

Feedback from the Field: A Summary of Focus Groups with Baltimore Police Officers in May 2022

**Prepared by The Crime and Justice Institute
for the Baltimore Police Department Monitoring Team**

August 2022

Contents

Introduction and Methodology	3
Community Relations and Community Policing.....	4
Management.....	6
Leadership and Communication	6
Policies	7
Staffing and Supervision	8
Rewards	9
Promotion	10
Infrastructure	10
Police Encounters with the Community	11
Stops, Searches, and Arrests.....	11
Use of Force	12
Accountability	13
Conclusion.....	13

Introduction and Methodology

As part of the City of Baltimore Consent Decree, the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) Monitoring Team (MT) contracted with the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) to conduct police officer focus groups to hear the perspectives of officers about the community they police and the Department that employs them. The focus groups were conducted pursuant to Paragraph 23 of the Consent Decree¹. Over a three-day period in May 2022, staff from the Crime and Justice Institute and members of the Monitoring Team facilitated eight focus groups of Baltimore Police Department officers. A total of 65 sworn personnel provided input across a range of topics. CJI previously conducted a similar round of focus groups in May of 2019 with 68 participants.² This report summarizes the feedback from officers who participated in the May 2022 groups.

The criteria for participating in the focus groups were agreed upon by the Monitoring Team, the Baltimore Police Department, and the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that the participants represented a cross-section of the Department along various dimensions. CJI worked with the Chief of Patrol Division to identify and assign officers to the eight focus groups, which included:

- All male, mixed race/ethnicity
- All female, mixed race/ethnicity
- White, mixed gender
- African American, mixed gender
- Latinx, mixed gender
- Lieutenants, mixed race/ethnicity/gender
- Sergeants, mixed race/ethnicity/gender
- Detectives, mixed race/ethnicity/gender

CJI conducted the focus groups of sworn personnel over the three-day period of May 23 to May 25, 2022. Officers from each of the three shifts (Adam, Baker, Charlie) and each of the Districts were included. Forty-one patrol officers, eight detectives, nine sergeants, and seven lieutenants, for a total of 65 participants, provided input on a selection of topics. The average tenure in the Department among focus group participants was 10.8 years, ranging from a low of one year to a high of 28 years. Eighteen percent of the participants were women and 82 percent of the participants were men.

Officers selected to participate in the focus groups were not provided additional compensation or incentives for their participation. Additionally, to facilitate a frank discussion and elicit candid responses, participants were informed at the beginning of each session that anything stated during the group would be reported anonymously. As such, care has been taken throughout this report to ensure that the identities of respondents are not revealed. Responses from the line officer, detective, sergeant, and

¹ Paragraph 23 states that “On an annual basis, the Monitor will conduct a reliable, comprehensive, and representative survey, consistent with the criteria set out directly below, of the Baltimore community’s experience with and perceptions of BPD and public safety. The survey will include police officers, regarding their experiences with and perceptions of BPD and public safety. Analysis of the results of this survey may be used to demonstrate sustained continuing improvement as this Agreement encourages.”

² [CJI+focus+group+report+7.31.19+for+MT.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

lieutenant focus groups are presented collectively, with respondents generically identified as “officers.” Quotes, therefore, are provided without attribution and may have been edited for clarity.

The focus groups were between one and a half to two hours in length and were structured around a set of open-ended questions developed by CJI with input from the Monitoring Team. The Monitoring Team and Parties approved the focus group questions in advance. General topics covered during the groups included:

- Community relations and community policing
- Management including leadership, staffing, and infrastructure
- Police encounters with the community, including stops, searches, and arrests and use of force
- Perceptions of the Consent Decree

CJI staff took detailed written notes during the focus groups, and the focus groups were not recorded. CJI analyzed the notes to identify the salient themes that emerged across the groups.

Community Relations and Community Policing

Numerous officers expressed an interest in building relationships with members of the public that they encounter during patrols, as well as building relationships with business owners and crime victims to help solve cases. This is a notable change from the 2019 focus groups, when officers seemed to struggle with the Department’s vision of community policing and were often unable to articulate what it was or the motivations behind it. Officers shared that this kind of relationship-building takes time, and current staffing levels combined with the number of calls for service that occur each day make it difficult to devote the necessary time and energy to relationship-building. Such time constraints also make it difficult for officers to establish formalized, problem-solving partnerships with community members and business owners. As one officer said,

I want to partner with the community on crimes, but we just don’t have enough people to take the time necessary to do that; we’re on a skeleton crew and triaging cases.

Despite this impediment, many officers exhibited a high degree of energy and interest in community engagement. This was particularly evident among younger officers and officers of color. Many officers across groups, shifts, and ranks spoke approvingly of foot patrol; as one officer put it, “You can’t do policing from a car, so I get out and try to engage.” Officers specifically mentioned saying hello to people on the street and striking up conversations as a strategy they frequently employ, although this was noted as less of an option for officers working the overnight shift. One officer told a story of getting a daily cup of coffee at the same shop for two years, saying hello to the other regulars, persisting through their initial mistrust, and gradually building relationships with them. Another officer with significant experience in the Department said:

I was getting guns and drugs [in previous years], now I’m shaking hands and kissing babies. I work with a community leader now and we get a lot done. My crime is lower, my community’s cleaner, because we work together to solve problems. I’m deep into my

community, helping with issues and making things better, I've spent time building rapport to do that. Gathering intel, trying to stop things before they start.

Some officers view speaking to people, breaking down barriers of mistrust and defensiveness, and establishing positive relationships as part of their job. "I'm not naive to some realities," said one officer, "but it comes down to: what are you going to do to human[ize] the badge?" However, officers also described colleagues who did not want to spend time building relationships in the community, who would stay in their car for entire shifts, or who would unnecessarily escalate situations by being too brusque or aggressive with community members. Some more experienced officers believe that younger officers are uninterested in striking up conversations with community members or did not know how to do so. One participant stated, "We've kind of lost the art of conversation." At the same time, some younger officers believe that older officers struggle with the adjustment to a community engagement-oriented model of policing.

Officers generally believe that a majority of community members are supportive and appreciative of the police, especially homeowners and elderly people, and that a smaller but more vocal share of community members have negative or adversarial views of police. Officers also stated that support for the police varied greatly by police district, and that in their opinion, people in more affluent areas of the City expect and receive a higher level of service than people in poorer areas receive. Some officers called attention to this perceived disparity and described it as unfair. Officers generally attributed positive views of the police to people who are more established or invested in the community, and negative views to younger people, individuals who engage in criminal activity, and people who had previously had negative experiences with the police, either personally or through their friends or family.

However, numerous officers also reported that community members who are otherwise supportive and appreciative of the Department, are also dissatisfied with the Department for not performing some functions that were performed in the past. Officers believe community members are frustrated with BPD for not arresting people for quality-of-life offenses, such as public urination or jaywalking, without supervisors' approval, not arresting people for marijuana-related offenses because they will not be prosecuted (several officers cited a specific case where teenagers were selling marijuana inside a convenience store), and not clearing people off corners or homeowners' front steps. The 2019 focus groups that CJI conducted with officers included similar stories of perceived resident dissatisfaction with the Department, especially with regards to clearing corners. Officers believe that this limited ability to respond to the perceived needs of the public harms community trust in the police department, community perceptions of the Department's effectiveness, and the safety of law-abiding residents.

Officers themselves seemed to understand that some of these changes were made because of the Consent Decree, and that others, such as marijuana-related prosecutions, could be attributed to the State Attorney's Office. They expressed frustration over a perceived overreach of the reforms and frustration that they could not respond to community needs. As one officer said, "Granted, there's a good reason why we're in the Consent Decree, but instead of taking it back to the legal line that was being crossed, it's like, now we go extra." While less overall frustration with the Consent Decree was evident compared to the 2019 focus groups, officers continued to express frustration about their

perceived inability to do anything for business owners who are afraid or who feel held hostage by criminal enterprises.

Some officers also voiced doubts about the value and impact of the Department's business checks, saying that supervisors viewed them as a way to generate positive statistics rather than a way to genuinely engage with the community, or to directly address the causes of crime or community priorities. There was a lack of consensus among officers on the length of time that an officer needed to be in a given business to "get credit" for the business check. One officer described being on a business check but having to leave for a priority call and because the log book showed less than a 10-minute visit, he was unable to count that business check. Some officers claimed that completing and logging business checks took up a significant amount of their time. Yet officers also said that business owners appreciate their presence and that they have developed relationships with business owners and employees where they regularly conducted business checks. Some officers reported that business checks make them appear more approachable to both business owners and other members of the community.

Officers had mixed opinions on the effectiveness of the community policing training. Two people affirmatively said that it was useful. Several people said that it was not useful; as one participant put it, "Nothing that I sat through helped me or made me a different cop. And when you get training, it should." Another officer reacted to the content of the training by saying, "You should sign up to this job to want to help people – you can't teach people common sense or customer service, that's inner. Those who are already used to not caring, you can't teach someone to care."

Management

Leadership and Communication

At the time of the 2019 focus groups, the Department had had four Police Commissioners in the previous two years, and officers reported at the time that the frequent changes had left the Department without clear and consistent direction. This issue was not present in the 2022 focus groups, as the last of those commissioners – Commissioner Michael Harrison – has continued in his role from 2019 to the present day. Officers acknowledged the Commissioner's communication efforts with staff through YouTube videos and emails but expressed a desire for more in-person visits or appearances at roll call on the part of the Commissioner, especially for the officers working the overnight shift.

Officers generally expressed skepticism and antagonism towards command staff, describing the Department as top-heavy and the command staff as disconnected from the issues of everyday officers. Several officers expressed that they had good relationships with their immediate supervisors, but that trust and good relationships did not extend to captains, majors, or personnel at higher ranks. Most officers perceived that there was a lack of clear communication from command staff, and that different members of command had differing and sometimes conflicting priorities. Some officers also perceived the priorities of their immediate supervisors or members of command staff as oriented towards generating statistics rather than holistically and effectively addressing crime. As one officer put it,

As long as you're getting what upper command wants done, that's what matters.

Policies

Many officers expressed frustration with the way that new policies are promulgated through the Department's PowerDMS system. In theory, officers have five days to read a new policy after it is released and electronically sign the policy to indicate that they have done so, but numerous officers spoke of pressure from their supervisors to sign the policy as soon as possible after release, before they had a reasonable chance to review it. These officers perceived that their supervisors are pressured to demonstrate high compliance rates to their superiors, so they emphasize signatures instead of reading and internalizing the policy. As one officer put it, "They force you to sign because they need a paper trail."

Officers also described practical problems that hinder their ability to read and sign policies in the desired timeframe, such as multiple policy revisions being released on the same day. Another source of frustration for officers was being expected to read the policies while they were out on patrol instead of doing police work, saying that this was not realistic given the demands on their time during a typical shift. "You get five policies all at once, and then your supervisor asks in the morning whether you read and signed [them] when you've been running from call to call all night," said one officer. Some officers even expressed that sitting in their car with their heads down, reading through a policy on a phone or computer, decreases officer awareness and puts them in danger of being physically attacked during their shifts. Officers also expressed a desire for additional alternative methods to train on policies – they appreciated one supervisor who created a reference binder, as well as another who does roll call briefings, and further suggested that in-person training strengthens the understanding of policies. In-service training was also mentioned as a valuable training technique. There was also discussion about the often-large gap in time between training and implementation. Suggestions were offered for different roll-out strategies such as prioritizing patrol officers receiving the training first and increasing roll-call trainings.

The content of the policies was also a frequent topic of conversation in the focus groups. Many officers perceived Departmental policies to be individually unclear, mutually contradictory, or subject to change after officers signed them. This final issue appeared to stem from misunderstandings of the Department's practice of sending out draft policies to gather officer feedback. The release of policies in draft and then again as a finalized policy is not a clear distinction for officers and intensifies their frustrations rather than increasing transparency and input opportunities. Other officers said that the perceived restrictions of some new policies have demoralized them and removed tools that they would otherwise use to address crime. Some officers spoke about the Department's policy on foot pursuit, which they described as saying that officers conducting a foot pursuit are responsible for the safety of the person they are chasing. This is incorrect. However, officers said that this policy, and the prospect of using force during or after a foot pursuit, have disincentivized them from conducting foot pursuits, or even attempting to make arrests in a situation where a foot pursuit is a likely possibility.

Staffing and Supervision

Across shifts, districts, and demographic groups, officers said that they were overworked and that the Department was not adequately staffed to meet the perceived needs of the City. Some officers reported that the overall size of the Department had decreased during their tenure, leaving the Department less able to carry out normal policing functions. Other officers said that the minimum number of officers who are required to be present for a given shift or district, known as the “constant,” has steadily decreased during their tenure, and that this severely hindered patrol officers’ ability to effectively respond to calls for service during their shifts. This was exacerbated by a distrust of command staff, as with one officer’s comment: “They keep lowering our constant – [they] don’t want to put enough officers on patrol, so they lower the number of officers who are required and say we’re not short.”

These perceived staffing shortages lead to high workloads. Officers of all ranks expressed dissatisfaction with high workloads that they said prevented them from engaging in community policing or other proactive methods of addressing crime; those high workloads made it difficult to find time to conduct investigations after a crime was committed. However, officers of all ranks also acknowledged that supervisors (specifically sergeants) faced particularly high workloads, including large amounts of required reporting and other administrative tasks, use-of-force reviews, providing guidance to their officers, and spending time in the field themselves. Officers in the focus groups report feeling a lack of support and supervision from sergeants due to their workload. As one example, officers described reaching out from a scene to get a sergeant to come on site and sergeants often replying with “call me” and providing advice or support by phone.

While officers acknowledge and understand the heavy amount of work for sergeants, they admit to needing more support than their sergeants currently can provide. At the same time, they feel badly about sergeants seemingly being buried in paperwork and try their best not to “bother” their supervisors. Officers mentioned hearing sergeants audibly moan when use of force reports are filed because of the knowledge of how long it takes to prepare and review BlueTeam reports. Sergeants suggested that supervisors’ training should be more focused on supervisors’ actual day-to-day duties and the computer systems that they use, especially BlueTeam and use-of-force reports. In particular, BlueTeam reports take a long time and are perceived to be redundant in some areas to other forms, such as Form 99. It is worth noting that while staff in each focus group talked about being busy, the amount of pressure felt by sergeants and attributed to sergeants feels fundamentally different from the other groups.

Some officers related that “drafting,” or forced overtime for officers, was a routine method of ensuring that there were enough officers to staff a given shift. Officers perceived this as a symptom of an overall lack of patrol officers, which meant that drafting was needed to fill in the gaps. However, drafted shifts can last for a maximum of four hours, so drafting is an imperfect solution to this problem. As one officer said:

We need 5-6 officers to work overtime and get drafted, so at around 7 PM every night... if we drafted 5 or 6, now we’re down to 10-11 officers for the whole shift, and two of them are 10-7 [out of service]. You do the math.

The conversation around drafting was a far more significant issue in the 2019 focus groups, though it remains an undesirable remedy for the staffing problem.

The Department currently assigns officers to a given shift (Adam, Baker, or Charlie) for a one-year period, which represents a change from the previous system of rotating officers through each shift, serving 28 days on Adam before 28 days on Baker. Most officers seemed to be content with one-year assignments to specific posts, saying that it brought stability and predictability to their personal lives and made it easier to build community relationships. This contrasted with the feedback from the 2019 focus groups, in which the majority of participants were unhappy with the Department's shift structure at the time. However, all shifts also recognized that the current system puts disproportionate strain on C shift, especially in certain districts. The experiences of officers on C shift – daily experiences with fatal and non-fatal shootings, child injury and death, intimate partner violence – are all risk factors for burnout and PTSD. Officers are aware of and concerned about the potential for retention and health of C shift officers. Officers on C shift also tended to be more junior, and several of those officers shared their frustration with the system, noting that even though officers reapply for new shift assignments every year, more senior people on the quieter daytime shifts are reluctant to relinquish their spots, which makes the current C shift junior staff feel destined to keep those hours for a long time. Importantly, these officers did not know why there was a change from the 28-day cycle to the 12-month cycle. Some were frustrated that the change occurred during their time in the academy and was different from their expectations at hiring.

Several longer-tenured officers voiced the opinion that newer officers just coming out of the academy are reluctant to make arrests or use force without permission from their supervisors. Some of these officers blamed the academy training for this trend, saying that “The biggest problem at the academy right now is [that] officers are extremely timid when it comes to very active, maybe violent situations.” These officers said that historically, the norm within the Department was for newer officers to ask more senior officers for advice instead of asking their supervisors. However, more recently hired officers default to consulting their supervisors, who often have little experience themselves, and rely on their supervisors to provide them with direction in situations when policies or laws appear to conflict. Officers also reported that newer officers are trained to wait for backup in situations where more experienced officers would likely take action before backup arrived such as entering an open door, or getting out of their car to confront a suspect. This perceived disconnect between the approaches of newer officers compared to longer-tenured officers was a common theme.

Rewards

Officers reported that some rewards and incentives are available for officers, such as the Officer of the Month program, although based on officers' descriptions, this program appears to vary by district and the rewards are uneven and inconsistently available. Officer of the month designations, in districts that participate, include perks and benefits such as a reserved parking spot, positive write-ups, or a police car that is theirs for a month. Other awards were also mentioned, such as an EPIC award. However, some officers expressed frustration with the perceived inconsistencies of the awards and recognition system, saying that some officers had done things that were worthy of an award – “I had one where a girl was

stabbed six times, tourniquet on both legs and chest seal on her” – but never received official recognition for their actions in spite of the submission by the supervisor. This produces a negative impact on officer morale. Some officers felt that a lack of official recognition was one consequence of supervisors’ heavy workloads and the priorities of command staff. “[Supervisors are] not going to get in trouble if they fail to write you up for something positive, but if you do something negative and they should’ve written you up and didn’t, they get in trouble,” said one officer.

Several officers expressed frustration and a sense of betrayal about the City raising the service requirement for pension eligibility from 20 to 25 years. Longer-tenured officers, who had signed on when 20 years was the standard amount of time, were particularly vocal about this change. These officers described the 25-year requirement as a major contributor to low morale in the Department.

Promotion

Officers consistently expressed a lack of faith in the promotion process. Some officers described spending significant time and energy preparing for the written and oral exams required to reach a higher rank, only to learn that they had done poorly on the exams and that officers who they perceived to be less effective had scored higher. This trend was attributed to some officers in administrative roles having more time to study than patrol officers, or to well-connected officers receiving private tutoring on the exams before they took place. Other officers were generally suspicious of the promotional process, characterizing it as “a buddy system,” based on “who you know, not what you did,” “a boy’s club,” or “a best friends’ club” where officers need to befriend well-connected individuals to get ahead. At least one woman, and some people of color with on-the-job success, described frustration at consistently receiving low scores on multiple tests and reported feeling hopeless about their ability to advance.

Another major source of frustration related to the promotion process was the promotion of relatively junior or inexperienced officers to supervisor and specialty positions. Patrol officers believed that newer officers were spending too little time on patrol before being assigned to specialized units that do not spend as much time on the street and expressed frustration when those officers were then promoted to sergeant or to higher ranks without having spent what they believed to be adequate time gaining experience on the street. “We all have the right to grow,” said one officer, “but don’t give the sergeant’s test to people who have been there for two years.” Officers believed that this trend also deprives patrol of talented officers who would be an asset to the patrol division, which they saw as the core of the Department.

Infrastructure

Officers described numerous issues with departmental infrastructure that they perceived to be inadequate, outdated, or broken. In the 2019 focus groups, officers described the old academy building as being in a state of serious disrepair, and officers in the 2022 groups were glad that it had been relocated to a newer building. Officers in different districts had differing opinions about the state of their district facilities; some had relatively few complaints, while others described powder falling from the ceilings, inadequate fencing that allowed potentially dangerous individuals to approach unhindered, and flooded basements or water being shut off.

Officers had numerous concerns about their cars. The individual circumstances or problems varied, but across districts and ranks, officers said that there often were not enough cars to meet the needs of their shift. Officers believed that new cars had not been purchased for the past several years, that the existing vehicle fleet was old and run-down (in part because the cars are driven around the clock by different shifts), and that the Department's vehicle maintenance contractors take a long time to complete even basic maintenance and are generally unreliable in their work. Some officers specifically mentioned that there was a shortage of prisoner transport vehicles, or "wagons," due to the wagons' age and perceived poor maintenance work. Multiple officers, when asked to make one suggestion that would improve the Department, suggested bringing vehicle maintenance in-house. Even when there were enough cars, some officers said, the process of transferring the cars during the change-over between shifts was inefficient and left the new shift short-handed for the first hour or two. However, there was some recognition that the Consent Decree has brought the Department additional funding to buy new cars and add portable printers to some of the older cars, among other upgrades to the Department's infrastructure. Officers almost uniformly praised this aspect of the Consent Decree.

Additionally, almost every group of officers expressed frustration with the many different electronic systems that they needed to interact with on a regular basis. In addition to the number of systems, which include PowerDMS, Acadis, Axon, and Workday among others, officers expressed that these systems often require different passwords, use different login credentials, and have different requirements that govern what the password could be and when the password must be changed. Multiple officers voiced a desire for a single, sign-on system with one password that would work across all the different programs.

These reported deficiencies in the Department's infrastructure have had a deleterious effect on officer morale. Officers believed that the problems with the Department's physical and electronic infrastructure have made it significantly harder for them to patrol their districts, address crime, and engage with the community.

Police Encounters with the Community

Stops, Searches, and Arrests

Numerous officers across focus groups reported that they are sometimes hesitant to engage with citizens who might be breaking the law, either because they are unclear about what policy allows them to do or not do, or because they fear the legal or personal consequences of engaging with citizens, or both. Officers reported that quality-of-life offenses are enforced less frequently than in the past, and that the Department changed the guidelines on how officers are allowed to search cars for suspected drugs. Several officers expressed dissatisfaction with the Baltimore State's Attorney and her office, due to her perceived unwillingness to prosecute people for marijuana-related offenses, which also affects the types of stops, searches, and arrests that officers make. Finally, it is worth noting that one officer expressed his belief that pretextual stops are no longer allowed.

Some officers attributed lower morale in the Department to these changes; as one officer said, “Why bother stopping [cars]? Get paid the same.” Longer-tenured officers were more likely to lament these changes than newer officers, especially those officers who had joined the Department since the Consent Decree was introduced. Some veteran officers acknowledged this trend directly, saying that newer officers did not complain about the new policies because they had never known anything else. For their part, some newer officers – and some older officers as well – attributed resistant in officers’ outlook to a general reluctance to adapt. As one officer put it:

There’s people who joined the Department and still have the mindset of what officers used to be. I like to call myself the new generation who understands more of what’s going on. You can’t violate people’s rights. If you want it, you gotta work for it. It’s not as easy as it used to be.

Use of Force

Some officers expressed that they are hesitant to use force, or to put themselves in situations where force may become necessary (such as by engaging in foot pursuits), because of changes to Departmental policy and practice. Nearly all officers believed that some amount of force was a necessary component of making arrests; as one person said, “If you’re going to enforce the law, it’s going to get dirty.” However, numerous officers also spoke about their fear of receiving charges, meaning internal Department discipline, because of using force in the field. Some officers believed that command staff wanted them to avoid using force whenever possible and said that officers frequently received internal charges for using force, whether or not that force was justified and reasonable. One officer said:

In reality, I’m not going to wait for you to get two inches from my face before I do something. But that’s what up-top wants you to do.

A few officers made an explicit connection between their perceived inability to use force in the course of making an arrest and community members’ perceived willingness to break the law. One officer said flatly: “Crime increases in correlation to use of force going down.”

In addition to the possible internal consequences of using force, officers expressed that members of the public do not understand what use of force means in a policing context, or the difference between a legitimate use of force and police brutality. Officers perceive use-of-force incidents, which are tracked internally in IAPro, as reflecting negatively on an officer rather than being a neutral metric. Some officers specifically mentioned this as a problem in circumstances when an officer’s “jacket,” or internal affairs file, is made public. These officers expressed the concern that members of the public might see someone with, for example, twenty-five uses of force and interpret that as the officer being exceptionally violent or undisciplined rather than proportionally using force in the course of making arrests.

Finally, officers across groups and ranks said that use-of-force reviews created a significant amount of work for their supervisors, since supervisors must review the entirety of the body-worn camera footage for every officer who was involved in the scene. Officers said that the reporting process differs between

districts, although the report forms themselves are standardized, and that supervisors' training does not cover how to use BlueTeam or how to fill out the use-of-force reports.

Accountability

In the 2019 focus groups, officers reported that the Department's internal investigatory process for complaints was opaque and unfair. They reported that it took a long time for cases ("open numbers") to be closed, whether the infraction in question was real or trivial, and that officers could not transfer to other units or apply for a promotion while they had open numbers, regardless of whether those open numbers had merit. Officers voiced many of these same concerns in 2022. Some officers perceived the Internal Affairs process as unfairly focusing on minor or trivial issues and taking a long time to resolve those issues, when they should have instead been filtered out, often at the district level. This delay in adjudication still seems to hold up transfers and promotions, and officers seem to be unaware of pending complaints until hearing that their request is denied due to a pending case. Some officers believed that after the Consent Decree's finding of unconstitutional policing, and then the scandal of the Gun Trace Task Force, command staff is trying to build back public trust by increasing public access to the agency and showing that officers would be held accountable when necessary. Some officers perceived that the Department was levying disproportionate punishments on officers who had made legitimate mistakes to show the public that police officers were being held accountable.

Conclusion

Officers generally reported favorable views of the Consent Decree and were more likely than in 2019 to agree that the City and the Department needed a Consent Decree. When asked to expand upon the benefits of the Decree, officers almost uniformly praised the additional funding the Department had received for new cars, technology upgrades such as portable printers for the cars, moving out of the old academy building, and other upgrades to the Department's physical infrastructure and resources. In nearly each group, one or more officers agreed that the Consent Decree was needed to rein in inappropriate behavior that had become a pattern for some officers.

In 2022, officers often did not directly connect Departmental policy changes, such as the perceived de-emphasis on arresting people for quality-of-life offenses, to the Consent Decree. However, when they spoke about those changes – to policies, to how the Department tracks uses of force – they often viewed them as deterring officers from taking traditional policing actions, and therefore as being detrimental to officers' morale and their perceived ability to do their jobs effectively. Officers frequently said that they were hesitant to make quality-of-life arrests for offenses such as jaywalking, make misdemeanor arrests without supervisor approval, engage in foot pursuits, or take other actions that may result in a use of force. In addition to these consequences, officers also said that some of the changes were harmful to public safety. As one officer put it: "The pendulum has swung – now they don't want us to arrest and cite for things we could cite for. And the longer the pendulum swings in this direction, the longer the city burns."

Officers also expressed frustrations with internal structures of the Department, including the perceived mismanagement of disciplinary actions for officers, a promotion system that is not wholly merit-based

and promotes officers who lack the requisite experience to hold higher ranks, and a perceived staffing shortage that leads to chronic overwork for people at all levels of the Department but especially for supervisors. Additionally, officers felt overloaded with reporting requirements and felt that some accountability systems within the Department were too focused on minor issues.

In terms of suggestions for improving officer morale, officers shared that more staffing, improved communication from leadership, streamlined access to various electronic systems, and updated equipment and facilities would greatly improve the quality of their day-to-day work life. There were also references to salary and benefits. There is an understanding that base pay or hiring pay is better than other jurisdictions, but officers with more experience see greener pastures elsewhere based on the combination of work and pay. There were a handful of officers, with varying levels of seniority, who said they often think about leaving BPD.

It is worth noting that despite the challenges presented above, many officers, but not all, shared positive sentiments about being a Baltimore police officer. When asked about their motivation for becoming a police officer, many shared that they wanted to positively impact the community, help people in times of need, and improve public safety. Many officers, both with long careers and those just starting out, believe that they are achieving those goals.

The Crime and Justice Institute hopes that the findings from this report will help inform policies and practices that contribute to a police department that values and supports its officers to better serve the residents of Baltimore.