

Oakland mayor calls for increased police training, civilian oversight to reduce shootings

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Posted:

InsideBayArea.com

OAKLAND -- Renewing her call for increased oversight of the police, Mayor Jean Quan on Thursday said better training, an updated computer system and a civilian watchdog similar to San Jose's would help Oakland address a troubling number of officer-involved shootings.

The mayor's comments came in response to an investigation by this newspaper, published Thursday, that highlighted a history of questionable police shootings in Oakland and a culture of failing to thoroughly investigate them.

While the department is already under the unprecedented scrutiny of the federal court to adopt widespread reforms, the mayor said a civilian inspector general would add another layer of accountability. She said she hopes to soon add the position to independently review internal affairs findings and make recommendations on officer discipline.

The department already has its own inspector general's office. It is charged with auditing programs and expenditures and tracking efforts to meet reforms ordered more than a decade ago by a federal judge in the wake of the Riders police abuse scandal.

What Quan has proposed is a new, civilian position, reporting directly to the mayor and city administrator.

"I want someone who is not a member of the force," Quan said, pointing to San Jose's use of an independent police auditor staffed with lawyers who review disciplinary cases and complaints against officers.

The plan needs the approval of the department's new federal compliance director, former Baltimore Police Department Commissioner Thomas Frazier, who was appointed in March to usher in reforms. Frazier could not be reached for comment.

Oakland police union president Barry Donelan declined to comment on Quan's proposal, calling Thursday's report on police shootings by this newspaper biased against the department.

Oakland police Sgt. Christopher Bolton, the department's chief of staff, had no response to Quan's proposal but said he would welcome her promise for new technology to help the department better track police shootings.

Oakland police have struggled to tally shootings over the years, blaming an antiquated computer system.

The newspaper's extensive review of police reports, district attorney's files, civil lawsuits and news accounts of police shootings since 2000 found police fired on people at least 117 times,

killing 39.

The review found two dozen officers involved in multiple shootings. At least nine people who appeared to be fleeing were shot in the back. And while the city has paid out more than \$9 million to settle lawsuits over the shootings, internal affairs investigations routinely find the shootings were justified.

Oakland police say officers often have little choice but to defend themselves with lethal force on the streets of one of California's most dangerous cities. Chief Howard Jordan insists the department constantly trains officers to avoid having to fire their weapons.

While Quan says the federal oversight has led to improvements, the mayor said more training would lead to fewer deadly encounters.

"We need to review whether the officers had to be in a (dangerous) position in the first place," she said.

The newspaper also reviewed new documents that raised questions about the department's internal affairs investigation into the 2007 shooting death of Gary King Jr. Last week, almost six years after the shooting, the Alameda County District Attorney's Office finally released a report, clearing Sgt. Patrick Gonzales of any wrongdoing.

On Thursday, Michael Haddad, an attorney who sued the city on behalf of King's family, said the \$1.5 million settlement was a "tacit admission" of flaws in the internal affairs investigation and called on District Attorney Nancy O'Malley to re-examine evidence he uncovered.

A spokeswoman from the District Attorney's Office had no comment.

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