



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

2024 Report on Claims and Lawsuits Involving Seattle Police Department

August 20, 2025

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Executive Summary

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is charged with the “assessment of inquests, federal and local litigation, and their final outcomes, patterns relating to civil claims and lawsuits alleging Seattle Police Department (SPD) misconduct, payout amounts over time, units disproportionately represented as subjects of claims and lawsuits, related training, and review of the investigations of the underlying incidents in such claims and lawsuits...”¹

This report provides a descriptive analysis of claims and lawsuits between 2014 and 2023, providing an in-depth examination of claims alleging SPD excessive force, claims filed by SPD personnel, and those associated with protests and demonstrations.² The report also includes reporting on SPD’s Early Intervention System (EIS), Collision Review Board (CRB), allegations filed with the Office of Police Accountability (OPA), and the City of Seattle’s (the City) Judgement and Claims Fund (JCF).

City of Seattle Litigation Process

Claims can allege SPD fault for incidents resulting in loss, injury, or damages. Claims contain basic information about the claimant, and a description of the incident or loss and the injuries and/or damages. Claims are filed with the City Clerk’s Office and then routed to the City’s Risk Management division, where an adjuster is assigned to investigate and evaluate the claim.

Most claims are resolved by paying the claimant a sum of money, transferring the claim to the entity responsible, or denying the claim. If a claimant disagrees with the resolution, the claimant can consult a private attorney, at their own expense, to explore the next steps, which may include litigation.³

Lawsuits are legal actions where a party (the plaintiff) files a complaint against another party (the defendant) to resolve a dispute. A lawsuit based upon allegations for damages arising from tortious conduct by SPD, may be filed sixty-calendar days after the filing of a claim. For other types of cases, plaintiffs may file a lawsuit without first filing a claim.⁴ The Civil Division of the City Attorney’s Office (CAO) represents SPD and its employees in lawsuits. Lawsuits are initiated in court by the filing of a complaint, which contains detailed information about the parties, the allegations, and the relief sought by the plaintiff.

Main Categories

- **Tow**—seeks reimbursement for wrongful towing and/or impoundment costs.
- **Fleet**—alleges harm for incidents involving SPD vehicles, such as vehicle collisions or allegations of SPD drivers failing to operate a vehicle with due care for the safety of the public.

1 Ordinance 125315, 3.29270 ¶14.

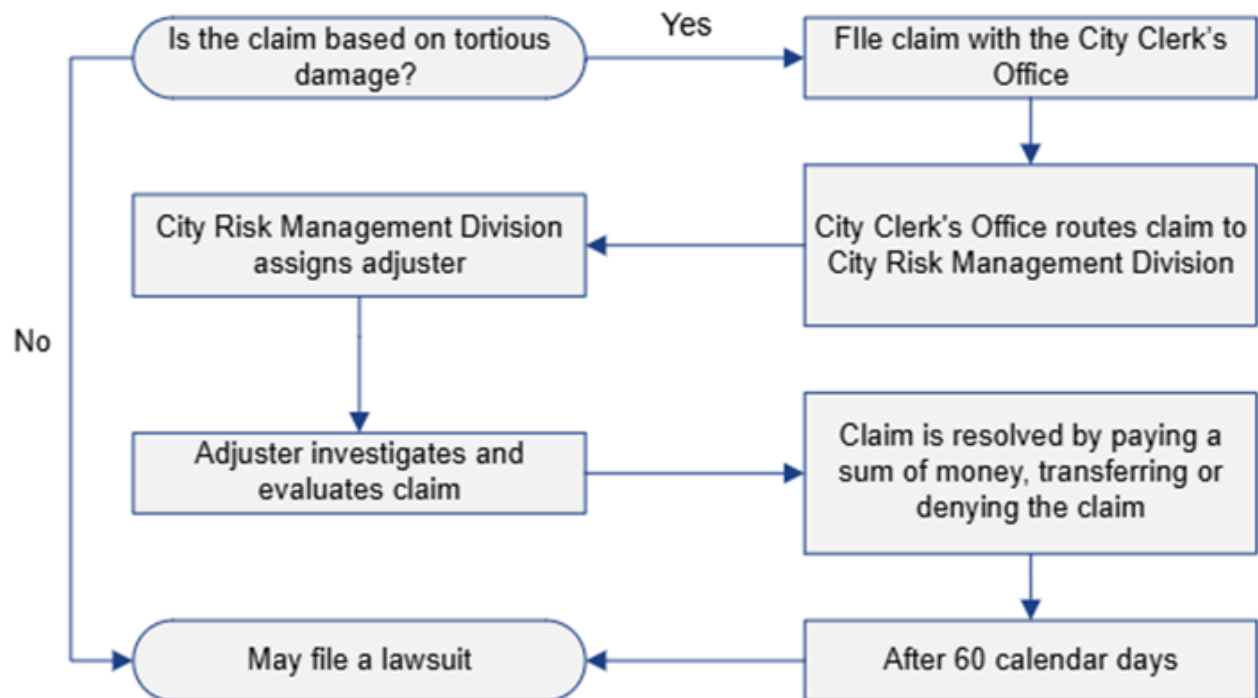
2 Due to the high volume of complaints and payments related to protests, those claims are presented in a separate section of this report.

3 [File a Damage Claim - City Finance | seattle.gov](#).

4 Washington State, Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 4.96.020 (4).

- **Police negligence**—alleges police failed to exercise reasonable care in the performance of their duties that resulted in damages to the complainant. Most lawsuits alleging police negligence involve fleets (“Police negligence: fleet”).
- **Police action**—alleges that SPD operations, personnel actions, equipment, or vehicles are responsible for loss, injury, or damages.

Claims process



OIG reviewed litigation data between 2014 and 2023 to analyze claims and lawsuits categories, resolutions, dispositions, and amounts paid by the City for allegations of SPD misconduct.

Main Findings

Claims

- Between 2019 and 2023, 59% of SPD-involved claims were resolved with payment, totaling \$3,439,857.41.
- Except for 2023, fleet claims accounted for the highest payments, primarily due to collisions with parked vehicles (18%), collisions with other vehicles (14%), failure to yield (11%), reversing into claimant (9%), and unsafe lane changing (7%).

Lawsuits

- Between 2014 and 2023, 172 lawsuits were filed. Police action (61%) and police negligence involving fleet (19%) were the most common.
- 43% of SPD-involved lawsuits were resolved by paying a sum of money through a settlement agreement or a post-trial judgement. Between 2021 and 2023, the City paid a total of \$13,042,400 in settlements, surpassing the \$6,005,577.40 paid on settlements and post-trial judgements between 2014 and 2020.⁵

OIG also reviewed reports, complaints, allegations, and outcomes related to all paid claims and lawsuits.⁶ OIG identified 22 OPA investigations: three lawsuits regarding police negligence: fleet operation, three claims related to police actions and 16 lawsuits involving police actions. Among these investigations, 9.1% had sustained allegations. In cases where allegations were sustained, officers typically received suspensions without pay from one to six days, with one instance of a 30-day suspension without pay and two terminations. For cases where allegations were not sustained, three investigations directed officers to additional training.

I. Claims and Lawsuits

This section presents a descriptive analysis of claims and civil lawsuits against SPD. To conduct this analysis, OIG reviewed claims and lawsuits, both open and closed between 2014 and 2023. The assessment includes analysis of complaint types, resolutions, dispositions, and amounts paid by the City on behalf of alleged SPD wrongdoing. A more detailed analysis of claims and lawsuits related to SPD excessive force, those filed by SPD personnel, and those associated with protests and demonstrations follows. Due to the high volume of complaints and payments related to protests, those claims are presented in a separate section of this report. Given that cases alleging excessive force accounted for most of police action payments, this report provides an in-depth examination of those claims and lawsuits.

a. Claims

Claims allege SPD fault for incidents resulting in loss, injury, or damages.⁷ Claims are filed with the City Clerk's Office and then routed to the City's Risk Management division which reviews, investigates, and resolves claims by:

- Paying a sum of money;
- Transferring the claim to another entity where appropriate; or
- Denying the claim where there is no evidence of SPD negligence.

⁵ According to FAS **2021** Judgement Claims Fund Annual Report, the City's highest expenses by department were as follows: for claims, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU)/Drainage & WW (\$3.8 million), followed by SPU/Water (\$1.1 million), Transportation (\$0.8 million), City Light (\$0.65 million), Parks & Recreation (\$0.18 million), and SPD (\$0.16 million); and for lawsuits, SPD (\$13 million) and the Mayor's Office (\$4.2 million).

⁶ Only for payments equal to or exceeding \$20,000.

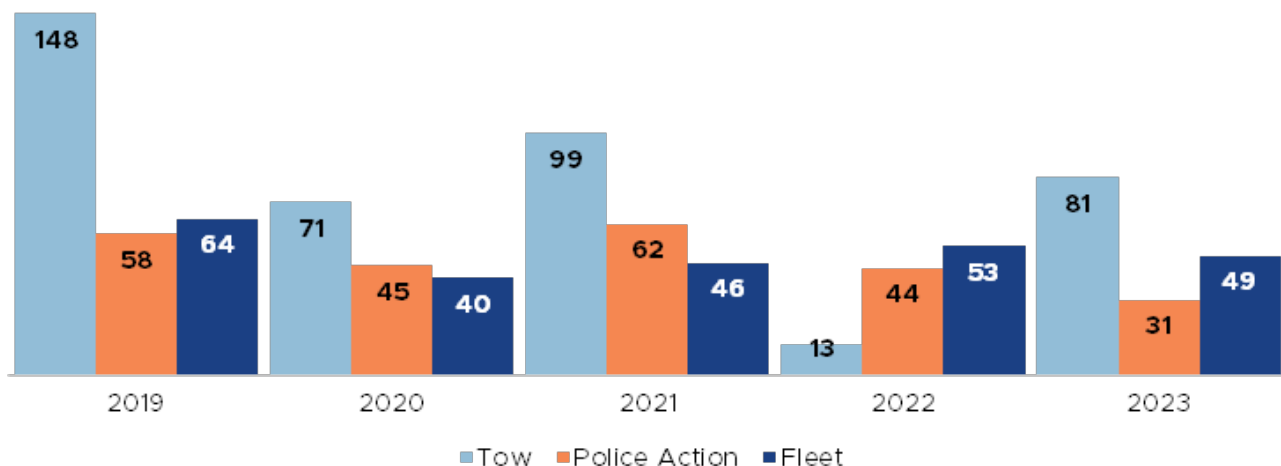
⁷ Claims are regulated by the Washington State Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 4.96.020 and the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 5.24.005.

The Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) maintains a database of claims filed.⁸ The majority of SPD-related claims are tow, police action, and fleet:

- **Fleet claims** are filed for incidents involving SPD vehicles, such as minor vehicle collisions or allegations of SPD drivers failing to operate a vehicle with due care for the safety of the public.
- **Police action claims** allege that SPD operations, personnel actions, equipment, or vehicles are responsible for loss, injury, or damages.
- **Tow claims** seek reimbursement for wrongful towing and/or impoundment costs.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of claims between 2019 to 2023. Tow (40%), police action (24%), and fleet (25%) claims were the most common claims in that period. Except for 2021, police action claims have decreased in the past five years; 2023 had the lowest number of police action claims (31). The fewest claims were filed in 2022 (126). The highest count of other claims (25) were filed in 2023, with 13 claims related to employment or city employee action.⁹

Figure 1. Most common claims filed by year



Source: FAS internal database. 1020 filed claims between 2019 and 2023.

The City's Risk Management Division assigns an adjuster to investigate and evaluate claims. The evaluation considers the facts of the loss, applicable law, whether the City of Seattle and SPD has legal responsibility, the claimant's role in the event, and the claimed damages.¹⁰

8 Claim types: Bailment, bicycle incidents, city employee action, collision, court action, employment, environmental, protection, equipment, facilities, fall, fleet, fire action, non-City, police action, property, damage, public disclosure, street defect, street design, tow.

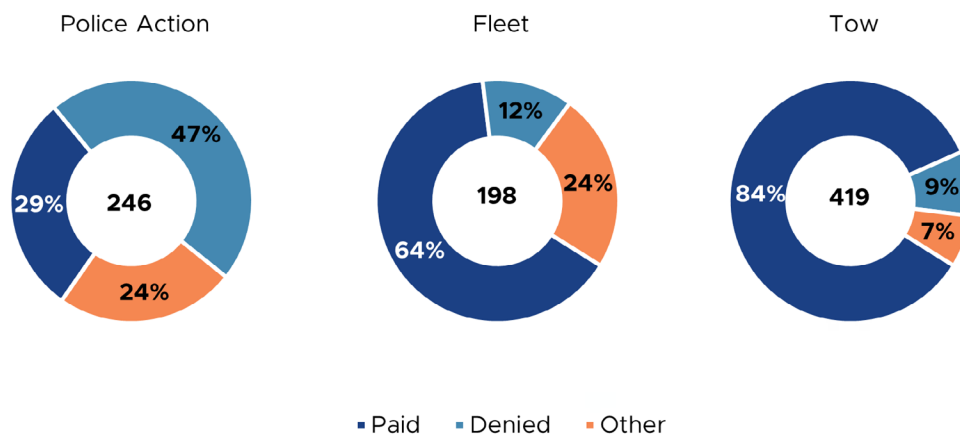
9 Other claim types: Bicycle incidents, city employee action, collision, court action, employment, environmental, protection, equipment, facilities, fall, fire action, non-City, property, damage, public disclosure, street defect, and street design.

10 [File a Damage Claim - City Finance | seattle.gov](https://www.seattle.gov/finance/claims).

Figure 2 depicts the three most common types of claims resolutions: payment, denial, or other (closed or small claim – no payment) between 2019 and 2023.

- Between 2019 and 2023, 59% of all SPD-involved claims were resolved by paying an amount of money.
- Police action claims had the highest percentage of denial overall (47%), with 2019 showing the highest percentage of denied claims (72%).
- Although tow claims are the most likely to be paid (84%) overall, 2022 had the highest percentages of claims denied (17%).

Figure 2. Claims by resolution between 2019 and 2023

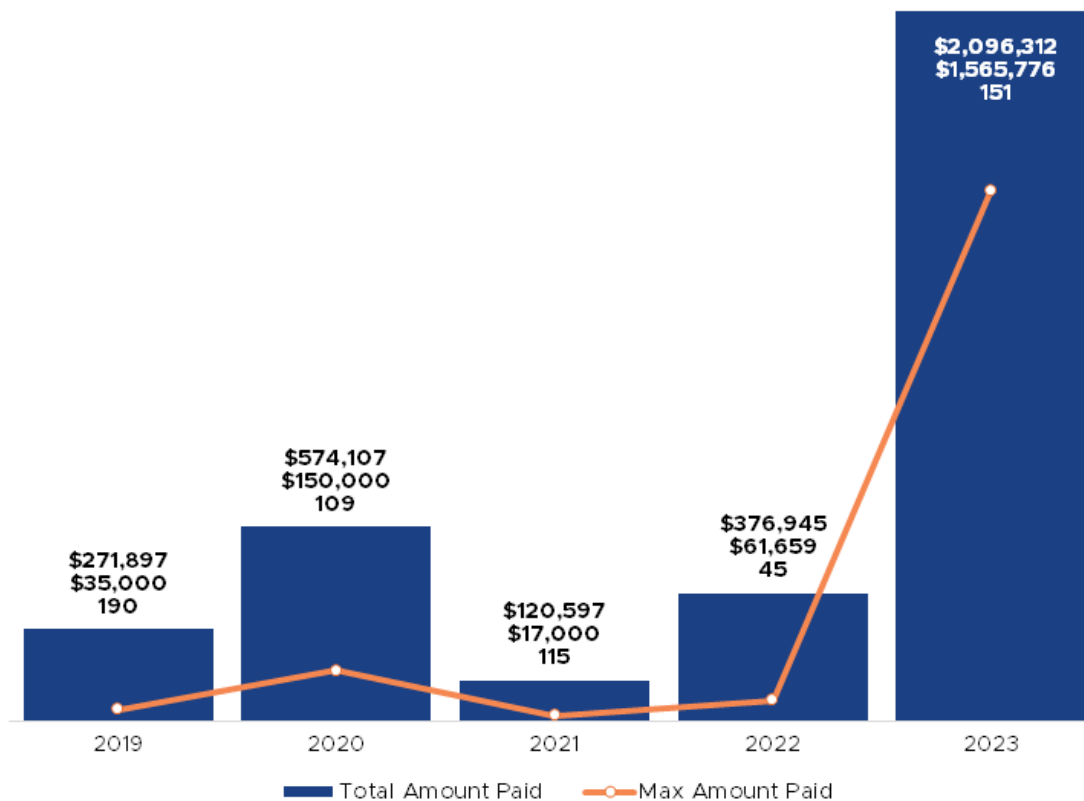


Source: FAS internal database. Other: Administrative closed and small claims with no payment. 1026 claims closed between 2019 and 2023.

Figure 3 depicts the total amount paid the maximum amount paid by year:

- The highest number of claims were paid in 2019 (190), followed by 2023 (151) and 2020 (109).
- The lowest total payments were in 2021 (\$120,597).
- The lowest maximum settled was paid in 2021 (\$17,000).
- 2023 had the highest amount of paid claims (\$2,096,312) and the maximum amount paid through a settlement (\$1,565,776.43).¹¹

Figure 3. Total and maximum amount paid by year



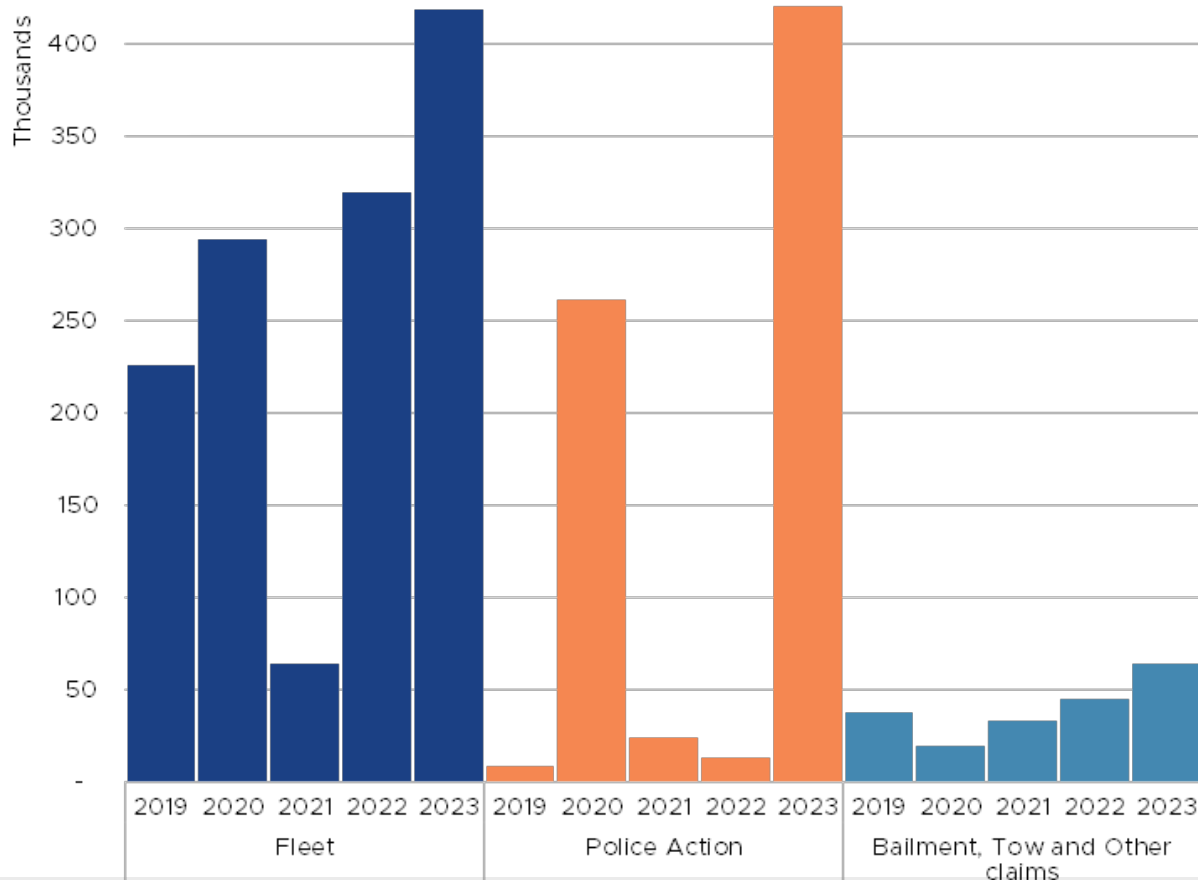
Transaction Year	Year Incident Occurred												
	88	95	99	00	11	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
2019					1	1	4	44	140				
2020							4	3	59	43			
2021								3	4	51	57		
2022								4	8	5	18	10	
2023	1	1	1	1				6	5	14	19	25	78

Source: FAS internal database. Other: Administrative closed and small claims with no payment. 1026 claims closed between 2019 and 2023.

¹¹ Police action claim settled for \$1,565,776.43 with the decedent's estate claim for [alleged] use of deadly force, wrongful death negligence, civil rights violation, and violation of Public Records Act.

Figure 4 depicts paid claims by type and year. Except for a police action payment in 2023 (\$1,613,936), fleet claims account for the highest payments. Payments were due to collisions with parked vehicles (18%), collisions with other vehicles (14%), failure to yield (11%), reversing into claimant (9%), and unsafe lane changing (7%).

Figure 4. Paid claims by type and year



Source: FAS internal database. Note: Value of \$1,613,936.24 from Police Action in 2023 is not shown at scale.

b. Lawsuits

A lawsuit is a legal action where a party (the plaintiff) files a complaint against another party (the defendant) to resolve a dispute. A lawsuit based on allegations of tortious conduct by SPD, may be filed sixty-calendar days after the filing of a claim. For other types of cases, plaintiffs may file a lawsuit without first filing a claim.

Lawsuits are opened by the filing of a complaint, which contains detailed information about the parties, the allegations, and the relief sought by the plaintiff. The Civil Division of the CAO represents the City in lawsuits.¹²

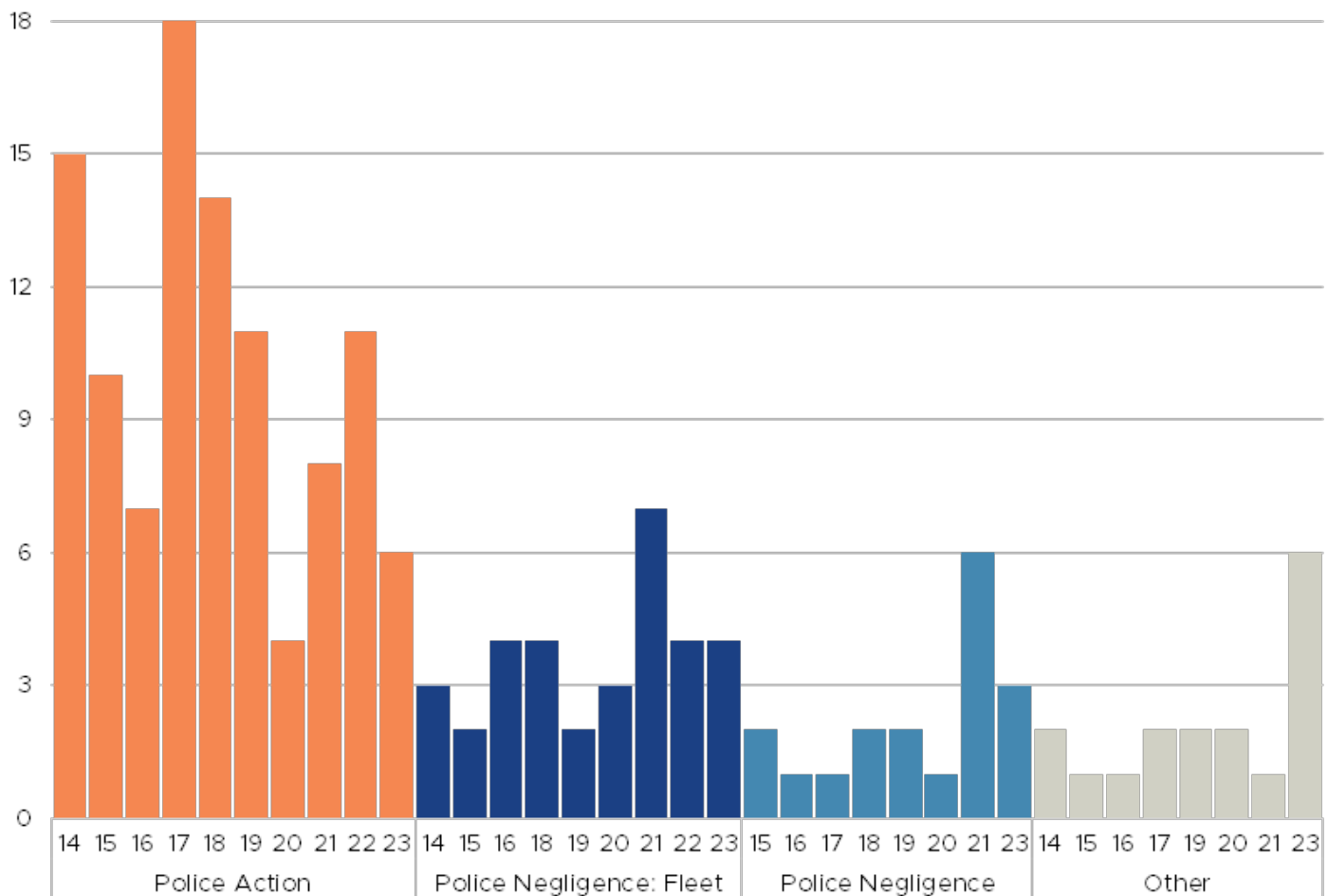
¹² The CAO determines legal strategy in lawsuits and considers a multitude of factors in evaluating whether to settle a case or continue the litigation process.

Most lawsuits against SPD are related to police action or police negligence involving allegations that SPD operations, personnel action, equipment were responsible for loss, injury, or damages.¹³ Police negligence lawsuits allege police failed to exercise reasonable care in the performance of their duties that resulted in damages to the complainant.

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of lawsuits filed by type and year:

- 2020 had the lowest count of lawsuits filed (10); 2021 (22) and 2017 (21) had the highest count of lawsuits filed.
- Police action (62%) and police negligence: fleet (19%) were the most common lawsuits.
- Except for 2022, police action lawsuits have decreased in the past seven years.
- 2020 had the lowest number of lawsuits related to police action (4).
- Except for 2021, police negligence: fleet lawsuits have remained consistent.

Figure 5. Paid claims by type and year



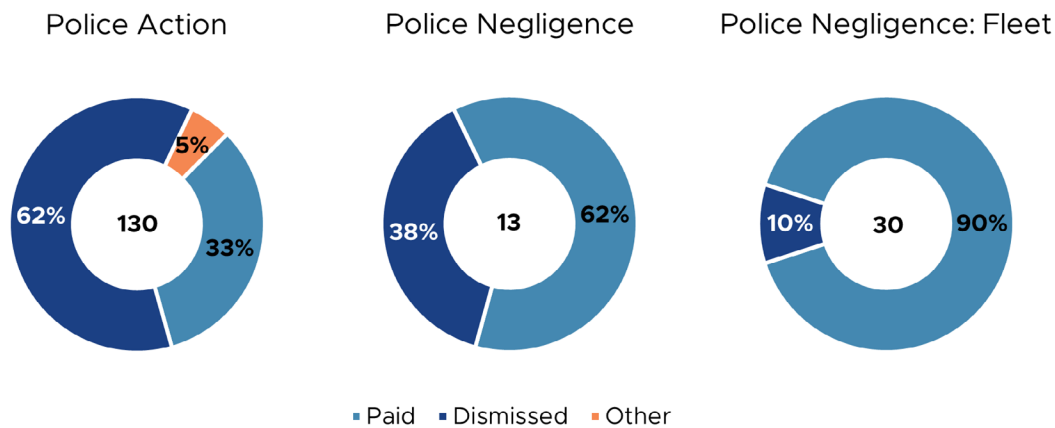
Source: CAO.

13 2021 OIG Annual Report.

Figure 6 shows the resolution by type of lawsuit between 2014 and 2023:

- SPD-involved lawsuits: 43% were resolved by paying a sum of money through a settlement agreement or a post-trial judgement.
- Except for 2014 and 2022, all closed police negligence: fleet lawsuits were settled (100%).
- Police action lawsuits had the highest percentage of dismissals (62%) followed by police negligence (38%) and police negligence involving fleet (10%).

Figure 6. Lawsuit resolution between 2014 and 2023



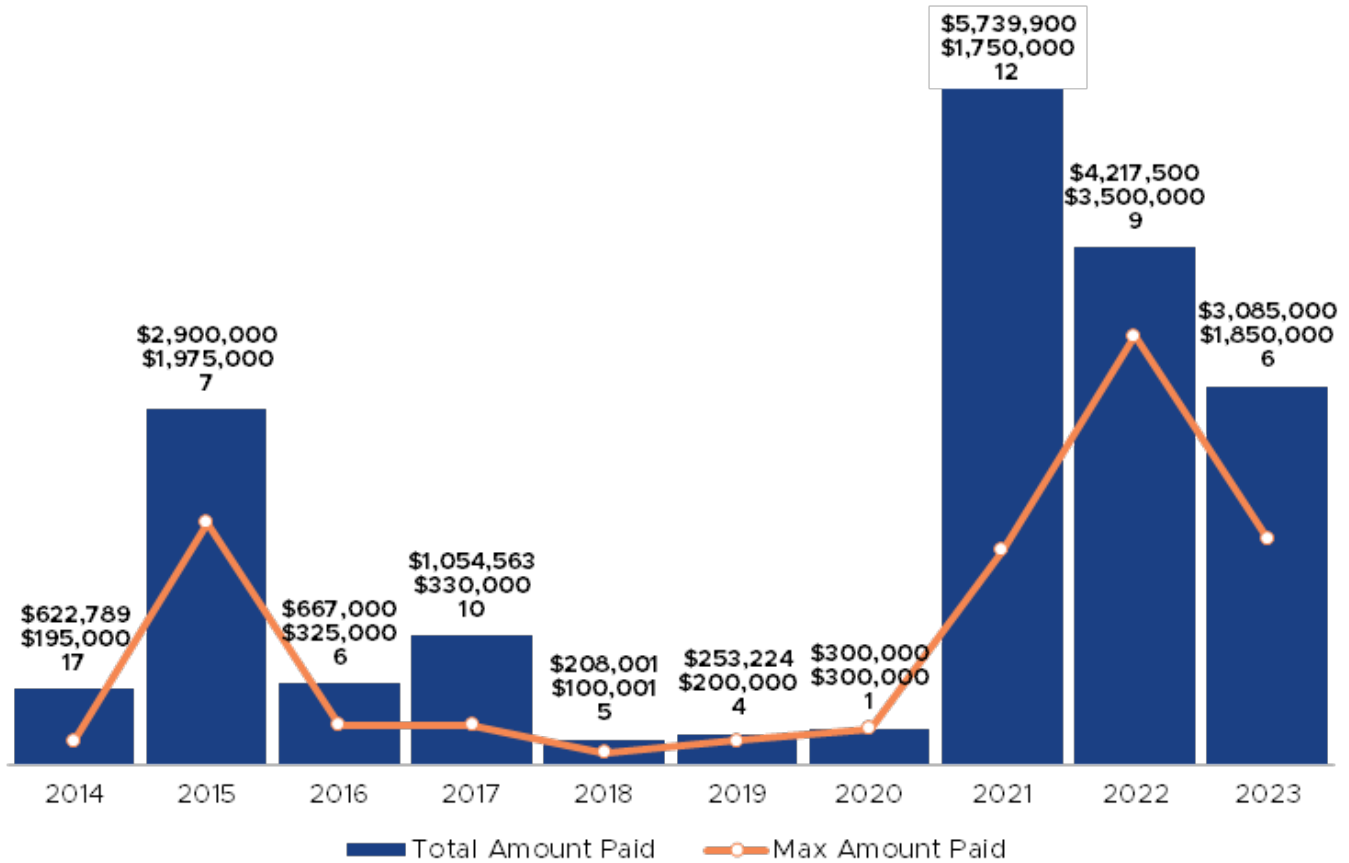
Source: CAO. Closed lawsuits, disposition year. Paid: settlement and post-trial judgement payment. Other: case closed and uncollectable. 14 other types of lawsuits closed not shown in the graph.

Figure 7 depicts the total amount paid and the maximum amount paid by year:¹⁴

- 2014 had the highest number of paid lawsuits (17), followed by 2021 (12), and 2022 (9).
- Between 2021 and 2023, the City paid a total of \$13,042,400 in settlements, significantly surpassing the \$6,005,577.40 paid on settlements and post-trial judgements between 2014 and 2020.
- 2018 had the lowest paid amount (\$208,001) and the lowest maximum settlement amount.
- The highest maximum amount paid was \$5.7 million in 2022.

¹⁴ OIG was unable to obtain a more specific breakdown of the paid amounts beyond the total. These totals may include an award of plaintiff attorney fees.

Figure 7. Lawsuits: total and maximum amount paid by year



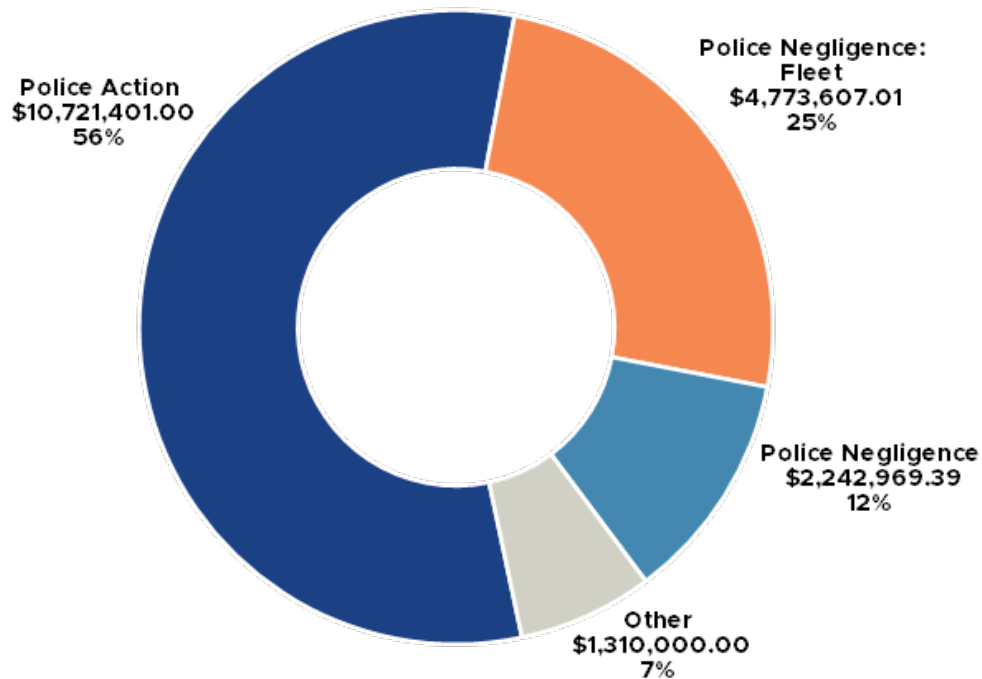
Disposition Year	Year Incident Occurred																		
	57	70	81	04	05	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
2014				1	1	2	6	4	2		1								
2015						1		1	4		1								
2016								1	2	1	2								
2017							1			4	1	1	3						
2018												3	2						
2019									1			2		1					
2020	1																		
2021													3	2	4	2	1		
2022			1												4			2	
2023		1															1	3	1

Source: CAO. Disposition year. Bar labels: Total amount settled; lines: maximum amount settled; number of claims settled.

Figure 8 shows settlements by lawsuit type between 2014 and 2023:

- Police action settlements accounted for the highest total paid by the City on behalf of SPD (\$10.7m) followed by police negligence: fleet (\$4.7m) and police negligence (\$2.2m).
- Other lawsuits involve cases alleging violation of the City’s Public Records Act, unlawful seizure of property, and an SPD personnel-related case.

Figure 8. Paid lawsuits by type between 2014 and 2023



Source: CAO. Closed lawsuits and disposition amount greater than 0. Disposition year.

Figure 9 shows settlements equal to and greater than \$100,000. Details of the highest payments are described as follows:¹⁵

Police Negligence: Fleet

- Plaintiff alleges that a vehicle collision on August 4, 2012, and resulting injuries were caused by City negligence. Disposition year: 2015. Settlement: \$365,000.
- Plaintiff alleges an SPD driver negligently collided with the car where he was a passenger. Plaintiff also sues the driver. Disposition year: 2021. Settlement: \$1,750,000.
- SPD Officer alleges that another SPD employee negligently caused them injury by hitting them with a vehicle in the SW precinct parking lot. Disposition year: 2023. Settlement: \$1,000,000.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Excessive Force section for information related to the police action highest settlements.

¹⁶ Case also mentioned on SPD personnel section.



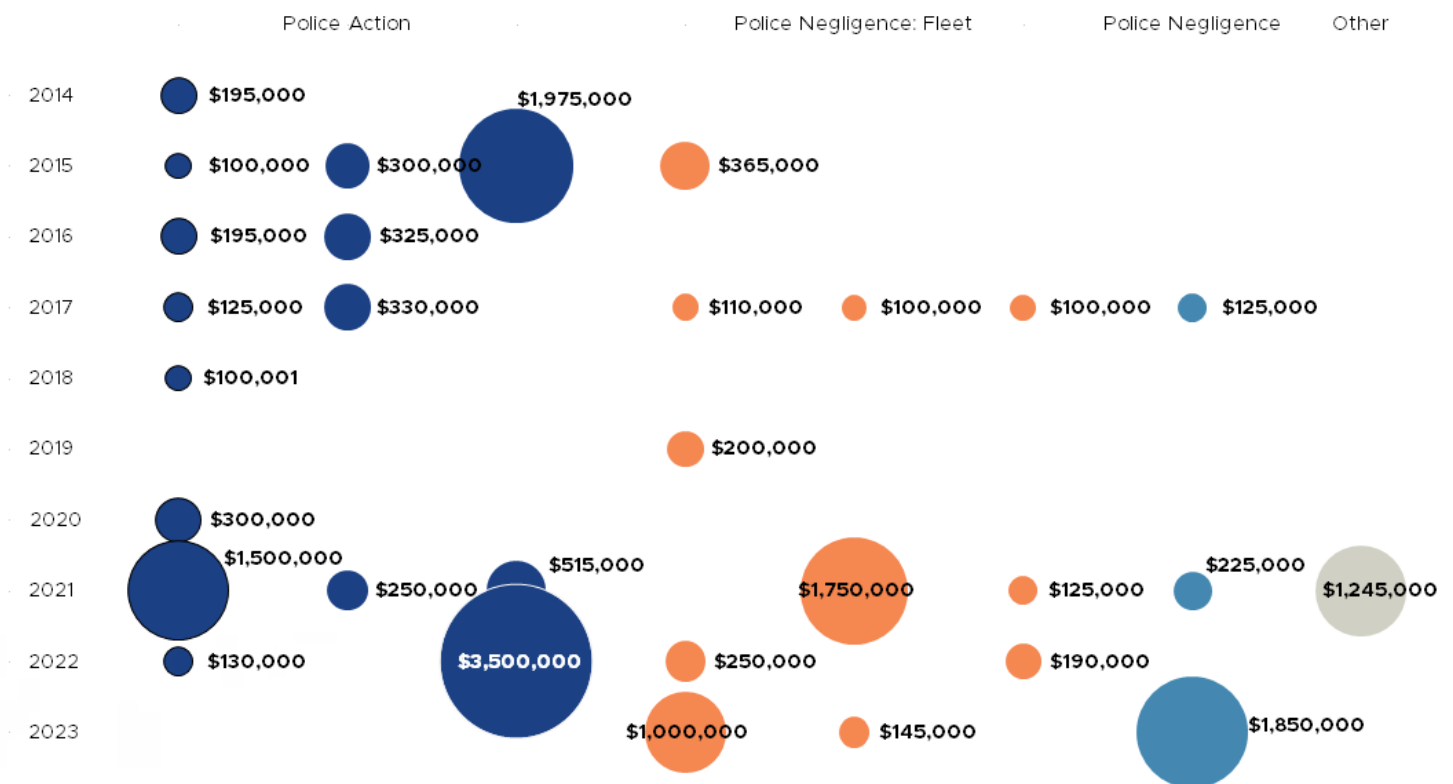
Police Action

- Plaintiff alleges that she was raped by a former SPD officer over 40 years ago in an SPD vehicle and seeks damages on negligence and Washington Law Against Discrimination. Disposition year: 2023. Settlement: \$1,850,000.

Tort

- This case involves two SPD officers who allege they were injured as a result of negligent bicycle maintenance and a spouse who alleges that the City violated the public records act in responding to a records request related to SPD bicycle maintenance. Disposition year: 2021. Settlement: \$1,245,000.¹⁷

Figure 9. Payments equal and greater than \$100,000



Source: CAO.

¹⁷ Case is also mentioned on SPD personnel section.

c. Claims and Lawsuits Related to Excessive Force

SPD categorizes force according to the severity or significance of the force involved:¹⁸

- **De minimis:** Actions that are meant to separate, guide, and/or control without the use of control techniques that are intended to or are reasonably likely to cause any pain or injury.
- **Type I:** Force that causes pain or injury not requiring anything greater than basic first aid.
- **Type II:** Force that causes or is reasonably expected to cause physical injury requiring medical treatment greater than basic first aid.
- **Type III:** Force that causes or is reasonably expected to cause great bodily harm, substantial bodily harm, loss of consciousness, or death.

Excessive force can be defined as physical force (e.g. beating, shoving, touching, or neglect) beyond what is necessary and reasonable to achieve a law enforcement objective. Excessive force need not result in death or serious injury - it can assume a more subtle form, such as a non-injurious push or shove.¹⁹ When force is excessive, officers and the City can be civilly liable.

Excessive Force Claims

Table 1 displays the number of filed claims alleging excessive force between 2019 and 2023. These allegations fall under police action claims. Except for 2020, the percentage of excessive force claims ranged from 13% to 16% of all police action claims.²⁰

Table 1. Counts of filed claims alleging excessive force

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No of Claims Filed	9 (16)	16 (36)	8 (13)	7 (16)	5 (16)

Source: FAS internal database. Percentage of claims alleging excessive force of all police action claims in parenthesis.

18 SPD Policy Manual, Interim Policy 8.050 Use of Force Definitions.

19 Thurman, Quint, and Andrew L. Giacomazzi. *Controversies in Policing*. Routledge, 2004.

20 No force-related claims were settled in 2021 and 2022. However, excessive force and force-related claims were more likely to be closed after litigation: Except for 2020, between 38% and 67% of litigated police action claims alleged excessive force.

Table 2 shows payments for claims alleging excessive force. From 2019 to 2023:

- In 2020, the second-highest maximum settlement reached \$150,000. This payment was for a claim alleging two SPD officers fired weapons into a car, injuring the claimant.
- The highest settlement occurred in 2023, where the claimant alleged unnecessary use of deadly force, wrongful death negligence, civil rights violations, and violation of the Public Records Act.

Table 2. Payments of claims alleging excessive force

Year	Total Paid	Max Payment
2019	\$2,250.00	\$2,250.00
2020	\$258,060.87	\$150,000.00
2021	\$3,909.64	\$2,609.17
2022	\$6,141.17	\$3,333.67
2023	\$1,569,725.21	\$1,565,776.43
Source: FAS internal database.		

Excessive Force Lawsuits

Table 3 tabulates the count of lawsuits alleging excessive force between 2014 and 2023. These allegations are part of police action lawsuits:²¹

- 2017 had the highest number of filed lawsuits alleging excessive force (8), followed by 2015 (6).
- The number of lawsuits decreased after 2017.
- Between 2018 and 2023, only 14 lawsuits were filed, fewer than 20 filed between 2014 and 2017.

Table 3. Counts of filed lawsuits alleging excessive force

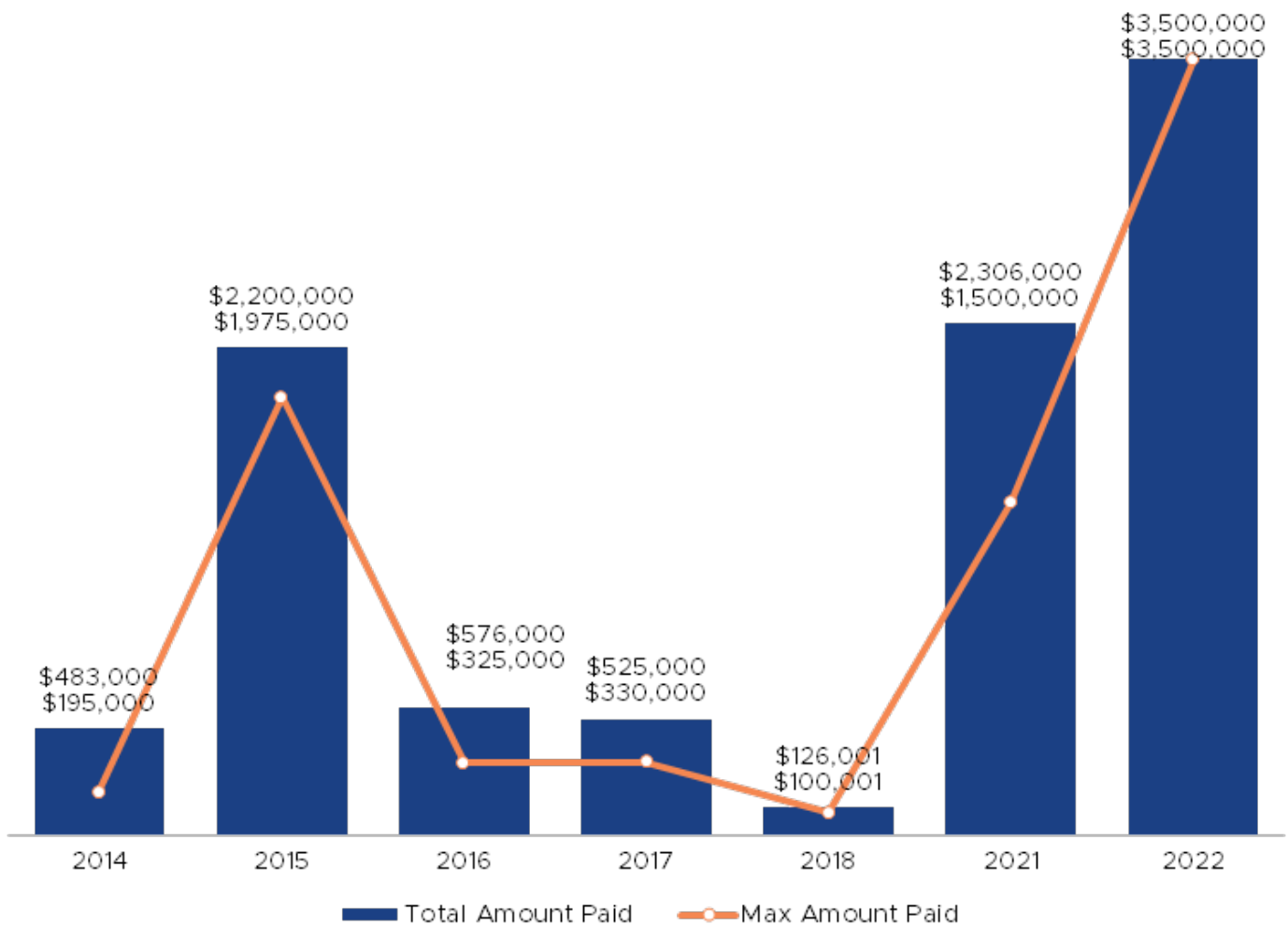
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Filed	3 (20)	6 (60)	2 (29)	8 (44)	4 (29)	4 (36)	1 (25)	2 (22)	1 (8)	2 (33)
Source: CAO. Percentage in parenthesis.										

²¹ 50% to 100% of settled police action lawsuits were force-related or involved allegations of excessive force. In 2014, the highest number of excessive force lawsuits were settled (10).

Figure 10 illustrates payments related to lawsuits involving excessive force or force-related claims:

- From 2014 to 2022, the City disbursed \$9,382,501 in settlements for excessive force lawsuits, constituting 90.32% of all police action settlements.
- 2022 had the highest settlement amount (\$3.5 million), followed by 2015 (\$1.98 million) and 2021 (\$1.5 million). Further details on these cases are provided below.
 - Plaintiff alleges he was shot in the face and injured as a result of unconstitutional police action on May 22, 2009. Disposition year: 2015. Settlement: \$1,975,000.
 - Plaintiff alleges 4th Amendment excessive force and 14th Amendment claims arising out of the officer-involved shooting resulting in the death of plaintiff's relative on February 21, 2016. Disposition year: 2021. Settlement: \$1,500,000.
 - Plaintiffs sue the City and defendant officers after plaintiff's relative was shot on June 6, 2018. Disposition year: 2022. Settlement: \$3,500,000.

Figure 10. Payments for lawsuits alleging excessive force



Source: Seattle City Attorney's Office. Disposition year. Labels: total amount paid, maximum amount paid.



d. Claims and Lawsuits Related to Protests and Demonstrations

SPD determines strategies and tactics for responding to protests and demonstrations in the City. Community members may file claims or lawsuits when the deployment of crowd control techniques, devices, and tactics used to respond to protest, or demonstrations results in harm or damages. This section presents claims and lawsuits data arising from public demonstrations and provides an overview of the associated outcomes.

Protests and Demonstrations Claims

Table 5 presents the counts of claims related to protests and demonstrations. Except for four cases, all claims filed against the City between 2020 and 2023 were tied to the 2020 protests following George Floyd’s murder. The highest number of claims was filed in 2020. Overall, 84% of closed protest-related claims resulted in payments.

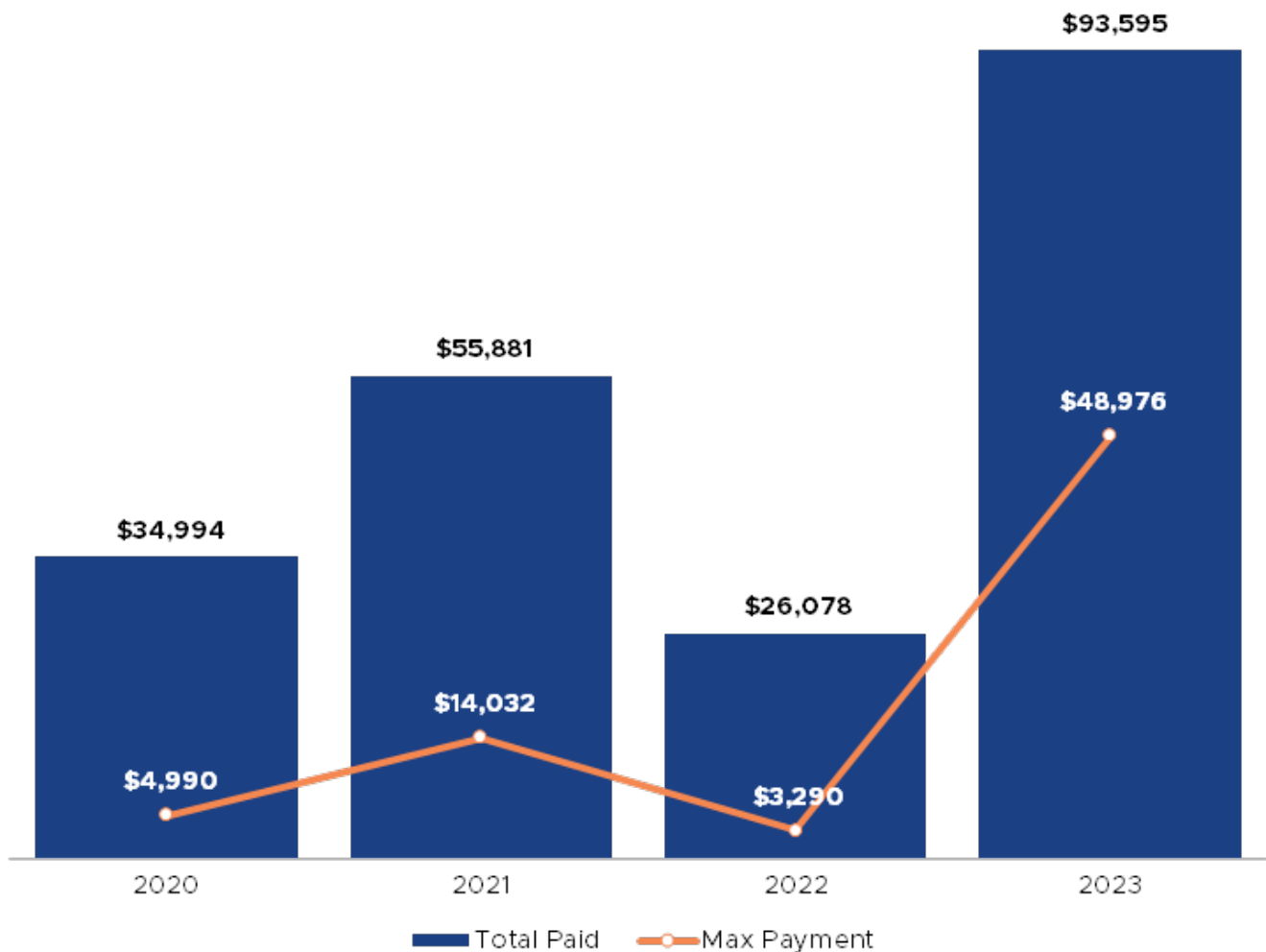
Table 4. Counts of claims related to protests or demonstrations

Year	Filed
2020	88
2021	7
2022	12
2023	7
Total	114
Source: FAS internal database.	

Figure 11 displays payments specifically related to protests. Between 2020 and 2023, the City paid a total of \$210,548. The highest payments occurred in 2023 (\$93,595), followed by 2021 (\$55,881) and 2020 (\$34,994). The maximum payments were as follows:

- Claim regarding the Capitol Hill Organized Protest zone in June 2020. Transaction year: 2023. Amount paid: \$ 48,975.68.
- Claimant alleged SPD shot pepper spray and tear gas into the business, making it unsafe for public use, in June 2020. Transaction year: 2021. Amount paid: \$14,031.92.
- Claimant alleged tear gas exposure and blunt trauma caused by SPD officers in May 2020. Transaction year: 2023. Amount paid: \$13,393.18.

Figure 11. Payments of claims related to protests or demonstrations



Source: FAS internal database.

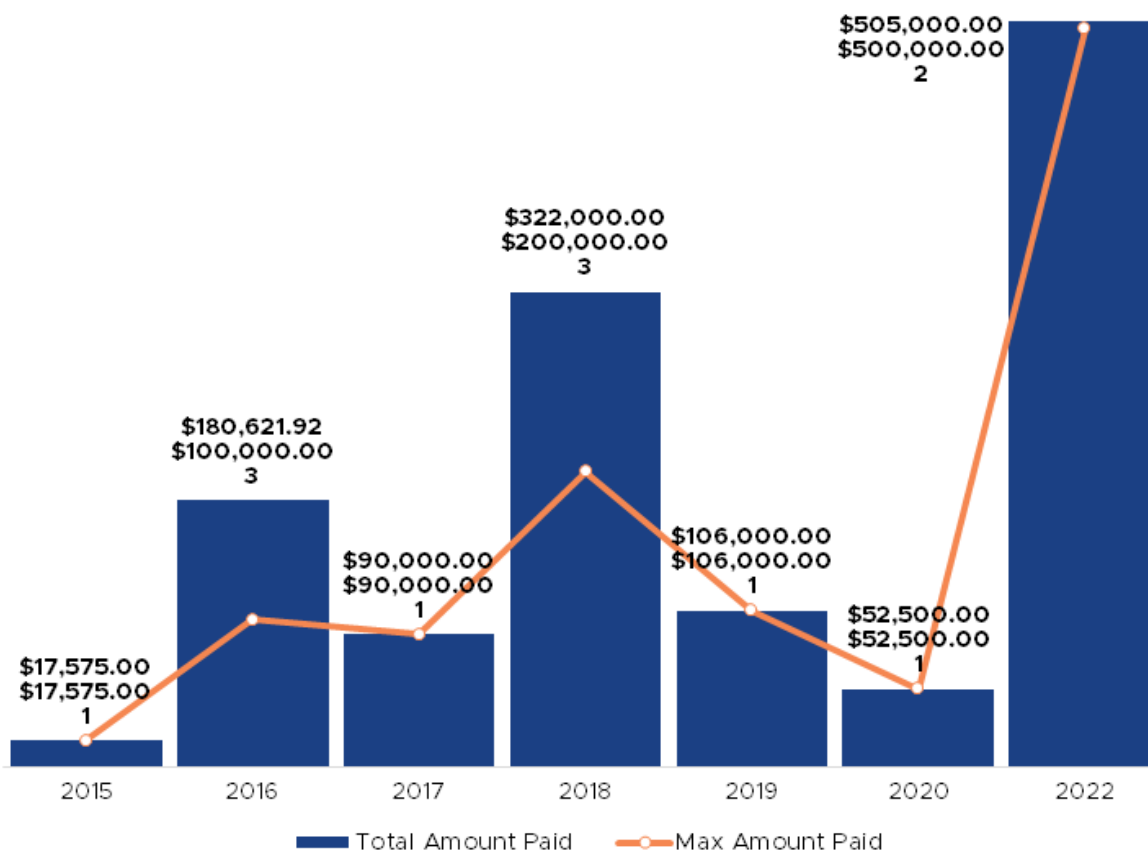


Protests and Demonstrations Lawsuits

Figure 12 shows payments for protest-related lawsuits. All closed suits related to protests and demonstrations were resolved through settlements for every year except 2022. From 2015 to 2022, the total settlements amounted to \$1,273,696.92. 79% of this sum corresponds to settlements made in 2022, 2018 and 2016. Specifically, 2022 accounted for \$505,000, 2018 for \$322,000, and 2016 for \$180,621.92. Further information regarding these three settlements is below:

- Plaintiff alleges that excessive force was used against him when he was pepper-sprayed on January 19, 2015, during Martin Luther King march/protest. Disposition year: 2016. Settlement: \$100,000.
- Plaintiff sued the SPD and six officers for false arrest, excessive force, and racial discrimination following his arrest at a mobile fence line during a Black Lives Matter/Ferguson-related protest on November 27, 2015. Disposition year: 2018. Settlement: \$200,000.
- The estate filed a variety of claims against the City for the shooting death of an individual by a third party in the Capitol Hill Organized Protest zone on June 20, 2020. Disposition year: 2022. Settlement: \$500,000.

Figure 12. Payments from lawsuits related to protests or demonstrations



Source: FAS internal database.



e. Claims and Lawsuits Related to SPD Personnel

The following section discusses claims and lawsuits filed by SPD personnel. Between 2019 and 2023, 35 claims were filed. The majority were filed in 2023 (40%), and most were vaccine-related. None of the closed claims resulted in payment.

Table 5. SPD personnel claims

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Filed	4	5	9	3	14
Closed	3	8	14	5	9

Source: FAS internal database.

Ten lawsuits were filed between 2014 and 2023. In comparison to previous years, 2023 had the highest number of filed cases (3). Two cases are currently open and three have received settlement payments.²² The settled cases were the following:

- Plaintiff sought tort damages for personal injury following a car accident that SPD determined was preventable and caused by another officer. Settlement: \$200,000.
- Two SPD officers alleged they were injured as a result of negligent bicycle maintenance; a spouse alleged the City violated the Public Records Act in responding to a records request related to SPD bicycle maintenance. Settlement: \$1,245,000.²³
- Plaintiff alleged another SPD employee negligently caused them injury by running into them with a vehicle in the Southwest precinct parking lot. Settlement: \$1,000,000.²⁴

Table 6. SPD personnel lawsuits

Year	2014	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023
Filed	4	5	9	3	14	1	1	3
Closed	3	8	14	5	9		1	2

Source: FAS internal database.

II. Risk Management: Early Intervention System

SPD's Early Intervention System (EIS) is a data driven management tool that alerts management to officers with potential performance problems, allowing interventions to be undertaken before major problems occur and formal disciplinary action is required.²⁵ SPD's EIS seeks to identify and address potential risk factors triggered by:

- Use of Force
- Vehicle collisions
- Receipts of Office of Police Accountability (OPA) complaints

²² Last accessed date: June 2024.

²³ Case also mentioned on Figure 15. Payments equal and greater than \$100,000.

²⁴ Case also mentioned on Figure 15. Payments equal and greater than \$100,000.

²⁵ Walker, Samuel. Early intervention systems for law enforcement agencies: A planning and management guide. Washington DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2003.

- Receipts of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints
- Name in police action claims and/or lawsuits.

The system is separate from, and does not replace, the existing system of discipline for violations of policy.²⁶

Early Intervention Assessment Process

SPD's Early Intervention (EI) assessment process consists of five stages.

First Stage. The EI assessment includes review of the EI criteria thresholds and prompt notification to the involved officer. Notification allows the officer to identify any errors in the data flagging the review. If the information in the EIS is accurate, the sergeant, commander, or civilian supervisor must also review at least two performance evaluations, documentation related to the underlying incident(s), and any additional information that would be relevant to the identified performance issues. The sergeant provides an EI assessment, and if appropriate, a proposed Mentoring Plan.

Second Stage. The sergeant meets with the officer to discuss any performance issues and concerns; if appropriate, the sergeant refers officer to the Education & Training Section, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and/or Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team. Referrals may be part of the EI Mentoring Plan but are not substitutes for it.²⁷

Third Stage. The lieutenant in the chain of command reviews, directs corrections and modifications, and recommends whether the officer should be assigned to the EI assessment. The EI coordinator reviews the thoroughness of EI assessment and forwards it to the Performance Review Committee.²⁸

Fourth Stage. The Performance Review Committee makes its recommended findings and/or changes and forwards the EI assessment and any proposed intervention plans to the concerned officer's Bureau Chief for review, comment, and approval.²⁹

Fifth Stage. The Bureau Chief reviews and approves the EI assessment and/or EI mentoring plan.³⁰

a. Officers Named in Police Action Claims and/or Lawsuits

An EI assessment is triggered once an officer is the subject of two claims or lawsuits within a 24-month period.³¹ Figure 20 provides a breakdown of EI alerts and assessment plans. Between 2016 and 2023, the EI system generated 47 alerts, resulting in 11 assessment plans. The highest number of EI alerts occurred in 2020 (15), followed by 2016 and 2021, each with 8 alerts. Additionally, 2017 had the highest number of assessment plans (3) while no assessment plans were initiated in 2023.

26 SPD Policy Manual 3.070 – EIS. According to SPD, the Early Intervention System is currently paused as SPD develops a new system.

27 Ibid 3.070-TSK-2.

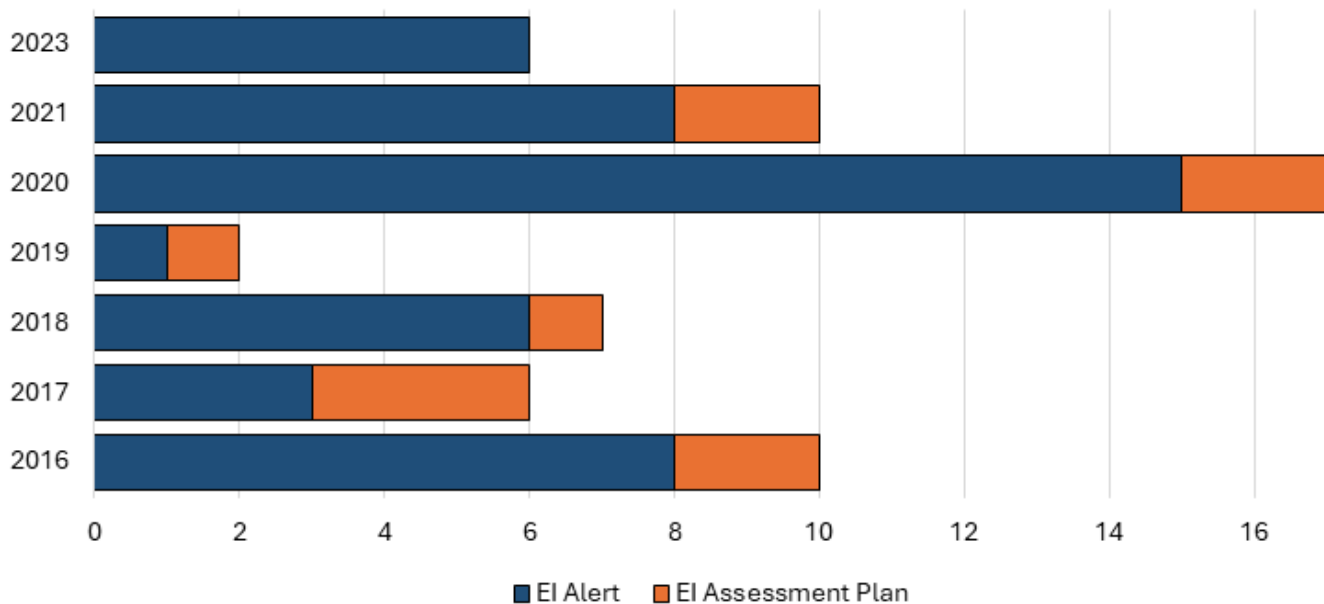
28 Ibid 3.070-TSK-1, 3.070-TSK-3, 3.070-TSK-4.

29 Ibid 3.070-TSK-5.

30 Ibid 3.070-TSK-6.

31 SPD Policy Manual 3.070 – EIS.

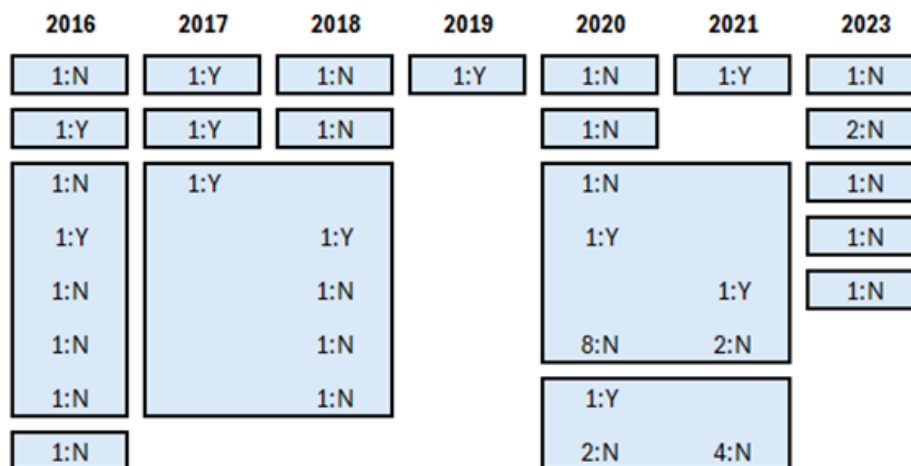
Figure 13. Named in police action claims and/or lawsuits. EI alert and assessment plan by year



Source: SPD Internal Data Analytics Platform.

Figure 14 summarizes EI alerts and assessments by officers and year. Each blue rectangle represents a unique officer. The number of EI alerts are followed by “Y” or “N”, indicating whether an EI assessment was assigned to the named officer. 2023 had the highest number of officers with EI alerts (5), followed by 2020 and 2016 (4 officers each). Between 2020 and 2021, two officers stood out with the highest number of EI alerts, one with 13 and the other with 7.

Figure 14. Summary of EI alerts and assessments by officer and year



Source: SPD Internal Data Analytics Platform. Y: Yes, N: No.



III. Incident Reporting and Dicipinary Actions

a. Office of Police Accountability

OPA has the responsibility to investigate allegations of misconduct involving SPD personnel related to SPD policy, and to refer and monitor investigations of federal, state, and local law.³² Misconduct complaints may be filed by community members, SPD, and other City employees. The OPA Director or their designee may also initiate a complaint based on a claim made against the City, litigation filing, media coverage of an accident, or any other source of information.³³ This includes allegations arising from claims and lawsuits even when a community member has not filed a complaint with OPA. Following an intake investigation, OPA determines whether the allegations, if proven, would violate laws, SPD's policies or training.

This section presents the OPA determination of those allegations of misconduct linked to a claim or lawsuit.³⁴ OIG reviewed reports, complaints, allegations, and outcomes related to all settled claims and lawsuits settled for amounts equal to or exceeding \$20,000.³⁵ Between 2014 and 2023, 75 lawsuits resulted in payments to plaintiffs, and from 2019 to 2023, 24 claims were settled. The analysis in this section excludes lawsuits for 30 incidents before 2015 due to data retention policies and the adoption of the current case management system.

Tables in Appendix B detail investigations conducted by OPA related to settled lawsuits and claims. OIG identified 22 investigations: Three lawsuits regarding police negligence: fleet operation, three claims related to police actions and 16 lawsuits involving police actions. Analysis of the data indicates that OPA investigated the majority of lawsuits and claims alleging police action (76%). Among these investigations, 9.1% sustained allegations, 22.7% partially sustained allegations, and the remaining 68.2% did not sustain allegations.

A total of 40 officers were involved in these investigations, averaging two officers per investigation.³⁶ Regarding police action, the most common allegations investigated were related to force (25.86%),³⁷ followed by allegations of bias-free policing (12.1%) and professionalism (8.62%).

32 OPA Internal Operations and Training Manual.

33 Ibid.

34 OPA conducts independent investigations and recommends findings to the Chief of Police. OPA reviews employee conduct based on SPD policy, which may involve different issues or considerations than civil litigation.

35 Linking lawsuits and claims to incident case management system. OIG obtained data from the incident case management system, which contains information of complaint investigations and OIC reports. The objective was to link lawsuits and claims to specific individuals (plaintiffs and claimants). OIG searched for names within the narrative and community member section of the incidents database. There were cases where the claimant or plaintiff's name was unknown, this was encountered mostly in situations where car insurance companies filed claims on behalf of their insuring parties. To broaden our knowledge of names, OIG looked for relevant news articles or online reports associated with the lawsuit or claim with unknown name. The search criteria included keywords from the lawsuit or claim narrative, events dates, and disposition dates. 12 cases were not located.

36 Witness officers not included.

37 Use of force, de-escalation of force and force reporting.

Allegations concerning discretion in authority, performance of duty, integrity, and ethics were investigated to a lesser extent.

In cases where allegations were sustained, officers typically received suspensions without pay from one to six days, with one instance of a 30-day suspension without pay and two terminations. For cases where allegations were not sustained, three investigations directed officers to additional training.

a. Collisions Involving SPD Vehicles

The Collision Review Board (CRB) reviews all collisions involving SPD employees, sworn and non-sworn. Based on the CRB collision review, the Bureau Chief renders a decision whether the incident was preventable or non-preventable and makes a recommendation to the Chief of Police regarding any possible discipline or re-training. The Chief of Police makes the final determination regarding discipline or re-training for the involved employee.³⁸

Table 11 in Appendix B presents data on officer collisions related to claims alleging police negligence in fleet operations. According to the data, 78% of cases reviewed by the CRB concluded that collisions involving officers were preventable; the CRB determined collisions were not preventable in 22% of cases.³⁹ The Chief of Police makes final determinations regarding discipline or re-training for the involved officers.⁴⁰

IV. City of Seattle Budget for Claims and Lawsuits

The City currently has \$20 million in excess liability insurance coverage, subject to a \$10 million self-insurance retention. Unless a settlement and its incurred litigation expense exceeds \$10 million, there will be no contribution from insurance.⁴¹ The Judgement and Claims Fund (JCF)⁴² self-insures for the payment of:

- Claims authorized by FAS;⁴³
- Advanced claims authorized by FAS;⁴⁴
- Judgements settlements authorized by CAO;⁴⁵ and
- Litigation expenses authorized by FAS or CAO.⁴⁶

Expenditures incurred by the JCF on behalf of SPD and other general fund supported departments are determined by premiums allocated to individual departments within the general fund. These premiums are calculated based on the average percentage of judgments, settlements, and other eligible expenses each department has incurred over the prior five years. This calculation is conducted annually. Each general fund department, including SPD, is responsible for funding its proportional share of anticipated payments in the forthcoming budget year.

38 SPD Manual. 13.015 – Collision Review Board.

39 A preventable CRB determination does not imply an at fault accident.

40 SPD does not currently track these determinations.

41 2022 Annual Report Judgment Claims Fund.

42 Seattle Municipal Code 5.24.010.

43 Seattle Municipal Code 5.24.030.

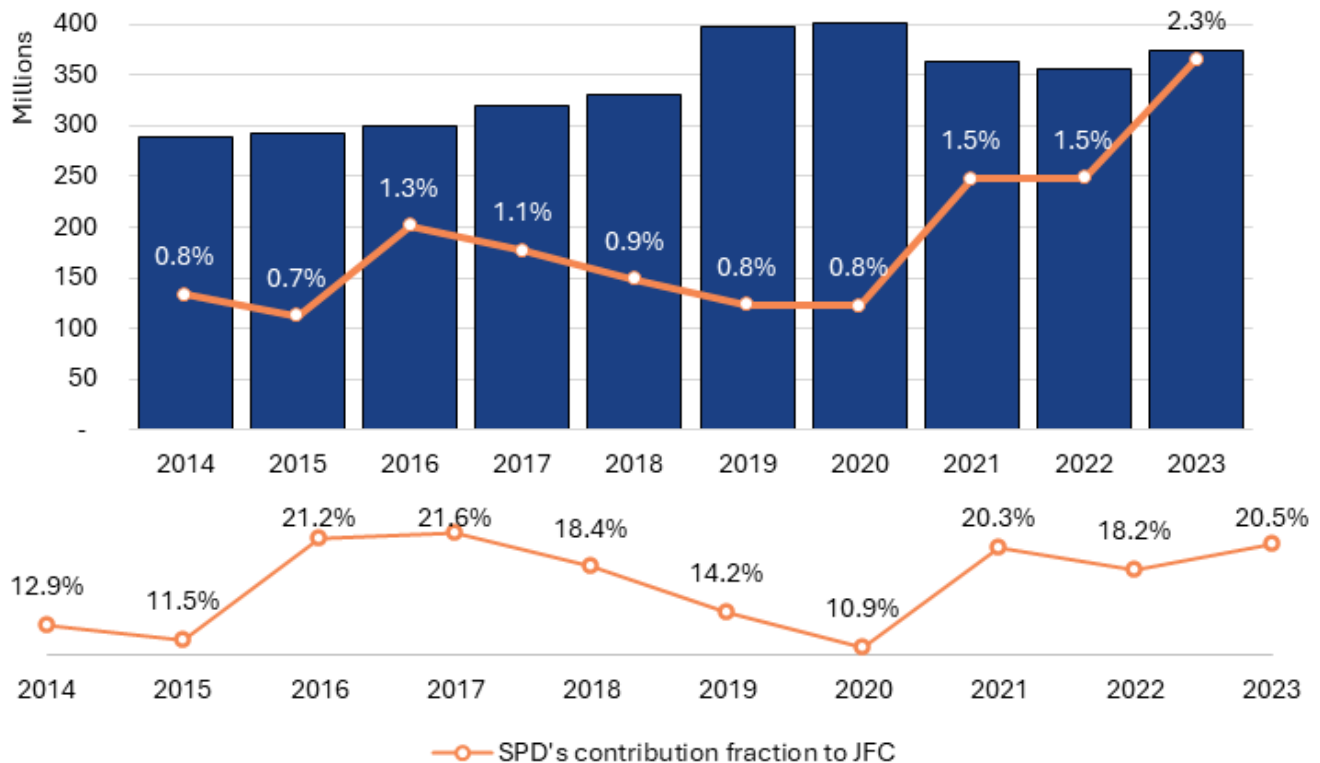
44 Seattle Municipal Code 5.24.040.

45 Seattle Municipal Code 5.24.020.

46 Seattle Municipal Code 5.24.060.

Figure 15 shows SPD's adopted budget and the percentage of contributions to the JCF by year. Contributions are expressed as the percentage of SPD's yearly adopted budget. 2015 had the lowest percentage of contributions 0.7% (\$2,044,365), and 2023 has the highest percentage of contributions 2.3% (\$8,520,813.60). The data shows a decreasing trend in contributions percentage from 2016 to 2019, followed by a steady rise after the 2020 protests. In contrast, the department's budget had a steady upward trend from 2014 to 2020, reaching its highest of \$401,715,774 dollars in 2020.

Figure 15. SPD budget and percentage of contributions to the JCF



Source: SPD Internal Data Analytics Platform.

Figure 15 also illustrates the proportion of the JCF contributed by SPD. Consistent with the trend in SPD contributions percentage, the fraction of JCF from SPD's contributions decreased between 2016 and 2020, reaching its lowest in 2020 at \$3,064,231.96. The highest contribution fraction occurred in 2017 (\$3,528,524), followed by 2016 (\$3,756,050), and 2023 (\$8,520,813.60).

V. Conclusions and Next Steps

Settlements for legal claims and civil lawsuits against SPD have increased between 2021 and 2023. In this period, the City disbursed a total of \$13,042,400 in settlements for lawsuits, surpassing the \$6,005,577.40 paid from 2014 to 2020. The number of claims, lawsuits, and payments alone do not indicate fault or improper conduct by officers.

OIG will continue to monitor efforts that SPD makes to address underlying actions that lead to claims and lawsuits to support continuous improvement. OIG plans to continue its yearly report of counts and amounts of claims and lawsuits, while advancing quantitative and qualitative analyses of litigation data. Next steps involve undertaking a comprehensive assessment of SPD officers involved in collisions.



Appendix A. OPA Investigations

Office of Police Accountability

Following an intake investigation, OPA determines whether the allegations, if proven, would violate laws, SPD's policies or training. If so, OPA classifies the complaint into one of the following:

Contact Log. A case may be classified as a Contact Log under the following circumstances: (1) the complaint does not involve a potential policy violation by an SPD employee; (2) there is insufficient information to proceed with further inquiry; (3) the complaint is time-barred under the contractual statute of limitations; (4) the complaint was previously reviewed or adjudicated by OPA and/or OIG; or (5) the complaint presents fact patterns that are clearly implausible or incredible, and there are no indicia of other potential misconduct.⁴⁷

Supervisor Action. The complaint generally involves a minor policy violation or performance issue that is best addressed through training, communication, or coaching by the employee's supervisor.⁴⁸

Investigation. OPA investigates alleged violations of SPD policy, such as allegations of unnecessary or excessive force or biased policing.⁴⁹ Full investigations may include interviewing the complainant and involved officer(s), identifying, and interviewing independent witnesses, as well as collecting and reviewing additional evidence.

Expedited investigations. "Findings can be reached based on the intake investigation, and no further investigation needs to be included."⁵⁰ This type of investigation should not be utilized for cases where one or more of the following are present:

- A lack of video depicting relevant and material issues or fact or elements of the alleged misconduct.
- Multiple unrelated allegation types involving two or more named employees.
- Complex or confusing fact patterns.
- Cases involving matters of significant public concern.⁵¹

47 OPA 2022 Annual Report.

48 Ibid.

49 Ordinance 125315, § 3.29.125(A).

50 OPA Internal Operations and Training Manual.

51 Ibid.



Table 7. OPA Full Investigations - Lawsuits

Incident Date	Disposition Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	OPA Inv Disposition	Officers Involved in OPA Investigation	Allegations: Discipline
08/2012	10/2015	Settlement	365,000.00	No allegations sustained	1	Comformance to Law Vehicle Operation: Training referral
12/2012	10/2015	Settlement	35,000.00	No allegations sustained	2	Discretion and Authority Investigations and Reports Performance on Duty
07/2014	11/2016	Post-Trial Judgement	325,000.00	Partially sustained	1	Bias-Free policing: Sustained, terminated Force - Use: Not sustained Force - Use (De-escalation): Sustained Professionalism: Sustained, retired in lieu of termination Stops, Detentions and Arrests: Not sustained
				No allegations sustained	2	Stops, Detentions and Arrests
01/2015	10/2017	Settlement	70,000.00	All allegations sustained	1	Force - Use: 1 day of suspension without pay
09/2015	10/2018	Settlement	100,001.00	No allegations sustained	6	Bias-Free Policing Force - Use



Incident Date	Disposition Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	OPA Inv Disposition	Officers Involved in OPA Investigation	Allegations: Discipline
					3	Use of Force: Sustained, 30 days of suspension without pay Bias-Free Policing: Not sustained Performance of Duty: Not sustained, training referral Professionalism: Not sustained, training referral Property and Evidence: Not sustained Force - Use: Not sustained Performance of Duty: Not sustained, training referral Property and Evidence: Not sustained Use of Force: Not sustained
02/2016	09/2017	Settlement	80,000.00	No allegations sustained	4	Bias-Free Policing Investigations and Reports Investigations and Reports
02/2016	04/2021	Settlement	1,500,000.00	No allegations sustained	3	Bias-Free policing Force - Use



Incident Date	Disposition Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	OPA Inv Disposition	Officers Involved in OPA Investigation	Allegations: Discipline
06/2016	02/2021	Settlement	41,000.00	No allegations sustained	2	Bias-Free Policing Force - Use Integrity and Ethics Stops, Detentions and Arrests
08/2016	12/2018	Settlement	17,500.00	No allegations sustained	1	Force - Use Force - Reporting
06/2017	05/2022	Settlement	3,500,000.00	All allegations sustained	1	Equipment and Uniform: 2 days of suspension without pay Discretion and Authority: Sustained, 6 days of suspension without pay Professionalism: Sustained
05/2018	01/2022	Settlement	130,000.00	Partially sustained	1	Force - De-Escalation Force - Use Search and Seizure



Table 8. OPA Full Investigations - Claims

Incident Date	Payment Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	OPA Inv Disposition	Officers Involved in OPA Investigation	Allegations: Discipline
						Force de-escalation: Sustained, 3 days of suspension without pay
02/2021	01/2023	Settlement	1,565,776.43	Partially Sustained	2	Force de-escalation: Sustained, 1 day of suspension without pay
						Force - Use: Not sustained
10/2017	08/2020	Settlement	105,000.00	Partially Sustained	2	Force - Use: Sustained, termination
						Discretion and Authority: Sustained, termination
10/2017	11/2020	Settlement	150,000.00			Conformance to Law: Not sustained
						Bias-Free Policing
07/2019		Settlement	24,910.88	No allegations sustained	2	Force - Reporting
						Force - Use

Table 9. OPA Expedited Investigations - Lawsuits

Incident Date	Disposition Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	OPA Inv Disposition	Officers Involved in OPA Investigation	Allegations
02/2019	08/2021	Settlement	250,000.00	No allegations sustained	2	Force - Use
01/1970	07/2023	Settlement	1,850,000.00	No allegations sustained	1	Conformance to Law
						Professionalism

Source: Seattle City Attorney's Office and case management system.



OIC Reports

Table 10. Officer Involved in Collision Reports

Incident Date	Disposition/ Pymt Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	Officers Involved: CRB Disposition
02/2015	07/2019	Settlement	19,575.03	1 Officer: Non preventable
10/2015	11/2018	Settlement	52,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
12/2015	09/2019	Settlement	200,000.00	1 Officer: Non preventable and 1 Officer: Preventable
02/2016	02/2017	Settlement	10,242.49	1 Officer: Non preventable
10/2016	08/2021	Settlement	41,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
12/2016	11/2018	Settlement	30,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
11/2017	05/2021	Settlement	35,000.00	1 Officer: Non preventable
12/2017	04/2020	Settlement	25,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
02/2018	04/2019	Settlement	35,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
07/2018	01/2020	Settlement	28,673.95	1 Officer: Preventable
02/2019	05/2022	Settlement	61,658.79	1 Officer: Preventable
04/2019	07/2020	Settlement	22,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
08/2019	03/2022	Settlement	50,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable in both settlements
	03/2022	Settlement	25,000.00	
08/2019	07/2022	Settlement	27,638.41	1 Officer: Preventable
08/2020	02/2023	Settlement	50,000.00	1 Officer: Non preventable
09/2020	10/2023	Settlement	20,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
09/2020	04/2023	Settlement	145,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
01/2021	05/2023	Settlement	25,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable in both settlements
	04/2023	Settlement	25,000.00	
01/2020	12/2023	Settlement	20,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
02/2021	09/2022	Settlement	20,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable
02/2019	05/2022	Settlement	61,658.79	1 Officer: Preventable
11/2021	04/2023	Settlement	25,000.00	1 Officer: Preventable

Table 11. OPA Full Investigations - Lawsuits. Police Negligence: Fleet

Incident Date	Disposition Date	Claim/Lawsuit Disposition	Amount	Officers Involved	CRB Disposition	OPA Inv Disposition	Allegations
08/2012	10/215	Settlement	365,000.00	1		No allegations sustained	Conformance to Law
05/2018	02/2021	Settlement	125,000.00	1	Preventable	No allegations sustained	Vehicle Operation
07/2018	01/2021	Settlement	1,750,000.00	Same Officer	Preventable	No allegations sustained	Video and audio recording
08/2018	03/2022	Settlement	190,000.00	1	Preventable	No allegations sustained	Professionalism Integrity and Ethics



Appendix B. Acronyms, Initials, and Abbreviations

FCAO: City Attorney’s Office
CRB: Collision Review Board
EEO: Equal Employment Opportunity
EIA: Early Intervention Assessment
EIS: Early Intervention System
FAS: Finance and Administrative Services
JFC: Judgment and Claims Fund
OIG: Office of Inspector General
OPA: Office of Police Accountability
SPD: Seattle Police Department
The City: City of Seattle

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