject to meet and confer.

Objective

The objective of this audit was to assess the timeliness of the Oakland Police Department in responding to calls for emergency services, with a focus on the Police Emergency Communications Center, which receives and handles 9-1-1 calls.

Audit Scope

We reviewed data on calls and staffing in the Police Communications Division from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2024.

Methodology

To meet our audit objective, we reviewed relevant management controls and:

- Analyzed data on call volume, call types, and response times from the Police Department's former and new Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Systems.
- Analyzed staffing data in the Department's Communications Division, including vacancies.
- Analyzed the Police Department's performance based on reports from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) received from the Department and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES).
- Analyzed data on interpreted 9-1-1 calls from CyraCom, the state's contracted interpretation provider to compare call durations between calls that did and did not use an interpreter.
- Compared benchmark jurisdictions' performance against Oakland's through analysis of ECaTS data.
- Reviewed Department policies and procedures relating to emergency call taking and dispatch, as well as California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) standards that regulate local Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs).
- Reviewed a random sample of the Emergency Communications Center's staffing one day a month and compared staffing levels to the Department's minimum staffing standards.
- Conducted two ride-alongs with Police sworn officers in the East and West Bureaus.
- Conducted three separate sit-alongs at the Police Emergency Communications Center, as well as one sit-along at San Francisco's emergency communications center.
- Interviewed staff at the Department to understand the call taking and dispatch process.

- Interviewed staff at the Department of Race and Equity, the Equal Access Office in the Human Resources Management Department, and the Department of Violence Prevention to identify potential equity concerns.
- Tested the non-emergency phone tree for ease and language accessibility.
- Interviewed staff at the following jurisdictions to identify best practices in staffing, overtime, non-emergency calls, alternative responses, and other areas:
    - Bakersfield
    - Fresno
    - Long Beach
    - Sacramento
    - San Francisco
    - San Jose
    - Portland, OR
- Reviewed best practices for emergency call taking, dispatch, and staffing, including analyzing staffing recommendations produced by the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) prediction model.
- Reviewed the Office's 2017 audit of the Police Department's Communications Division 9-1-1 Call Operations and similar audits in other jurisdictions.
- Reviewed City policies, contracts, and municipal code sections pertaining to the Police Department and language accessibility.

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate the City Administration and staff in the Police and Fire departments for their cooperation and insight during the audit process. We also thank the Office of the Inspector General for their coordination and collaboration, as well as the Department of Race & Equity, Office of the City Attorney, and Information Technology Department for their support and review. We give special thanks to our two graduate fellows, Paula Kaltenbrunner and Estefanía Suárez, who provided invaluable research and data analysis as part of their studies at the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley.

Consolidated Call Taking and Dispatch

A recent trend among public safety agencies is consolidation of police and fire call taking and dispatch functions. This model involves using a single emergency communications center, rather than two separate emergency communications centers for Police and Fire, for greater efficiency and coordination in 9-1-1 response.

In Oakland, police and fire dispatch functions are distinct, with the City's Police and Fire departments each operating their own emergency communications center. Calls on the 9-1-1 line are first received and processed by the Police Emergency Communications Center and transferred to the Fire Emergency Communications Center for callers needing fire or medical response. Other jurisdictions, including San Francisco and Long Beach, have transitioned to a consolidated model to enhance their 9-1-1 response. This appendix includes information from interviews with emergency communications staff at these jurisdictions.

Having two emergency communications centers in Oakland means that callers with a fire or medical emergency must wait to be transferred from the Police to the Fire Emergency Communications Center. Although the time it takes for a Fire call taker to answer the call may be relatively quick, the caller must repeat the same information they provided the Police call taker (usually phone number, location, and nature of the call) to the Fire call taker.[44] The Police call taker remains on the line to confirm that both parties are connected.

Consolidation offers a quicker alternative to 9-1-1 call taking and dispatch by having one emergency communications center handle all police, fire, and medical calls. Unlike in a traditional Police or Fire emergency communications center in which call takers are trained to handle either police or fire-related calls, call takers in a consolidated model are trained to handle all call types. This arrangement reduces the need to transfer callers to another emergency communications center, shortening the time to dispatch the appropriate response unit. In 2024, the Police Department recorded 38,486 medical-related incidents and 5,826 fire-related incidents in its Computer-Aided Dispatch system.

As in call taking, communications staff are trained to handle police, fire, and medical dispatch functions. In San Francisco, dispatchers rotate among these roles and staff report that although these functions remain distinct, locating them within the same center enhances dispatch coordination and communication, especially in situations involving joint response among police, fire, and medical units.

Cross-training dispatch staff to handle more call taking and dispatch responsibilities allows the consolidated emergency communications center to use staff more efficiently. Dispatch staff can move more fluidly across roles to address gaps and reduce overtime, as well as handle spikes in

[44] As mentioned in Finding 2, callers that are limited English speakers experience additional delays when bilingual call takers are not available, especially when their calls are transferred to the Fire Emergency Communications Center. Callers must wait for call takers to obtain outside interpreters for their language and for the interpreter to convey their information to the call taker. In addition, the Police Emergency Communications Center does not routinely transfer interpreters when they transfer callers to the Fire Communications Center, meaning callers must wait twice to obtain an interpreter if bilingual call takers are not available.

call volume. The greater flexibility and capacity of a consolidated emergency communications center can reduce staff burnout and potentially lead to long-term cost savings via more efficient operations.

A consolidated emergency communications center is typically managed by a department other than a police or fire department. In San Francisco, the emergency communications center is located within the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) and in Long Beach, the Department of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications oversees the city's emergency communications center.

While there are several benefits to a consolidated emergency communications center, there are also certain factors and costs a jurisdiction would need to consider. These include costs and challenges associated with physical relocation, staff training and merging operations, as well as obtaining buy-in from key stakeholders (including the dispatchers themselves), labor union negotiations, maintaining coordination with public safety departments, and navigating cultural and identity shifts with the transition.[45]

Staff at San Francisco and Long Beach report that consolidating emergency communications centers can be a long and arduous process, and that cost savings typically do not materialize immediately. Moreover, both cities report that despite being over a decade since either of them began consolidation, neither of their staff are completely cross-trained.[46]

Consolidation has both its advantages and challenges; while the process requires significant resources, it can result in more efficient responses to 9-1-1 calls.

Exhibit 40: Consolidation Can Result in Quicker Response Times but Involves Several Challenges

Benefits	Costs and Challenges
• Quicker triage and response times, since staff do not need to transfer calls • More staffing flexibility and less overtime due to larger pool of dispatchers to backfill shifts • Greater capacity to handle spikes in call volume • Streamlined information sharing, leading to enhanced coordination between police and fire response • Reduced burnout due to more flexible scheduling and greater variety of duties • Monetary gains from operational efficiencies	• Training time and costs • Physical relocation costs • Merging operations, policies, and procedures • Obtaining buy-in from staff and decision-makers • Labor negotiations, including adjustment of responsibilities and salary raises • Identifying appropriate department responsible for operating the emergency communications center • Maintaining communication and coordination with sworn departments • Navigating cultural and identity shifts among staff

Source: Interviews with staff at the San Francisco Department of Emergency Management and Long Beach Department of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Communications.

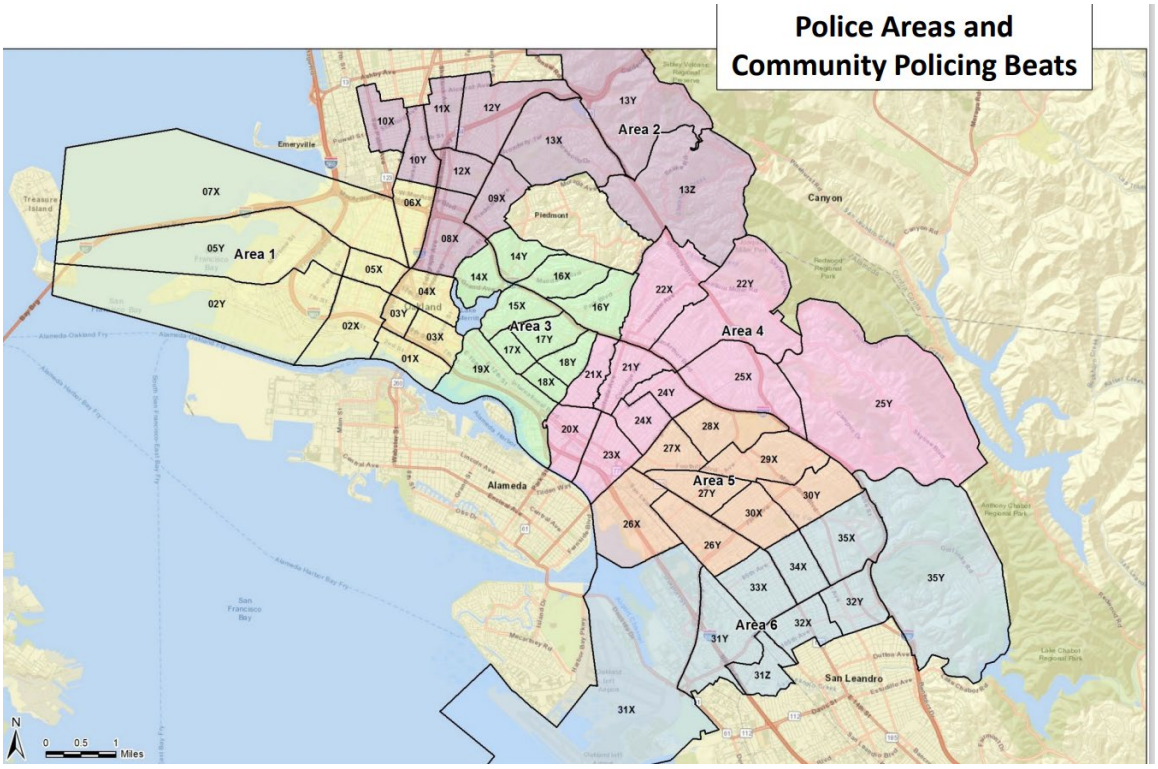
[45] Long Beach reports that in terms of morale, the transition was "devastating" to existing personnel who had previously strongly identified as employees of the police and fire departments.

[46] Cross-training dispatchers in both police and fire functions can be challenging due to the substantial staff time it requires and the different nature of police vs. fire and medical call taking and dispatch.

Police Beat Geography

The Police Department deploys patrol officers based on geographic boundaries known as police beats. The Department seeks to assign at least one officer per beat per shift. There are 35 police beats, with 19 beats in Areas 1 through 3 in the West Bureau, and 16 beats in Areas 4 through 6 in the East Bureau.

Exhibit 41: The Police Department Divides Oakland into 35 Police Beats



Source: Oakland Police Department Crime Report for April to September 2024.

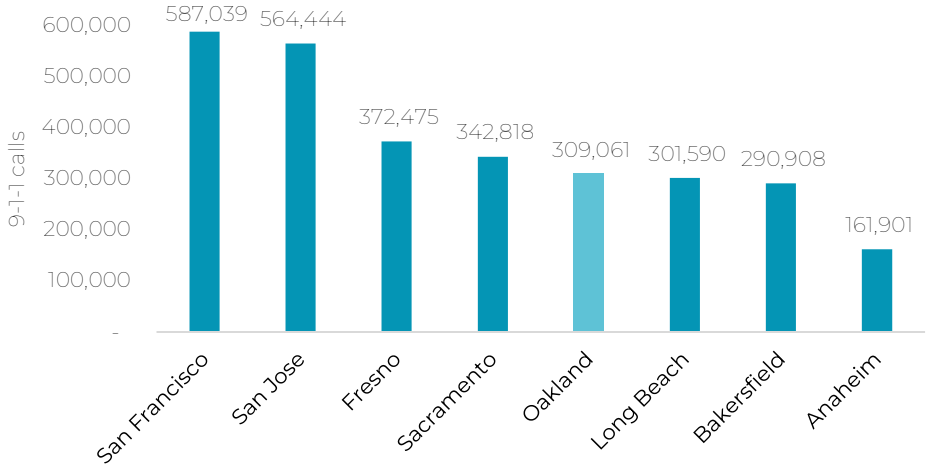
Benchmark Comparisons

To better understand Oakland's performance, we compared it to that of other comparison cities. We selected these cities based on similar characteristics in population size, land area, crime rates, proximity to Oakland, and input from the Police Department. These comparison cities are:

- Anaheim
- Bakersfield
- Fresno
- Long Beach
- Sacramento
- San Francisco
- San Jose

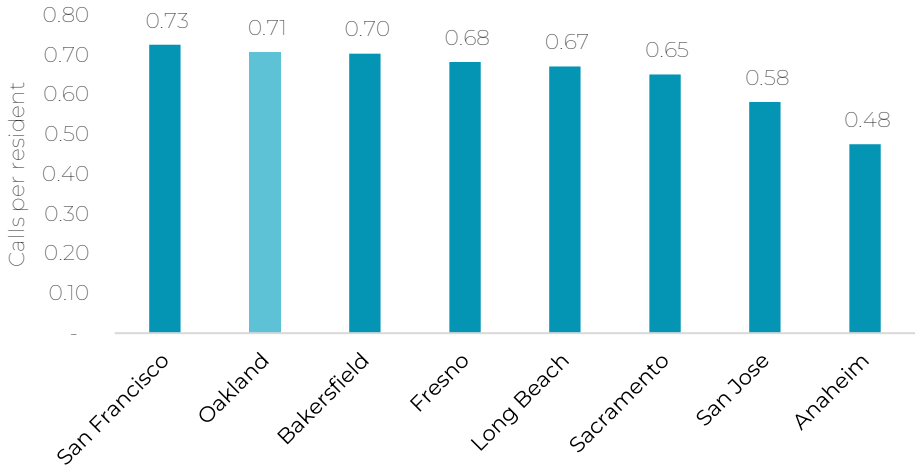
This appendix contains observations and data comparing these jurisdictions.

Exhibit 42: Oakland's 9-1-1 Call Volume Was Mid-Range Among Other Jurisdictions in 2023



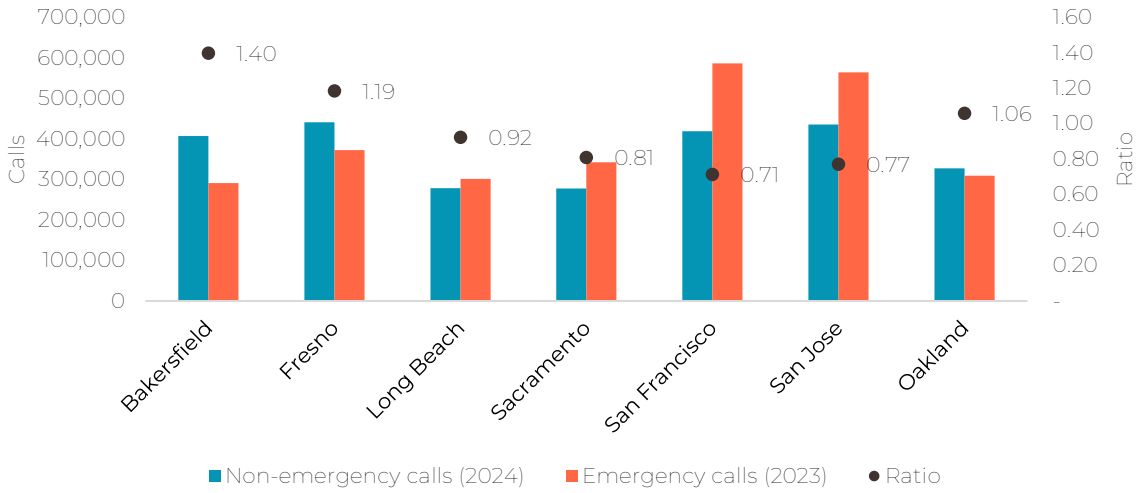
Source: Auditor analysis of 9-1-1 call volume across peer cities based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023.

Exhibit 43: Oakland Had the Second Most Calls per Resident Among Comparison Cities in 2023



Source: Auditor analysis of 9-1-1 calls per resident across peer cities based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023. Population estimates for each city are 5-year estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2024).

Exhibit 44: Oakland's Ratio of Non-Emergency Call Volume to Emergency Call Volume Was Mid-Range Among Peer Jurisdictions in 2023



Source: Auditor analysis of emergency and non-emergency call volume and ratio across peer cities based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023 and jurisdictions' self-reported number of non-emergency calls from an auditor survey in 2024.

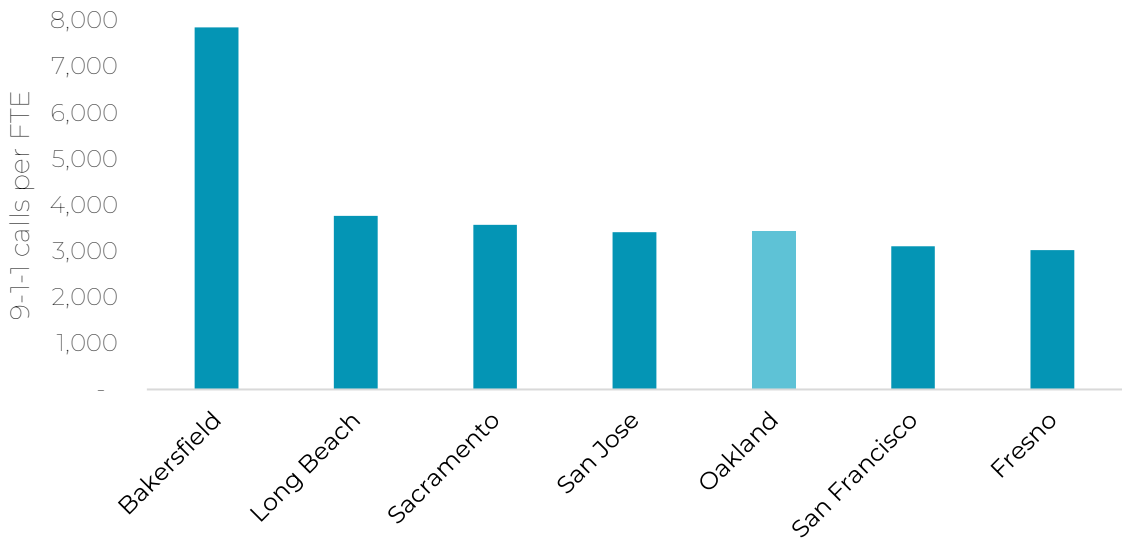
Exhibit 45: Oakland and Peer Cities had Varying Levels of Authorized Dispatch Staffing

Jurisdiction	Authorized FTE	Year	Notes
Oakland	91	FY 2024	This number includes entry and senior-level dispatchers, operators, supervisors, and a communications manager.
Bakersfield	37	*FY 2024	This number is based on the Bakersfield Police Department website and may not necessarily reflect authorized staffing. In addition to 32 dispatchers and 5 supervisors, the website also noted that Bakersfield's 9-1-1 Police communications center has three part-time FTE (not included in this calculation).
Fresno	123	FY 2024	
Long Beach	80	FY 2025	
Sacramento	96	FY 2024	
San Francisco	189	FY 2025	Staff note that they are authorized by San Francisco's Annual Salary Ordinance for 189 FTE; however, the number of actual dispatchers is lower due to attrition rates. The County's target for dispatchers is 155-165 FTE.
San Jose	165.5	FY 2024-25	

Source: Budget documents for the fiscal years listed above for Oakland, Fresno, Sacramento, and San Jose. Staff-reported numbers for Long Beach and San Francisco.

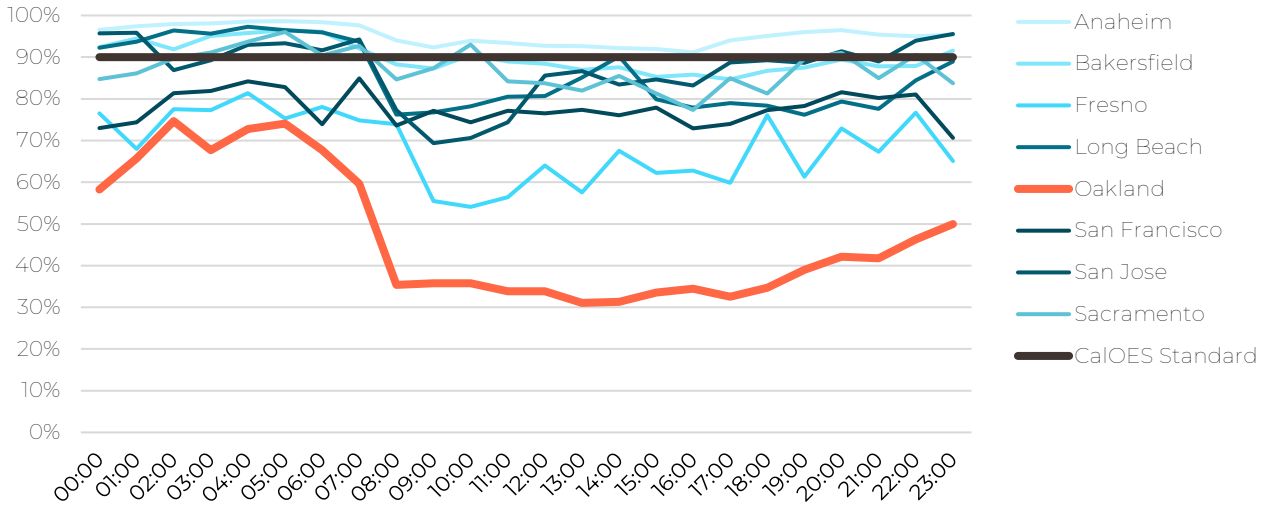
*Bakersfield's staffing number was pulled from the Bakersfield Police Department website as of October 1, 2024.

Exhibit 46: Oakland's 9-1-1 calls per authorized staffing is similar to most other peer jurisdictions in 2023



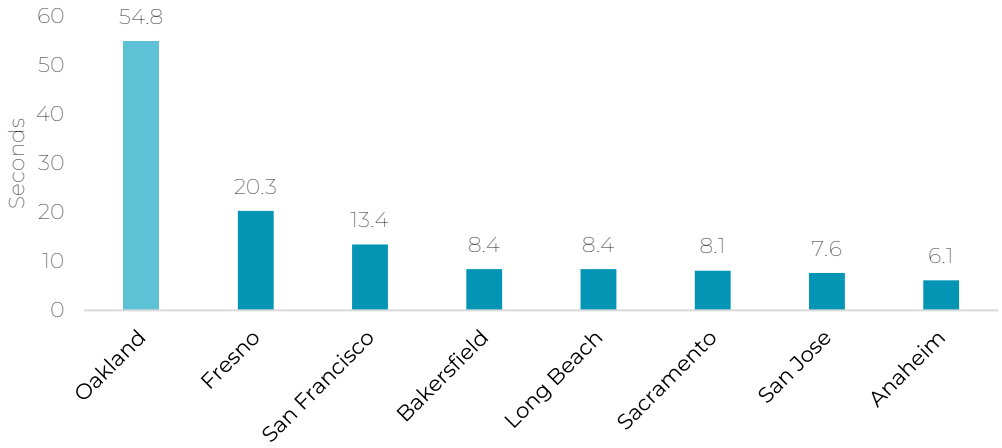
Source: Auditor analysis of staffing numbers in Exhibit XX and total 9-1-1 calls for 2023 based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES).

Exhibit 47: Compared to Other Jurisdictions, in 2023, Oakland Had a Lower Percent of 9-1-1 Calls Answered Within 15 Seconds at All Hours of the Day



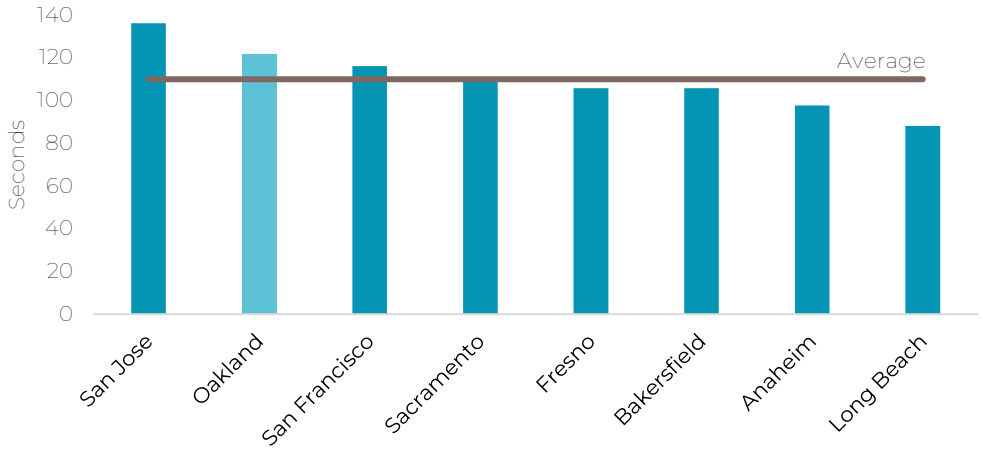
Source: Auditor analysis of percent of 9-1-1 calls answered within 15 seconds across peer cities based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023.

Exhibit 48: In 2023, Oakland's Average Answer Time Was 54.8 Seconds, Far Longer than All Other Comparison Cities



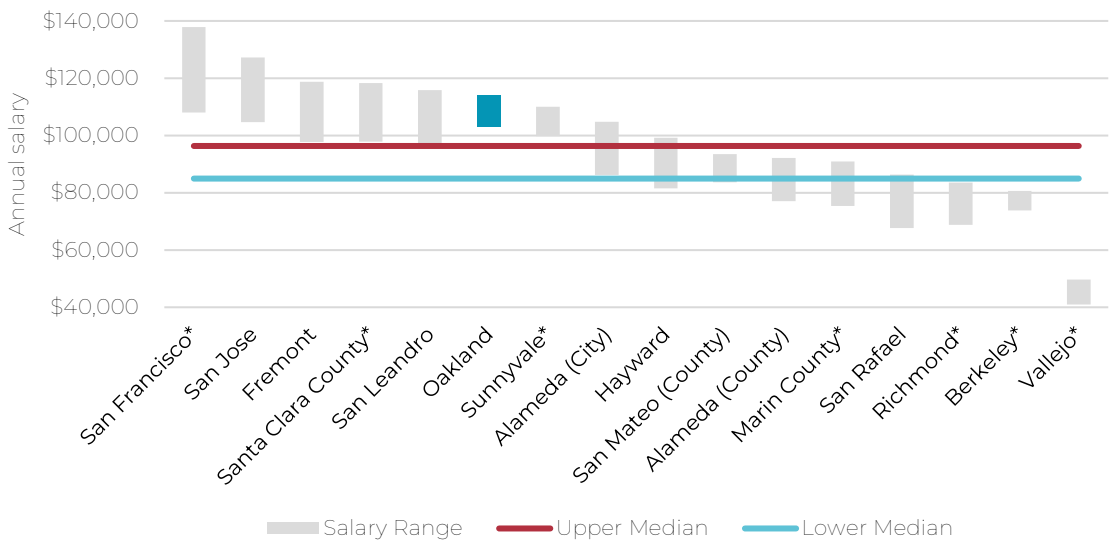
Source: Auditor analysis of average answer time in seconds across peer cities based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023.

Exhibit 49: On Average, Oakland Call Takers Spent More Time Speaking to Callers than Did Comparison Cities' Call Takers in 2023



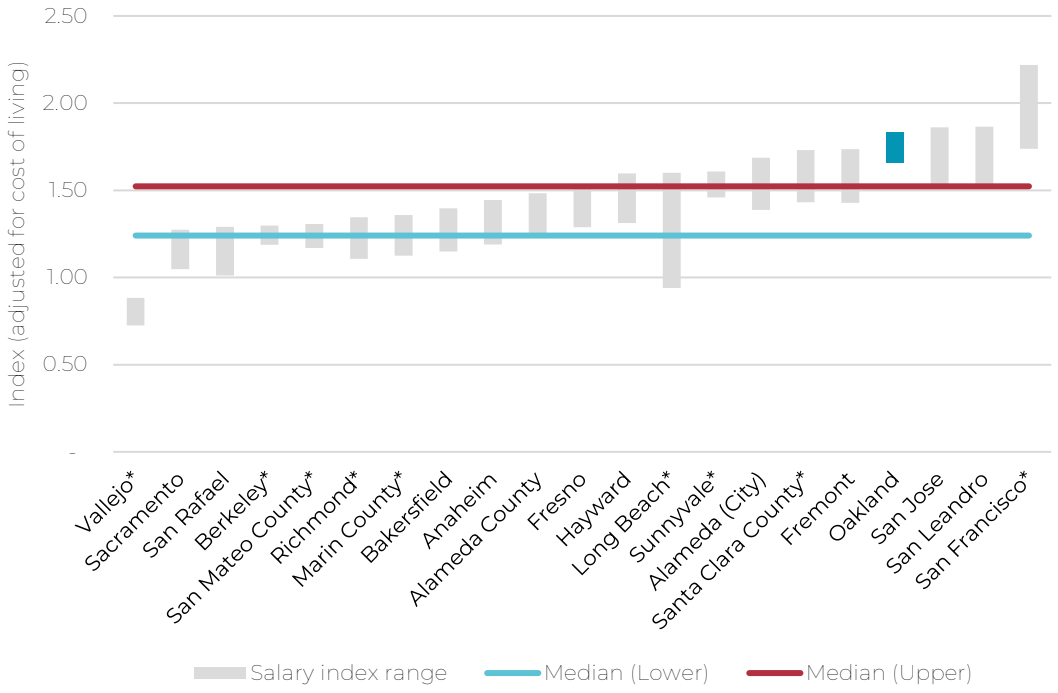
Source: Auditor analysis of average answer time in seconds across peer cities based on reports from the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) obtained from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for 2023.

Exhibit 50: Oakland Police Dispatcher Salaries Were Above the Median for Peer Jurisdictions in 2024



Source: Auditor analysis of annual entry-level dispatcher salaries across peer jurisdictions in the Bay Area as of December 2024 . We included these jurisdictions because they share similar job markets. Salary data is based on job postings on jurisdiction websites or salary schedules. Jurisdictions with asterisks (*) have a single salary posting for both police and fire dispatchers. The gray bar indicates salary range, with the upper median being the median of all salary maximums and lower median being the median of all salary minimums. Note: In addition to base salaries, there are other elements of total compensation, such as bonuses for completing probation and other benefits, which are not reflected in this analysis.

Exhibit 51: Police Dispatcher Salaries Were Above the Median for Peer Cities in 2024 When Adjusting for Cost of Living



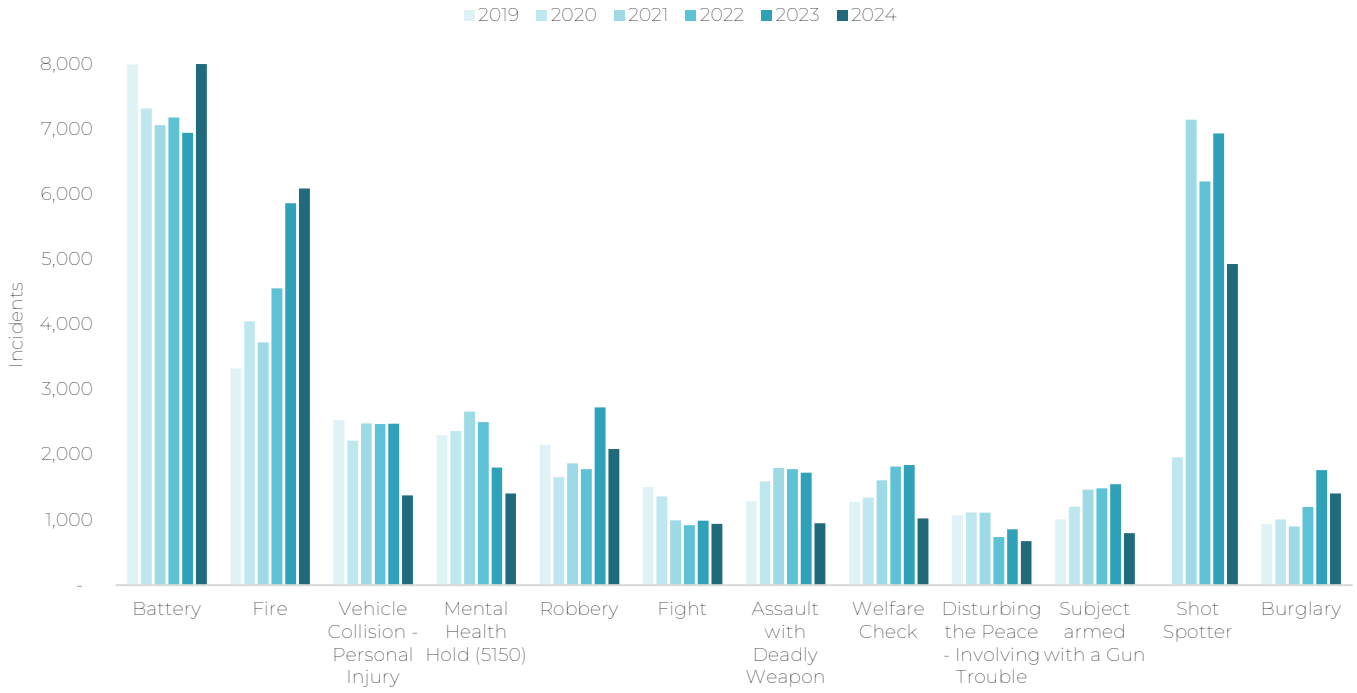
Source: Auditor analysis of annual entry-level dispatcher salaries as of December 2024 across peer jurisdictions in California adjusted for cost of living. Salary ranges are based on job postings on jurisdiction websites or salary schedules. Salaries are adjusted for cost of living estimates using 2023 estimates from MIT's Living Wage Lab. Jurisdictions with asterisks (*) have a single salary posting for both police and fire dispatchers. The gray bar indicates salary range, with the upper median being the median of all salary maximums and lower median being the median of all salary minimums. Note: In addition to salaries, there are other elements of total compensation, such as sign-on bonuses and benefits, which are not reflected in this analysis.

Common Call Types and Response Times by Priority

This appendix provides information on the most common call types and response times for Priority 1 through 4 calls. As described in the Background of this report, police calls are assigned to one of the following categories:

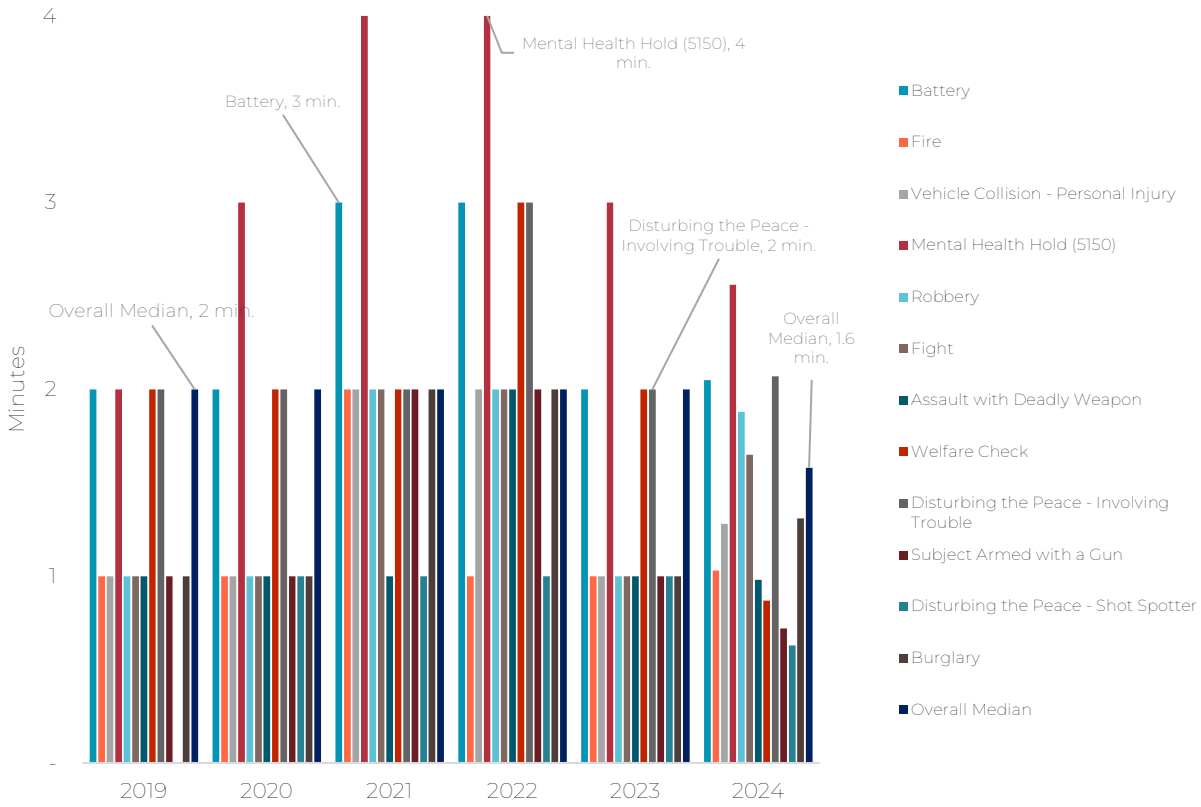
- **Priority 0 calls** are the highest priority and used for natural or man-made catastrophes. These calls are relatively uncommon.
- **Priority 1 calls** involve immediate threat to life, including those involving violence and/or weapons. Any officer in Oakland can respond to a Priority 1 call. Officers may be pulled from lower priority calls to respond to Priority 1 incidents.
- **Priority 2 calls** involve in-progress situations with the potential for violence or damage to property, as well as incidents that have just occurred. Common Priority 2 calls include 9-1-1 hangups from cell phones, disturbing the peace, alarms, and stolen vehicles.
- **Priority 3 calls** are police non-emergency incidents, such as auto burglaries, auto blocking a driveway, cold reports, and other situations not posing a threat to life or property.
- **Priority 4 calls** are non-emergencies or administrative calls, such as abandoned cars, 9-1-1 misdials, and calls that are "not 9-1-1 call matter," meaning they do not involve an emergency and do not require police to be dispatched.

Exhibit 52: From 2019 through 2024, Battery and Shot Spotter Made up a Significant Share of All Priority 1 Calls, and Fire Calls Nearly Doubled



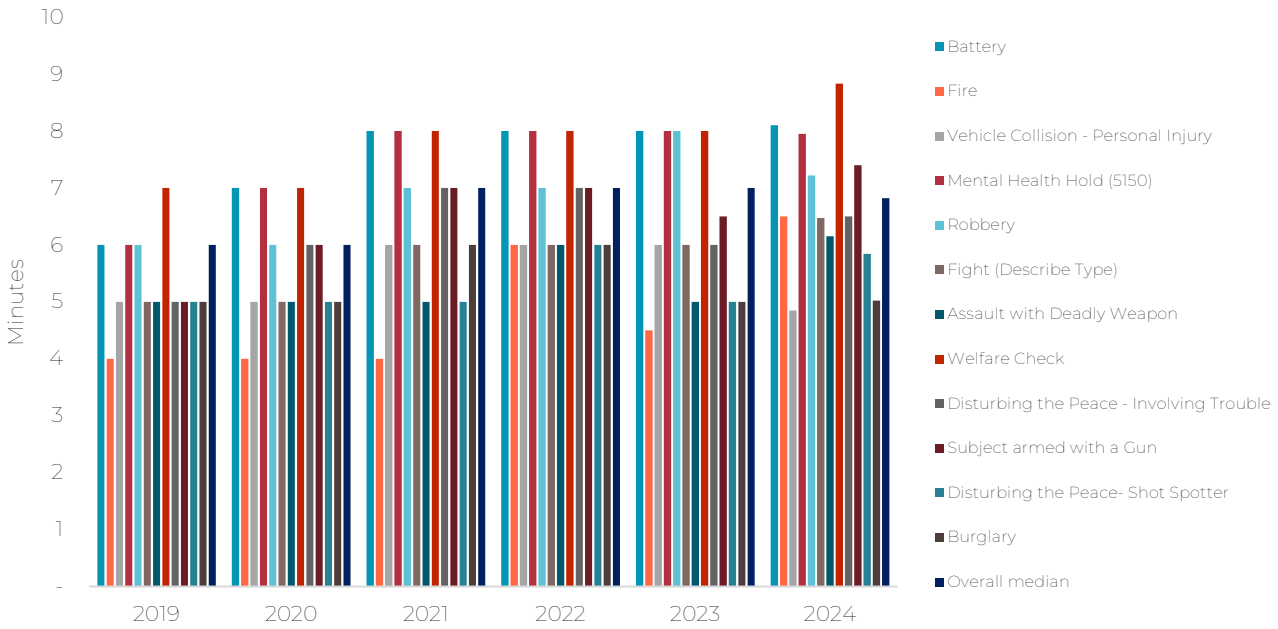
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. Note: Some incident types have been renamed to reflect common language use. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates. These incident types comprised 44 percent of total Priority 1 calls in 2024.

Exhibit 53: From 2019 through 2024 Median Officer Dispatch Times Varied across the Most Common Priority 1 Call Types



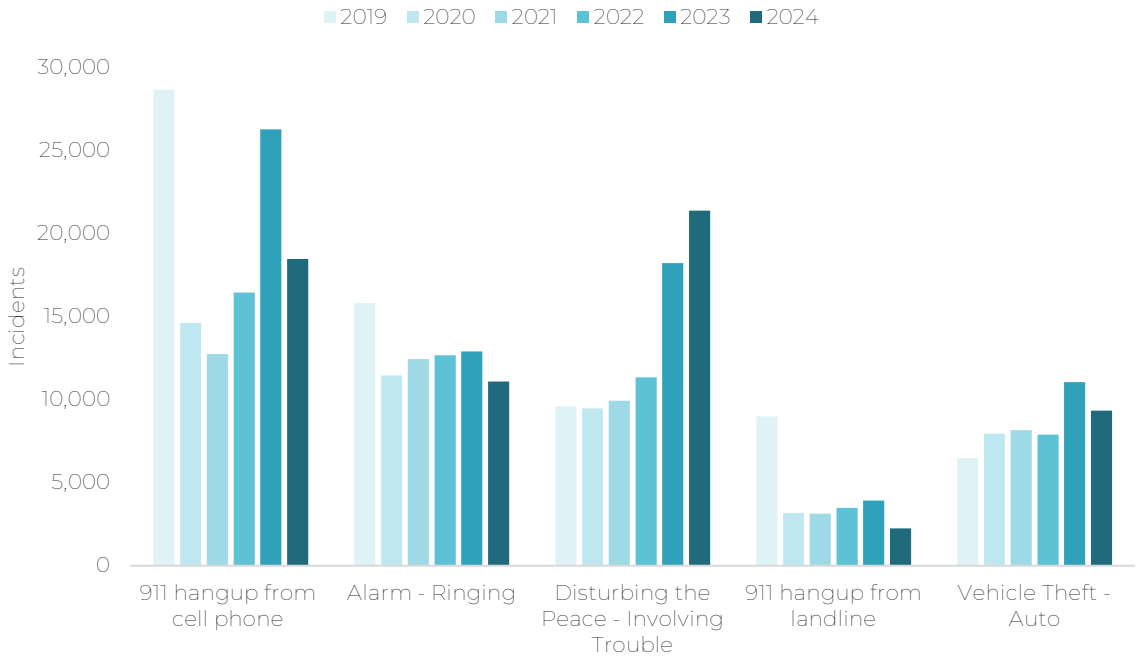
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. Note: Some incident types have been renamed to reflect common language use. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates.

Exhibit 54: From 2019 through 2024 there were Few Discernable Trends in Median Travel Times for the Most Common Priority 1 Call Types



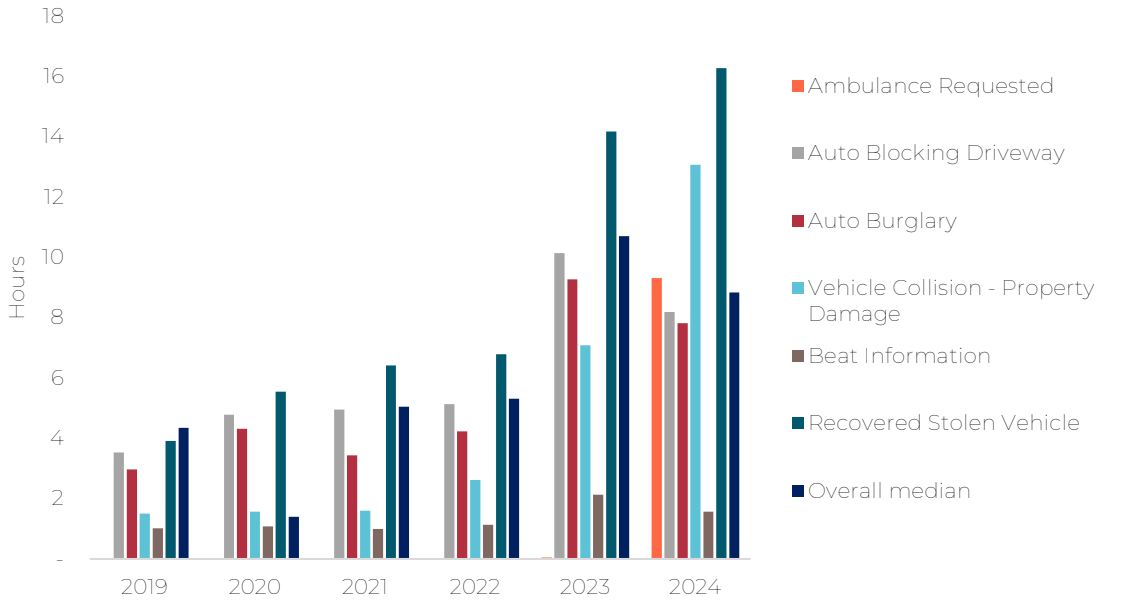
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. Note: Some incident types have been renamed to reflect common language use. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates.

Exhibit 55: The Highest Number of Priority 2 Calls from 2019 through 2024 were Cell Phone Hangups while Disturbing the Peace Involving Trouble Calls Substantially Increased



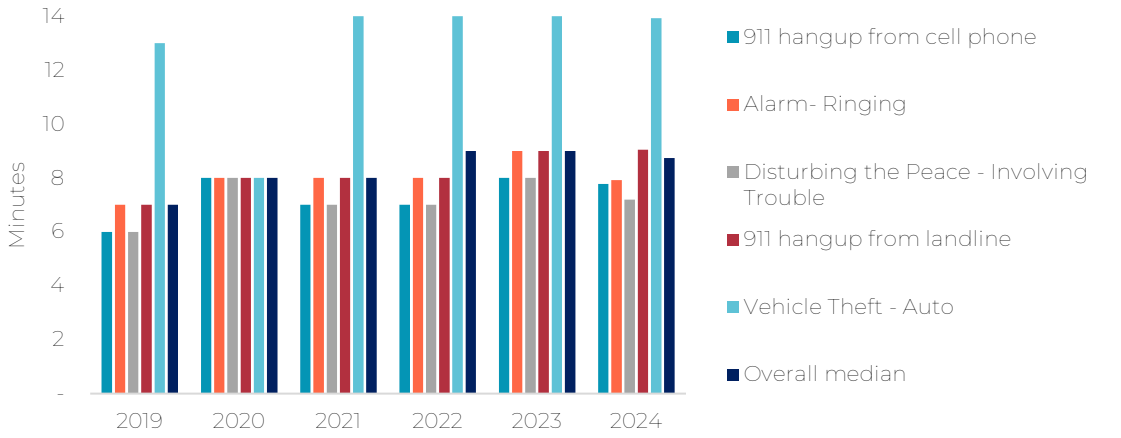
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. Note: Some incident types have been renamed to reflect common language use. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates. These incident types comprised 41 percent of total Priority 2 calls in 2024.

Exhibit 56: From 2019 through 2024 Median Travel Times for Many of the Most Common Priority 2 Call Types Increased



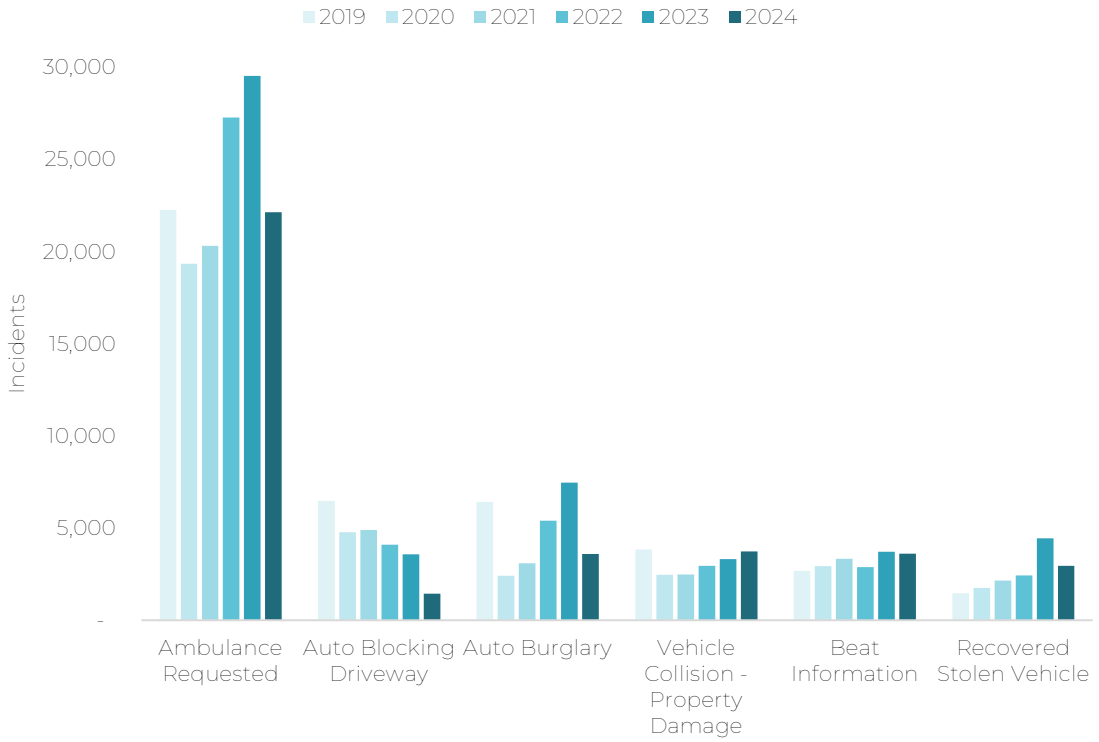
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. Note: Some incident types have been renamed to reflect common language use. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates.

Exhibit 57: From 2019 through 2024 Vehicle Theft Had the Highest Median Travel Times Among the Most Common Priority 2 Call Types



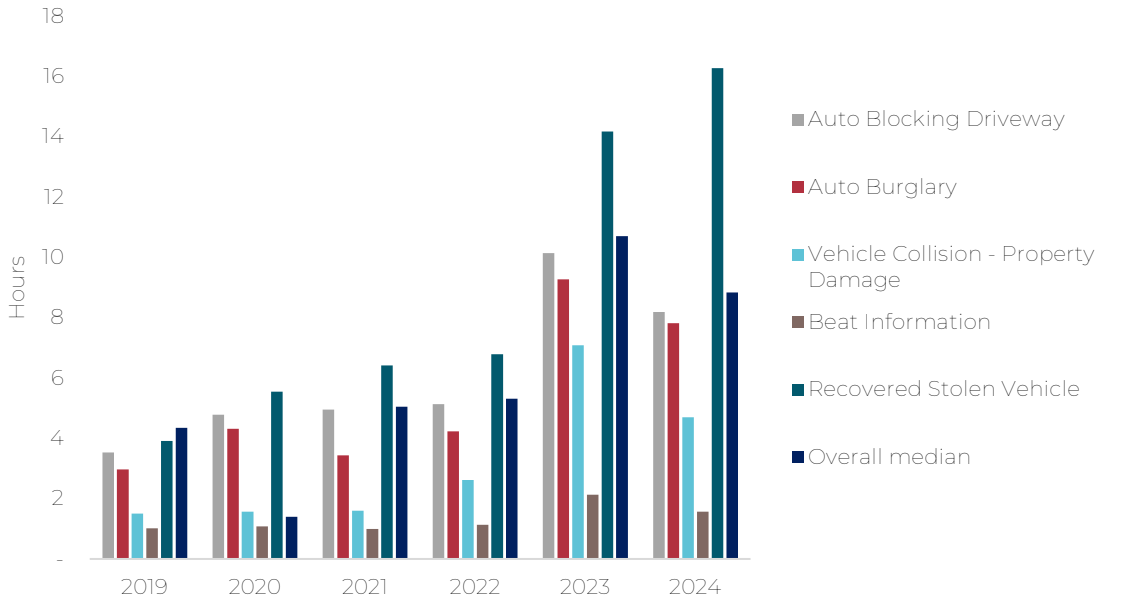
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. Note: Some incident types have been renamed to reflect common language use. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates.

Exhibit 58: Common Priority 3 Incidents Include Requests for Ambulances and Vehicle-Related Calls



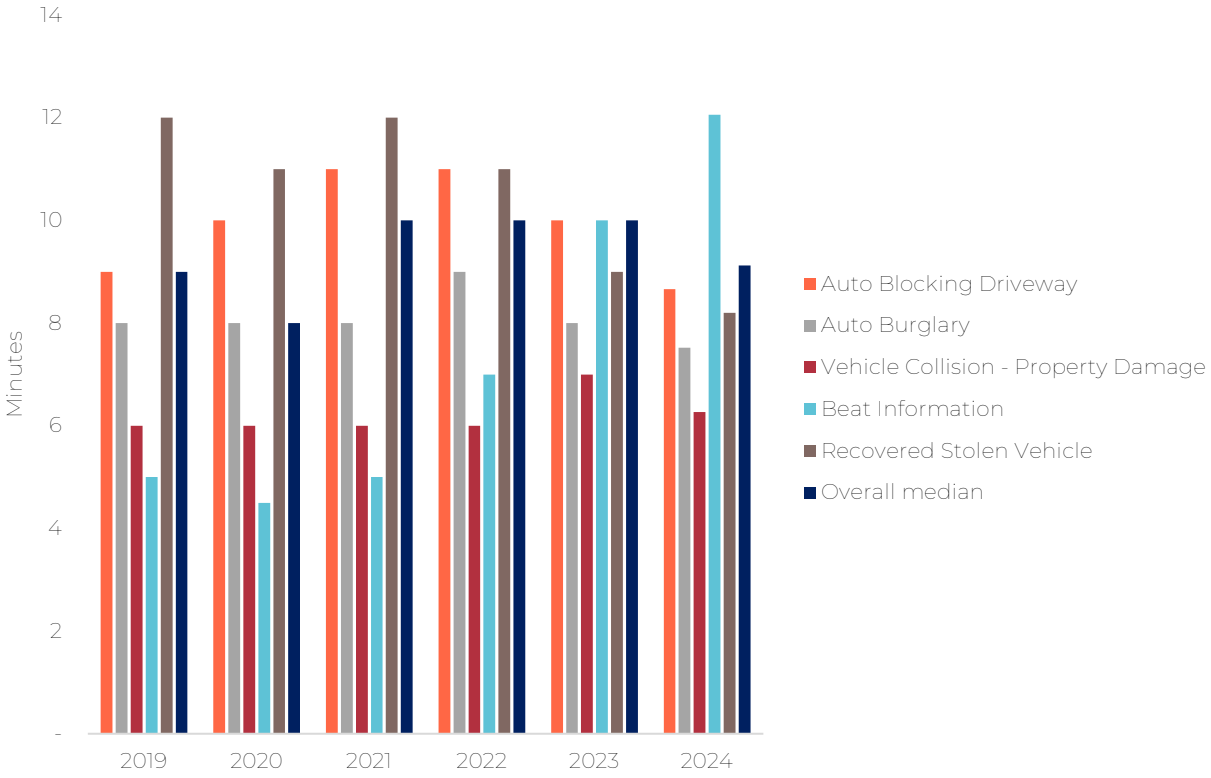
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates. These incident types comprised 47 percent of total Priority 3 calls in 2024.

Exhibit 59: From 2019 through 2024 Median Dispatch Times for the Most Common Priority 3 Call Types Increased



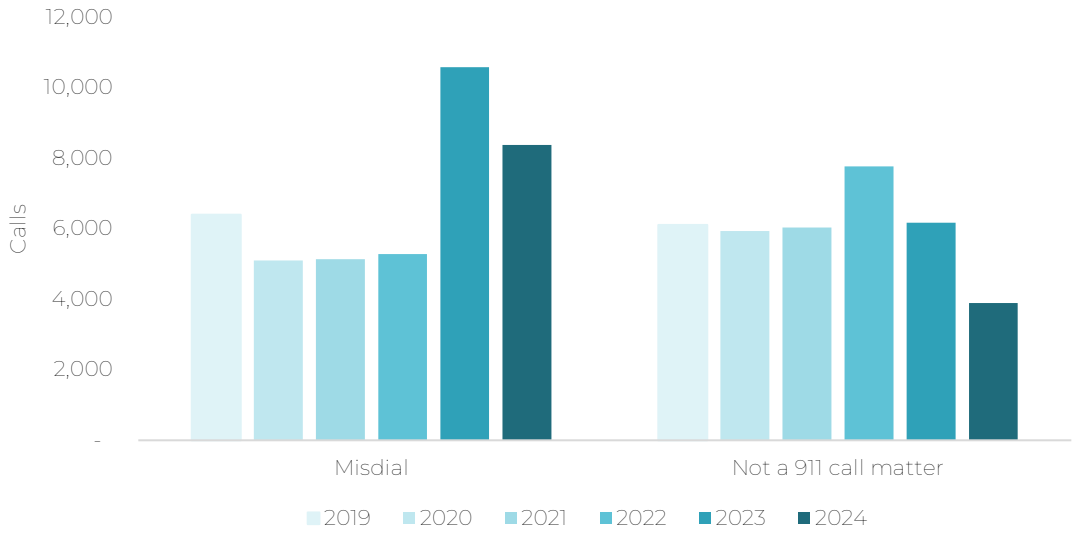
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. We removed "Ambulance Requested" because the Police Department does not typically dispatch a police response to these calls. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates.

Exhibit 60: From 2019 through 2024 there were Few Discernable Trends in Median Travel Times for the Most Common Priority 3 Call Types



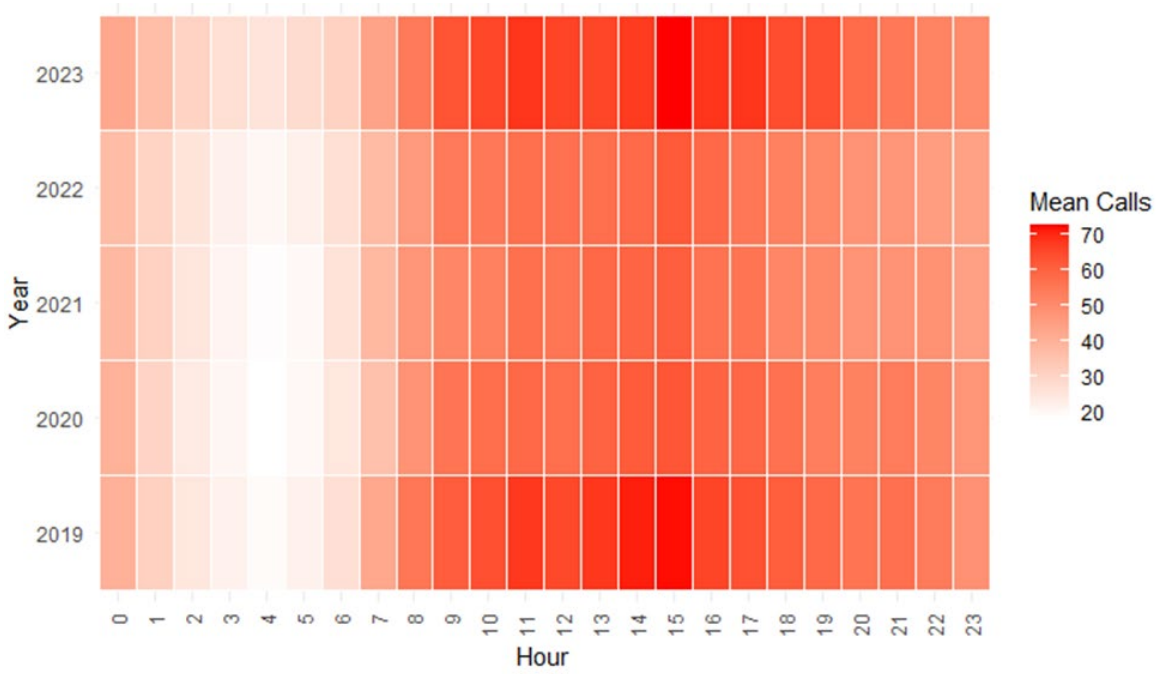
Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. We removed "Ambulance Requested" because the Police Department does not typically dispatch a police response to these calls. Response time data for 2023 and 2024 was less complete than previous years (see Box 4). This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates.

Exhibit 61: Misdials and "Not a 9-1-1 Call Matter" Comprised 88 Percent of Total Priority 4 Calls



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2024. This analysis excludes incidents that were marked as duplicates. These incident types comprised of 88 percent of total Priority 4 calls in 2024. We did not include response times to Priority 4 calls since the dispatch rate of Priority 4 calls is relatively low (2 percent in 2022).

Exhibit 62: On Average, Priority 1 Through 4 Calls Are Highest During Business Hours (9:00 AM To 4:00 PM)



Source: Auditor analysis of data from the Police Computer-Aided Dispatch system from 2019-2023. Note: This does not include "Administrative" call types except 9-1-1 calls from cell phones, 9-1-1 hangups, and "Text 911" calls.

Rec#	City Auditor's Recommendations	Management Action Plan	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
1	The Police Communications Division should adjust minimum staffing to reflect call volume, using the staffing recommendations from the state's Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) as guidance. As part of this, the Division needs to revisit the current shift structure and adjust as needed to ensure that schedules reflect call volume and staffing needs to achieve state 9-1-1 call answering targets.	OPD partially agrees with the recommendation. While the Emergency Call Tracking System (ECaTS) provides important data on 9-1-1 call volume, it does not encompass the full range of responsibilities assigned to the Police Communications Division. Staffing requirements extend beyond 9-1-1 call-taking and must also account for additional operational demands such as supporting sideshow-related activities during weekend/evening hours, providing after-hours answering services for City entities including the Internal Affairs Bureau and Animal Control Unit, and triaging service requests for Public Works. As such, relying solely on ECaTS data would not adequately capture the Division's overall staffing needs. Furthermore, any adjustments to shift structures or staffing levels consistent with ECaTS recommendations will require vacancies to be filled to ensure sufficient personnel coverage across all functions.	OPD	December 2026
2	The Police Communications Division should establish a practice of letting callers know when their incident has been referred to dispatch.	OPD agrees with the recommendation. The dispatcher can advise at the end of	OPD	December 2025

Rec#	City Auditor's Recommendations	Management Action Plan	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
		the call, when permissible, "the call has been put up for dispatch."		
3	The Police Communications Division should develop a plan to maximize hourly coverage of bilingual dispatchers.	OPD agrees with the recommendation. Dispatcher work schedules are determined by the annual bid process outlined in the collective bargaining agreement with SEIU Local 1021, which prioritizes seniority and limits management's ability to unilaterally assign shifts. While this framework limits direct adjustments to maximize bilingual coverage, OPD acknowledges that language access is a critical operational need and will explore avenues to enhance service delivery. Specifically, OPD will engage with the City Administrator's Office and SEIU Local 1021 to explore whether bilingual coverage can be addressed during the annual shift bid process. We will also assess the feasibility of increasing current bilingual pay incentives and expanding targeted recruitment to increase the number of qualified bilingual candidates. In parallel, OPD will evaluate technological solutions with real-time translation tools to reduce	OPD	December 2026

Rec#	City Auditor's Recommendations	Management Action Plan	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
		disparities when bilingual dispatchers are unavailable.		
4	The Police Communications Division should adjust its target for bilingual dispatchers (based on regular assessments required by the City's Administrative Instruction 145) towards an equivalent level of service for emergency calls in languages spoken by limited English speakers with more than 10,000 residents.	OPD partially agrees with the recommendation. The Police Communications Division and OPD's Recruiting & Background Unit already engage in targeted recruitment efforts for bilingual candidates, and the City has established special skills requirements for qualified bilingual applicants. The Department remains committed to expanding bilingual capacity as recruitment allows.	OPD	
5	The Police Department should update its policies to reflect existing and/or best practices in language accessibility, such as its current practice of prioritizing use of bilingual dispatchers over third-party interpreters, as well as streamlining the transfer of interpreted calls to the Fire Department so that interpreters are not dropped, and informing officers or police service technicians when they are responding to calls involving limited English speakers.	OPD partially agrees with the recommendation as written. While the intent of prioritizing bilingual dispatchers over third-party interpreters is recognized, in practice this approach may introduce operational delays. Specifically, transferring a caller to another dispatcher for language support requires briefing that dispatcher on the information already obtained, which extends call-processing time during critical moments. By contrast, the use of professional third-party interpreters allows the initial call-taker to	OPD	June 2026

Rec#	City Auditor's Recommendations	Management Action Plan	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
		maintain continuity and efficiency in managing the call. Additionally, current practice already includes documentation within call notes when a language other than English is spoken by the caller, ensuring that responding personnel are informed of language considerations in advance. OPD and OFD will need to explore options with the language line vendor to keep the interpreter on the line after the transfer to streamline the interpretation service.		
6	The Police Department should analyze and report its progress towards the City's policy goal of providing the same level of service for limited English speaking populations to an appropriate oversight body, such as the City Council's Public Safety Committee. These reports should include the number of 9-1-1 calls from limited English speakers by language and call response times compared to other calls.	OPD agrees with the recommendation. However, the current Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system does not contain functionality to track or report calls for service specifically involving limited English-speaking populations. Similarly, based on the existing databases available to the Police Communications Division, there is no mechanism to reliably correlate incoming calls with calls for service attributable to limited English-speaking callers. As a result, the Department is not currently able to generate the type of reporting outlined in the recommendation. This data may need	OPD	The target date will not be in the foreseeable future as OPD just upgraded the CAD system in 2024.

Rec#	City Auditor's Recommendations	Management Action Plan	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
		to wait for the next CAD upgrade and identify a system that has a feature to track the number of 9-1-1 calls from limited English speakers.		
7	The Police Communications Division should translate the initial greeting of the Department's non-emergency phone tree into threshold languages as defined by the Equal Access to Services Ordinance.	OPD agrees with this recommendation and is in the process of updating the non-emergency phone tree into the threshold languages as defined by the Equal Access to Services Ordinances to include Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese in its initial greeting.	OPD	December 2025
8	The Police Department should adopt targets for each stage of its response times, set a process to revisit these targets as needed, and regularly report on its performance.	OPD agrees with the recommendation. CalOES established performance standards requiring that 90 percent of all 9-1-1 calls be answered within 15 seconds and 95 percent within 20 seconds. At present, the Police Communications Division has been unable to consistently achieve these benchmarks due to staffing challenges and ongoing dispatcher vacancies. The Division continues to prioritize recruitment and hiring efforts to address these vacancies and remains committed to meeting the call-answering performance standards mandated by the State.	OPD	December 2026

Police Emergency Response: Inadequate 9-1-1 Staffing and Outdated Beat Boundaries Have Led to Slow and Inequitable Response Times

City Administration's Recommendation Implementation Plan

Rec#	City Auditor's Recommendations	Management Action Plan	Responsible Party	Target Date for Completion
9	The Police Department should update beat boundaries, considering factors such as call volume, call types (e.g., calls involving violence) and priorities, and officer and supervisory capacity.	OPD agrees with this recommendation and is actively reviewing options to assess whether updating beat boundaries will result in more effective and efficient police response times. A call for service demand study is needed to identify the appropriate boundaries and beat sizes needed to reduce overall response times.	OPD	January 2027
10	The Police Department should activate GPS in its patrol cars to enable dispatchers to dispatch the nearest officer to an incident to minimize travel times. This recommendation may be subject to meet and confer.	OPD agrees with this recommendation. Before scheduling a meet and confer to discuss activating GPS in the Department's CAD system, which will enable location detection in patrol vehicles, the OPD policy on GPS/ARL must be finalized. Once finalized, OPD will coordinate with Employee Relations to schedule the meet and confer to begin discussions on implementing GPS in CAD.	OPD	March 2026

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CITY AUDITOR

Michael C. Houston, MPP, CIA

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