

CONFIDENTIAL

Report to:

OTTAWA POLICE SERVICE BOARD COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

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Submitted by: Executive Director, Ottawa Police Services Board

Contact Person:

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SUBJECT: REVIEW OF COMPLAINT INV-25-186

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Ottawa Police Service Board's Complaints Committee:

- 1. Receive this report and find that matters raised in Complaint No. INV-25-186 do not indicate any gap or deficiency in Board policy that requires corrective action at this time.**
- 2. Recommend to the Policy and Governance Committee that its review of the Board's Major Events policy, and associated community consultations, consider how the Ottawa Police Service communicates publicly about protests, including arrests and charging decisions arising from protest-related enforcement activity, and related standards for accuracy, updating, and removal of published information.**
- 3. Authorize the Executive Director to communicate the Committee's findings to the Inspector General, the Solicitor General, and the complainant.**
- 4. Authorize the Executive Director to publish this report on the Board's website for the purpose of informing the public of the Board's findings.**

BACKGROUND

Policy and Procedure Complaints are complaints referred to the Board by the Inspector General of Policing pursuant to subsection 107(6) of the *Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019* (CSPA). Under subsection 107(1) of the CSPA, the Inspector General is responsible for receiving and addressing complaints relating to policing, including complaints concerning the policies, by-laws, rules, or procedures of a police service

board and the procedures established by a chief of police. Where the Inspector General determines that such a complaint is appropriately addressed at the governance level, subsection 107(6) requires the Inspector General to refer the complaint to the relevant police service board and to inform the complainant of that decision.

Upon referral, the Board is required under subsection 107(7) of the CSPA to review the complaint as it relates to Board policies and Chief's procedures, and to report back to the Inspector General and to the Solicitor General on any steps taken. The Inspector General has generally specified a 90-day timeline for the completion of such reviews.

The Board's Policy CR-32 Policy and Procedure Complaints establishes the framework for administering these reviews. Under that policy, upon receipt of a referral the Executive Director notifies the Chief, gathers relevant Chief's Procedures and contextual information, conducts a review of applicable Board policies, and prepares a comprehensive report addressing the complaint as it relates to both Board policies and Chief's procedures. The Executive Director then submits that report to the Complaints Committee.

The Complaints Committee's role is to conduct an action-oriented review of the complaint and to identify opportunities for corrective action or improvement. In exercising its delegated authority, the Committee may request additional information, approve the Board's response to the Inspector General, endorse or modify recommendations contained in the report, and identify broader governance or policy issues for consideration by the Board or its committees. The review does not extend to findings regarding the conduct of individual members of the Ottawa Police Service.

Following the Committee's review, the Executive Director communicates the outcome to the Inspector General, the Solicitor General, and the complainant, subject to any limitations or conditions determined by the Committee.

DISCUSSION

Summary of the complaint

The complaint concerns a media release published on the Ottawa Police Service website following arrests made during a public demonstration at the intersection of Laurier Avenue and Metcalfe Street on November 18, 2024. The complainant alleges that the release inaccurately characterized the charges laid against those arrested, and that the release remained accessible on the OPS public website long after the Crown withdrew all charges on May 9, 2025. The complainant seeks correction of the published information and adherence to proper standards for the public dissemination of information.

In accordance with section 107(7) of the CSPA, this review is confined to whether the complaint raises matters that warrant attention to Board policies or to procedures established by the Chief of Police. It does not examine the facts of the underlying enforcement event, does not assess the conduct of any individual OPS member, and makes no findings of fault with respect to any individual.

Steps taken in response to the complaint

Upon receipt of the referral, the Board commenced a review focused on whether the complaint engages Board policies or procedures established by the Chief of Police, and whether any action is warranted in respect of either.

The Executive Director contacted the Ottawa Police Service Professional Standards Unit (PSU) to request information about any relevant Chief's procedures. The PSU did not identify any relevant written procedures addressing these matters.

The Executive Director also contacted the OPS Directorate of Strategy and Communications. The Directorate confirmed the existence of an internal practice under which media releases that identify an individual charged are removed from the OPS public-facing website 60 days after their initial publication. This practice is described in further detail below.

The media release referenced in the complaint was verified as still accessible on the OPS website as of March 24, 2026, the date of the Executive Director's most recent check.

Review of the complaint as it pertains to board policies or procedures

Board policies

The Board does not have a written policy that specifically addresses the management of media releases, the communication of charging decisions to the public, or the accuracy or removal of published public information.

The Board's Policy GA-11 Board Communications and Community Outreach outlines a commitment to transparency, to fostering positive relationships with the media and the public, and to providing the media with accurate and timely information. However, this policy's scope is limited to the Board's own communications and does not apply to the Service's media and communication activities.

The OPS 60-day media release removal practice

The Directorate of Strategy and Communications confirmed that the OPS maintains an internal practice of removing from its public website those media releases that identify

an individual charged, 60 days after initial publication. The rationale underlying this practice is sound and reflects a reasonable and balanced response to competing institutional imperatives.

On the one hand, police services have an obligation to communicate with the public and the media about matters of public interest, including arrests and charges arising from significant enforcement events. On the other hand, individuals who are charged are entitled to the protection of their privacy and reputation, particularly given that charging decisions do not represent final judicial outcomes. Charges may be withdrawn, stayed, varied, or result in acquittals. A media release accurately describing charges as laid does not necessarily remain accurate as the judicial process unfolds, and its indefinite persistence on a public website risks causing lasting reputational harm to individuals whose charges are subsequently not proceeded with.

The 60-day removal practice addresses this tension in a proportionate way. It allows sufficient time for the information to serve its public communication function while establishing a defined limit on the period of public exposure for identifiable individuals.

The Directorate of Strategy and Communications advised that the 60-day removal practice is in the process of being automated as part of a broader redevelopment of the OPS website. The practice will also be formalized as part of an ongoing review of Chief's procedures. These developments are noted as relevant context for the Committee's consideration of whether additional direction is warranted at this time.

It should be noted however, that the press release referenced in the complaint was not subject to the 60-day rule because it did not identify any individuals.

On accuracy and judicial outcomes

The complaint also raises a concern about the accuracy of the information contained in the release, specifically the characterization of the charges laid. It is relevant to note that OPS media releases describe the information available to the Service at the time of publication. They are not updated to reflect subsequent judicial developments.

The OPS Directorate of Strategy and Communications noted that there are no systematic feedback mechanisms through which the Crown keeps operational sections of OPS informed of judicial outcomes, which may include charges being stayed, withdrawn, varied, or resulting in conviction or acquittal. The responsibility for communicating judicial outcomes to the public rests with the courts rather than with the police service. It is therefore not clear that the Service bears a duty to provide follow-up

public communications regarding the judicial disposition of charges described in prior media releases.

Whether the charges were accurately characterized in the release as initially published is a factual question that falls outside the scope of this policy and procedure review.

Broader governance context

This complaint arises in the context of a public demonstration, and the concerns it raises about public communications following protest-related enforcement activity intersect with work currently underway at the Board level.

As part of the Board's review of its major events policy, work is underway to develop a human rights-based framework for the governance of protest management. The scope of that work includes questions of media relations, transparency, and public communications in relation to protests. The Complaints Committee may recommend to the Policy and Governance Committee that the Major Events policy review and the associated community consultations consider how the Service ought to communicate publicly about arrests and charging decisions following protest-related enforcement activity.

CONSULTATION

N/A

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1: Complaint form filed by complainant

Document 2: Inspectorate of Policing referral correspondence, December 15, 2025

CONCLUSION

The complaint raises legitimate concerns about the accuracy and persistence of public information published by the Ottawa Police Service following protest-related arrests. However, the review does not disclose a deficiency in Board policy that requires immediate corrective action.

The Board has no written policy governing the Service's media release practices, nor is such a policy required at this time. The OPS 60-day media release removal practice reflects a proportionate and principled response to the competing interests of public communication and individual privacy. That practice is in the process of being

formalized and automated, which addresses the primary procedural concern raised by this complaint.

On the question of accuracy, OPS media releases describe information available at the time of publication and are not updated to reflect subsequent judicial developments. The responsibility for communicating judicial outcomes to the public rests with the courts. No Board policy currently imposes, or should at this time impose, an obligation on the Service to issue corrective or follow-up communications regarding charging decisions that are subsequently withdrawn or stayed.

The complaint does, however, surface a governance question that is appropriately addressed in the context of existing work rather than through a standalone policy amendment. The Board's ongoing review of its Major Events policy, including the development of a human rights-based framework for protest management, is the appropriate vehicle for considering how the Service should communicate publicly about enforcement activity in demonstration contexts. The Complaints Committee's referral of this question to the Policy and Governance Committee ensures the concern is addressed substantively without displacing a process already underway.