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To: All Municipal Police Chief Constables  
Chief Officer – Metro Vancouver Transit Police (MVTP)  
Chief Officer – Stl’atl’imx Tribal Police Service  
Chief Officer – Combined Special Enforcement Units (CFSEU-BC) / Organized  
Crime Agency (OCA-BC)

And to: All Professional Standards Officers

From: Police Complaint Commissioner

Date: October 8, 2014 (Reissued March 2023) – **Revised: January 15, 2024**

Re: **Guideline on Receiving & Handling of Complaints**

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## PURPOSE

This Guideline confirms the processes relating to the receiving and handling of a registered complaint or a service or policy complaint. Section 177(2)(a) of the *Police Act* provides the Police Complaint Commissioner with the authority to create binding statutory guidelines to be followed by those receiving and handling registered complaints and service or policy complaints.

The [Complaint Form](#) is intended to be used for complaints that are made and registered. This form must be used by all agencies with members who fall under Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC) jurisdiction. This form will be used only for registered complaints; any questions or concerns from a member of the public are to be recorded on a relevant *Question or Concern Form*<sup>12</sup>.

## BACKGROUND

Sections 80 and 169 of the *Police Act* establish that any person assigned, designated, or authorized to receive registered complaints or a service and policy complaints **must** provide complainants with any assistance they may require in making a complaint.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to OPCC statutory *Guideline 2 – Receiving & Handling Questions or Concerns* for detailed instructions.

<sup>2</sup> To acquire a copy of the *Question or Concern Form*, or any other OPCC documents referenced within this Guideline, please contact the OPCC directly by email ([info@opcc.bc.ca](mailto:info@opcc.bc.ca)), phone (250-356-7458), toll-free (1-877-999-8707). Of note, the documents referenced in this Guideline are updated regularly. To ensure the version of the document being used is up to date, best practices are to request a new copy or to confirm with the OPCC directly that a local saved copy remains accurate.

Reducing barriers in the filing of complaints is a priority for the OPCC. Implementation of processes which effectively reduce or eliminate barriers to access assists in promoting equitable access to the complaints process for all individuals, regardless of language, disability, culture, mental health, or other complex social factors.

Departments may wish to change their processes in light of the Provincial Policing Standards for unbiased policing as it relates to removing barriers to justice and police services<sup>3</sup>.

## REGISTERED COMPLAINTS

Pursuant to section 78(2)(b) of the *Police Act*, a complaint may be made and registered by stating or delivering it to a designated individual, or a member at a municipal police department<sup>4</sup> who is assigned to receive and register complaints. Reasonable efforts should be made to ensure someone is available to receive and register complaints at all times.

A person receiving a registered complaint MUST do the following in accordance with section 80 of the *Police Act*:

➤ **Provide the complainant with any assistance that the complainant requires in making the complaint.**

All complaints are to be recorded in writing on the OPCC *Complaint Form*, regardless of whether they are received orally, in person or by telephone. Additional support may be required to address any barriers to access, such as language, literacy, or disabilities, individuals may face when participating in the police complaint process. It is essential to make efforts to assist individuals in the filing of their complaints, and no person should be discouraged from doing so.

Trained staff at the department should be made available to provide initial support and assistance to complainants with completion of the complaint form and any information they may require in filing a police complaint.

Police should recognize that making a complaint at the department may be intimidating for some individuals and supports from a third-party support agency may be necessary. In those cases, please connect with OPCC intake staff who can provide assistance with connecting the complainant to a suitable support agency.

Complaint forms in PDF are now available in languages that newcomers speak:

- Punjabi
- Chinese (Traditional)
- Chinese (Simplified)
- Arabic
- Somali
- Korean

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<sup>3</sup> [Provincial Policing Standards Part XI Guiding Principles](#)

<sup>4</sup> The definition of “municipal police department” within the *Police Act* extends to all agencies with members who fall under OPCC jurisdiction.

- Vietnamese
- Persian

If a complaint does not involve your respective police department or involves the RCMP, assistance should be provided. If the complaint involves another municipal police department, the *OPCC Complaint Form* should be completed and forwarded to the OPCC. If the complaint only involves the RCMP and does not involve any members who fall under OPCC jurisdiction, contact details for the Civilian Review and Complaints Commissioner for RCMP complaints should be provided.

- **Provide information or advice to the complainant regarding the complaint process.**  
In addition to the *Complaint Form*, the OPCC has produced informational brochures that explain the complaint process including *General Information*, *Complaint Resolution*, and *Let us Help You*. The *Do you have a complaint about the police in British Columbia* and the *Complaint Resolution* brochures are now available in Punjabi, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese. Departments should have these brochures on display in an area readily available to the public and should be provided to the complainant.

If a complainant has questions about the process that cannot be readily answered, they should be referred to a Professional Standards member from your department or directed to contact the OPCC. Contact information for the OPCC is provided on the *Complaint Form* and the brochures. All staff who are designated to take complaints should be familiar with the complaints process and be trained in trauma informed practices.

- **Request that the complainant provide any information that may be required by the Police Complaint Commissioner.**  
Areas on the *Complaint Form* that are marked with the star symbol \* indicate required information. The person receiving the complaint is to review the *Complaint Form* to ensure that the required fields have been completed and that the *Complaint Form* is as complete as possible. Details in the description section of the *Complaint Form* should be recorded using the complainant's own words.
- **Provide the complainant with a list of support agencies.**  
Support agencies are community-based organizations who have agreed to help complainants with a range of services, including the filing of complaints. To meet the individual needs of a complainant, the OPCC will assist complainants by linking them to appropriate support agencies which best suit their individual circumstances. Intake staff at the OPCC are available for any questions regarding access to supports.
- **The date and time the complaint was received must be recorded on the form, and a copy of the completed *Complaint Form* must be provided to the complainant.**  
If the complaint was received by telephone, the contents of the complaint must be read back to the complainant to ensure accuracy of the information provided. In addition, if

received by telephone, a copy must be mailed (or sent electronically) to the complainant.

- **Receive authorization from the complainant that they wish to make a registered complaint.**  
Prior to completing and forwarding complaints to the Police Complaint Commissioner, members must confirm the complainant's authorization of filing a registered complaint, and, if applicable, the characterization of the complaint.
- **Complete and forward to the Police Complaint Commissioner the record of complaint in the form and manner required by the Police Complaint Commissioner.**  
Ensure the shaded blue portions on the PDF *Complaint Form* are filled in by the person receiving the complaint. The completed *Complaint Form* and any associated documentation are to be uploaded electronically to the OPCC using the File Transfer System or Web Portal. *Complaint Forms* should be uploaded within one business day of receipt.

## SERVICE OR POLICY COMPLAINTS

Pursuant to section 168(1) of the *Police Act*, any person may make a complaint to the Police Complaint Commissioner about the following:

- a) The general direction and management or operation of a municipal police department;  
or
- b) The inadequacy or inappropriateness of any of the following in respect of a municipal police department:
  - (i) its staffing or resource allocation;
  - (ii) its training programs or resources;
  - (iii) its standing orders or policies;
  - (iv) its ability to respond to requests for assistance;
  - (v) its internal procedures.

Similar to the filing of registered complaints, a person receiving a complaint concerning a service or policy **MUST** do the following in accordance with section 169 of the *Police Act*:

- Provide the person making the complaint with any assistance that person requires in making the complaint.
- Provide the person making the complaint with any information or advice that may be required under the guidelines prepared by the Police Complaint Commissioner under section 177(2)(a) of the *Police Act*.
- Record the complaint and the date and time of its receipt.
- Provide the person making the complaint with written acknowledgment of its receipt.

- Forward a copy of the complaint or, if the complaint was not made in writing, a copy of the record of the complaint to:
  - (i) a Chief Constable of the municipal police department concerned;
  - (ii) the board of that municipal police department; and
  - (iii) the Police Complaint Commissioner.
- The record of the complaint is to be completed and forwarded using the *Complaint Form*.

*Original Signed By:*

Police Complaint Commissioner