



# 2025 Annual Report for the Citizens' Police Oversight Board and Office of the Independent Police Auditor for the City of Akron

September 1, 2024 – December 31, 2025

Effective policing and meaningful accountability are not opposing goals; they are mutually reinforcing. Civilian oversight bridges community voice and institutional practice, transforming lessons from individual incidents into systemic improvements that reduce harm and build trust over time.

# Table of Contents

<b>Letter From the Akron Citizens’ Oversight Board</b> .....	4
<b>Letter from the Independent Police Auditor</b> .....	6
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	7
<b>Charter Authority, Oversight Framework, and Independence</b> .....	8
<b>What Civilian Oversight Does—and Does Not—Do</b> .....	9
<b>Why this distinction matters</b> .....	9
<b>Board Composition, Governance, and Operations</b> .....	10
<b>Board Composition</b> .....	10
<b>Governance and Meeting Practices</b> .....	11
<b>Review, Deliberation, and Voting Authority</b> .....	11
<b>Policy-Level Oversight and Thematic Review</b> .....	11
<b>Why Board governance matters</b> .....	12
<b>Use of Force Review Activity, Complaint Intake, and Classification</b> .....	13
<b>Independent Use of Force Review Process</b> .....	13
<b>Disposition Categories</b> .....	13
<b>Complaint Intake</b> .....	15
<b>Classification of Cases</b> .....	15
<b>Why this process matters</b> .....	16
<b>Use-of-Force Oversight and Constitutional Policing Analysis</b> .....	17
<b>Scope and Volume of Review Activity</b> .....	17
<b>Legal Standards Applied</b> .....	17
<b>What OIPA seeks to find</b> .....	18
<b>Review Methodology</b> .....	19
<b>Recommendations Issued, Responses, and Accountability Follow-Up</b> .....	20
<b>Why delayed or missing responses undermine transparency</b> .....	21
<b>Risks created by delayed or outstanding responses</b> .....	21
<b>Accountability Follow-Up</b> .....	22
<b>Policy, Training, and Systemic Reform Themes</b> .....	23
<b>Required Reporting Categories and Systemic Implications</b> .....	23
<b>Systemic issues:</b> .....	25

<b>Mental Health Crisis Response and Behavioral Health Encounters (<i>Cross-Cutting Theme</i>)</b> .....	25
Systemic crisis-response issues typically involve: .....	27
<b>Recognition of APD Efforts and Ongoing Oversight Considerations</b> .....	27
Why continued review remains necessary .....	28
<b>Community Engagement &amp; Accountability Circles</b> .....	29
Accountability Circles: Purpose and Structure.....	29
Leadership and Facilitation.....	29
Community Participation and Engagement Value.....	30
Outcomes and Next Steps .....	30
Relevance to Upcoming Policy and Reform Efforts.....	30
Why this level of engagement matters .....	31
<b>Transparency, Public Reporting, and Trust-Building</b> .....	32
Public Meetings and Open Governance .....	32
Publication of Reports and Plain-Language Communication.....	32
Data Transparency and Trend Analysis .....	33
Public-Facing Oversight Dashboard .....	33
Why transparency and trust-building matter in Akron .....	33
Transparency Within Constraints .....	34
<b>Staffing, Budget, and Operational Capacity</b> .....	35
Staffing Levels .....	35
Budget Allocation and Fiscal Responsibility.....	35
Operational Capacity and Constraints.....	36
Board Capacity and Compensation .....	36
Looking forward: Future capacity needs .....	37
<b>Special Projects and Ongoing Reviews</b> .....	38
Officer-Involved Shootings.....	38
Why external subject-matter experts (SME) are necessary .....	39
Case-Management System Development .....	40
External Partnerships.....	40
Systemic Importance of Special Projects .....	40
<b>Challenges, Risks, and Structural Limitations</b> .....	41

<b>Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) Constraints</b> .....	41
<b>Access to Information and Process Integration</b> .....	41
<b>Structural and Operational Impediments</b> .....	42
<b>Risk Implications</b> .....	42
<b>Oversight perspective and path forward</b> .....	43
<b>Goals and Work Plan for 2026–2027</b> .....	44
<b>Oversight Priorities</b> .....	44
<b>Policy and Training Initiatives</b> .....	44
<b>Reporting Enhancements and Data-Driven Oversight</b> .....	45
<b>Community Engagement and Education</b> .....	45
<b>Why this work plan matters</b> .....	45
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	47
<b>Reaffirmation of commitment</b> .....	48

# LETTER FROM THE AKRON CITIZENS' OVERSIGHT BOARD

On behalf of the Akron Citizens' Police Oversight Board, I am honored to present this Annual Report to our community. This report reflects more than meetings held, cases reviewed, or policies examined. It represents our shared commitment to accountability, transparency, and public trust in the City of Akron.

The work of civilian oversight is not simply procedural but also relational. It exists at the intersection of community voice and public service. Our responsibility is to ensure that oversight is conducted with integrity, fairness, and a deep respect for both residents and law enforcement professionals who serve our city each day.

Over the past year, the Board has worked diligently to:

- Review citizen complaints thoroughly and impartially
- Strengthening transparency in oversight processes
- Engage residents through community conversations and listening sessions
- Provide recommendations aimed at improving policies and practices
- Uphold the standards outlined in the City Charter and governing ordinances

We recognize that accountability is not adversarial, it is constructive. Effective oversight does not weaken public safety; it strengthens it. Trust grows when processes are clear, when concerns are heard, and when decisions are grounded in facts and fairness.

We also acknowledge that oversight work happens within a broader context. Akron, like many cities, continues to navigate complex challenges. In such times, the importance of civic participation and collaborative problem-solving becomes even more vital. CPOB exists because our community values transparency and believes in the power of shared responsibility.

I am deeply grateful to my fellow Board members for their diligence, professionalism, and volunteer service. I also extend appreciation to city staff, community partners, and residents who have participated in this process. Whether by filing concerns, attending meetings, or offering thoughtful input. Your engagement strengthens our work.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to:

- Continuous improvement
- Clear communication
- Fair and unbiased review
- Strengthening public confidence in oversight processes

Accountability is not a destination; it is an ongoing practice. And it is most effective when it belongs to all of us. Thank you for your trust, your participation, and your continued commitment to a just and thriving Akron.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kemp A. Boyd', written in a cursive style.

Kemp A. Boyd, Chair

# LETTER FROM THE INDEPENDENT POLICE AUDITOR

As Independent Police Auditor, I am pleased to present this report reflecting the continued progress of civilian oversight in Akron. Over the past year, our office has strengthened its independent review processes, expanded policy and training recommendations grounded in constitutional policing principles, and enhanced transparency through clearer public reporting and sustained collaboration with the Citizens' Police Oversight Board, the Akron Police Department, and the community we serve. These efforts are designed to ensure accountability while supporting effective, lawful policing.

Significant goals have been achieved, including improved consistency in use-of-force review protocols, expanded community engagement initiatives, and the development of structured policy feedback mechanisms that allow oversight findings to translate into meaningful operational improvements. We have also worked to reinforce data-driven oversight practices, ensuring that recommendations are informed by evidence, national best practices, and the lived experiences of Akron residents.

Looking ahead, our vision is focused on deepening trust through transparency, strengthening policy alignment with constitutional standards, and fostering collaborative reform that enhances both public safety and public confidence. Continued emphasis on officer training, early intervention strategies, and clear accountability pathways will remain central to our work. Equally important is maintaining the independence of civilian oversight so that it continues to serve as a credible bridge between the community and law enforcement.

I remain encouraged by the progress Akron has made and by the commitment shown by community members, City leadership, and law enforcement professionals who recognize that effective oversight is a cornerstone of democratic policing. With sustained engagement, thoughtful policy development, and a shared commitment to fairness and transparency, the future of civilian oversight in Akron is strong and promising.

Sincerely,



Anthony W. Finnell, Independent Police Auditor

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 reporting year represents continued advancement of Akron’s civilian police oversight framework established under Charter §68. The Citizens’ Police Oversight Board (CPOB) and the Office of the Independent Police Auditor (OIPA) maintained independent review of police use-of-force incidents and citizen complaints, issued policy and training recommendations, strengthened transparency, and expanded community engagement. Collectively, these efforts support constitutional policing, institutional accountability, and public confidence in law enforcement oversight.

During calendar year 2025, OIPA reviewed approximately 310 use-of-force incidents and complaints. In the majority of cases, oversight findings concurred with Akron Police Department (APD) investigative conclusions; however, recurring issues were identified involving policy clarity, training consistency, supervisory review quality, documentation practices, and accountability mechanisms. These findings highlight the importance of addressing systemic drivers of risk rather than focusing solely on isolated incidents.

Thematic reform priorities identified during the year included proportionality in use-of-force decision-making, juvenile encounter guidance, restraint safety practices, CEW<sup>1</sup> deployment and pursuit protocols, supervisory accountability, body-worn camera (BWC) compliance, and law-enforcement responses to individuals experiencing mental-health crises. These areas reflect broader institutional considerations that affect officer safety, community trust, and legal risk management.

Transparency and public engagement remained central to oversight operations. Regular public meetings, publication of reports, structured community dialogue initiatives such as Accountability Circles, and ongoing development of enhanced data-reporting tools contributed to increased visibility of oversight activities and strengthened community participation in reform discussions.

The report also identifies structural and operational challenges affecting oversight effectiveness, including delayed administrative responses to recommendations, contractual limitations influencing accountability timelines, information-access constraints, and resource capacity considerations. Addressing these issues will be important to ensure that oversight findings translate into timely and measurable institutional improvements.

Looking forward, the 2026–2027 Goals and Work Plan emphasize continued independent review of critical incidents, comprehensive policy and training reform, improved data infrastructure, expanded transparency initiatives, and sustained community engagement. Through these efforts, CPOB and OIPA reaffirm their commitment to constitutional policing, independent oversight, and building lasting public trust in Akron’s system of police accountability.

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<sup>1</sup> Conducted Electrical Weapons, commonly referred to as a TASER.

## **CHARTER AUTHORITY, OVERSIGHT FRAMEWORK, AND INDEPENDENCE**

Charter §68 establishes the CPOB and OIPA as core components of Akron’s civilian police oversight system, with distinct but complementary roles designed to ensure independence, transparency, and accountability in the review of police conduct.

Under the Charter, OIPA is authorized to receive, review, and independently evaluate citizen complaints and use-of-force incidents, including the authority to assess the adequacy, completeness, and objectivity of APD investigations. This authority extends beyond reviewing outcomes alone and includes examination of investigative steps, evidentiary sufficiency, policy application, supervisory review, and compliance with constitutional standards and departmental policy. OIPA’s role is not limited to individual officer conduct; it also includes identifying systemic issues, policy gaps, training deficiencies, and recurring patterns that may contribute to risk or undermine public trust.

The CPOB serves as the public governance and accountability body within this framework. Through open meetings, public deliberation, and formal action on OIPA reports, the Board provides civilian oversight that is visible, participatory, and independent of the police chain of command. The Board’s responsibilities include reviewing OIPA findings, receiving public input, transmitting recommendations to the Mayor and City Council, and ensuring that oversight work remains aligned with the Charter’s intent and community expectations.

A defining feature of the Charter framework is institutional independence. Neither OIPA nor the CPOB is subordinate to APD in the performance of their oversight functions. OIPA’s analyses and conclusions are reached independently of APD investigative determinations, and the Board’s review and deliberations are conducted in public, outside of departmental control. Independence does not mean opposition; rather, it ensures that oversight assessments are objective, credible, and insulated from conflicts of interest, while still allowing for collaboration and dialogue aimed at continuous improvement.

During 2025, this independent framework was exercised in practice. In most cases, OIPA concurred with APD findings, reflecting alignment where investigations were thorough and supported by evidence. In other cases, OIPA issued non-concurrence findings or concurrence with recommendations, identifying deficiencies in investigative practices, policy application, supervisory review, or systemic safeguards. Where administrative responses were delayed, incomplete, or deferred to broader policy review without written rationale, the CPOB and OIPA engaged in formal follow-up to preserve accountability and transparency consistent with Charter expectations.

Together, CPOB and OIPA operationalize Charter §68 by providing independent review, public accountability, and policy-focused oversight. This framework is intended not only to address individual incidents, but also to strengthen institutional practices, reduce risk, and promote constitutional policing through sustained civilian engagement and oversight.

# What Civilian Oversight Does—and Does Not—Do

## What Oversight *Does Do*

- **Independently reviews** citizen complaints and use-of-force incidents for fairness, completeness, and compliance with law and policy
- **Evaluates the quality of APD investigations**, not just their conclusions
- **Identifies systemic issues**, including policy gaps, training needs, and supervisory deficiencies
- **Issues findings and recommendations** to the Mayor and City Council to promote accountability and reform
- **Provides public transparency and civilian governance** through open meetings and reporting

## What Oversight *Does Not Do*

- Does **not** replace APD's role in conducting internal investigations
- Does **not** directly discipline officers or impose penalties
- Does **not** direct day-to-day police operations or tactical decisions
- Does **not** determine criminal liability

### **Why this distinction matters**

Civilian oversight is designed to provide independent review and public accountability, not to supplant management or disciplinary authority. By maintaining this separation, the Charter ensures that oversight remains objective, credible, and focused on constitutional policing and systemic improvement, while preserving established roles under law and collective bargaining agreements.

# BOARD COMPOSITION, GOVERNANCE, AND OPERATIONS

The Citizens' Police Oversight Board (CPOB) functions as the governing and deliberative body within Akron's civilian police oversight system. Its role is to provide public-facing governance, accountability, and oversight direction, distinct from investigative or managerial functions. Board composition, meeting practices, and voting procedures are structured to ensure transparency, independence, and meaningful civilian participation in police oversight.

## Board Composition

In 2025, the CPOB was composed of community members appointed pursuant to the City Charter, reflecting a range of backgrounds and perspectives. Board membership is designed to ensure that civilian oversight is not concentrated within law enforcement or city administration but instead reflects community values and expectations.

### Current CPOB Members (as of the end of 2025):

- **Kemp Boyd**, Chair
- **Donzella Anuszkiewicz**, Vice Chair
- **Ericka Burney-Hawkins**
- **Brandyn Costa**
- **Duane Crabbs**
- **Juanita Elton**
- **Shawn Peoples**
- **Christopher Weems**
- *(One vacant seat)*

### Former CPOB Members (term ended or resigned during 2025):

- Caitlin Castle
- Robert Gippin
- Crystal Jones
- Beverly Richards

Board turnover during the year reflected routine term expirations, resignations, and appointment transitions. Vacancies were managed consistently with Charter processes, and the Board maintained quorum for all regular meetings.

## **Governance and Meeting Practices**

The CPOB conducted its work through regularly scheduled, publicly noticed meetings, consistent with Ohio open-meetings requirements and the transparency principles embedded in Charter §68. Meetings provided a structured forum for:

- Presentation of OIPA Board Reports covering defined reporting periods
- Public discussion and questioning of oversight findings
- Board deliberation regarding recommendations, follow-up, and policy concerns
- Receipt of public comment

Board agendas, materials, and reports were made available to the public, reinforcing trust and accessibility in the oversight process.

## **Review, Deliberation, and Voting Authority**

A central operational function of the CPOB is the review and formal acceptance of OIPA findings and recommendations. In 2025, the Board:

- Reviewed OIPA Board Reports summarizing complaint and use-of-force reviews
- Voted on the acceptance of those reports
- Authorized the transmission of findings and recommendations to the Mayor and City Council

These votes serve as a critical accountability mechanism, ensuring that oversight conclusions are not merely internal analyses, but are formally acknowledged and elevated through a public, civilian body.

## **Policy-Level Oversight and Thematic Review**

Beyond individual case review, the Board engaged in policy-level governance through thematic briefings and discussions. These briefings aggregated trends identified across multiple cases and focused on broader issues such as:

- Use-of-force standards and proportionality
- Juvenile encounters and school-related incidents
- De-escalation practices and crisis response
- Supervisory accountability and documentation standards

This approach allowed the Board to shift from reactive, case-by-case review to strategic oversight, supporting long-term reform and risk reduction.

## **Why Board governance matters**

CPOB's governance role ensures that civilian oversight in Akron is:

- **Transparent** – conducted in public, with documented actions
- **Independent** – separate from APD command and internal discipline processes
- **Accountable** – grounded in formal votes, records, and reporting
- **Community-centered** – reflective of civilian perspectives and concerns

By combining structured governance with independent analysis from OIPA, the Board plays a central role in translating oversight findings into public accountability and policy reform.

# USE OF FORCE REVIEW ACTIVITY, COMPLAINT INTAKE, AND CLASSIFICATION

Use of force review, complaint intake, and classification, are foundational components of Akron’s civilian police oversight system. Through this process, OIPA ensures that concerns regarding police conduct and use of force are received, documented, independently reviewed, and evaluated in a manner that promotes fairness, transparency, and accountability.

## Independent Use of Force Review Process

OIPA conducts an independent review of each incident, which typically includes:

- Examination of investigative reports and supporting documentation
- Review of body-worn camera footage and other available evidence
- Assessment of APD policy compliance and constitutional standards
- Evaluation of supervisory review and investigative thoroughness

The purpose of this review is not to reinvestigate cases, but to evaluate the adequacy, objectivity, and conclusions of APD’s investigation, and to identify any policy, training, or systemic issues revealed by the case.

## Disposition Categories

OIPA’s disposition categories, **Concur**, **Concur with Recommendations**, and **Do Not Concur**, are the primary method for communicating oversight outcomes in a consistent, transparent, and accountable manner. These categories are not merely labels; they are a standardized way to document whether APD’s findings and investigative conclusions are supported by the evidence and policy, and whether a case reveals system-level deficiencies that warrant corrective action.

### Definitions and Practical Meaning

#### **Concur (Concur with APD Findings)**

A “Concur” disposition means OIPA determined that APD’s investigation and conclusions are supported by the available evidence and that the incident, based on the record reviewed, was handled in a manner consistent with applicable law and department policy. This finding indicates that:

- The investigation appears complete and coherent (key evidence collected, timelines and reports align)
- The investigative conclusion is reasonable and supported
- Policy application and supervisory review are generally adequate

## What Concur does *not* mean

Concurrence does **not** mean an encounter was ideal, that no improvement is possible, or that community concerns are invalid. It means that, based on the evidence available, the investigative conclusion is supportable.

### Concur with Recommendations (Concur with APD Findings – Recommendations Issued)

A “Concur with Recommendations” disposition means OIPA agrees with APD’s overall conclusion (for example, that force was within policy or that an allegation was not sustained), but identifies policy, training, supervisory, documentation, or systemic gaps that should be addressed to prevent future incidents, reduce risk, or strengthen constitutional policing.

This category is used when:

- The outcome is supportable, but the case reflects avoidable risk factors
- The incident exposes policy ambiguity, training gaps, or recurring practices
- Supervisory documentation and review are technically sufficient, but show quality-control deficiencies
- The encounter illustrates a trend that, if left unaddressed, could increase exposure to harm or liability

## Why this category matters

It prevents a false binary of “cleared” versus “misconduct.” It allows oversight to say: *the finding is supportable, but the system needs improvement.*

### Do Not Concur (Non-Concurrence with APD Findings)

A “Do Not Concur” disposition means OIPA determined that APD’s conclusion is not supported by the evidence, applicable policy, or accepted standards of investigative review. This finding typically reflects one or more of the following:

- Material inconsistency between evidence (e.g., BWC) and the investigative narrative
- Failure to address key factual disputes or contradictions
- Misapplication of policy or an incomplete investigative record
- A conclusion that does not logically follow from the documented facts

Non-concurrence is the oversight mechanism used to formally document a material disagreement and trigger heightened accountability and follow-up, because it signals that the existing review process may have failed to reach a defensible conclusion.

## How These Dispositions Build Accountability

OIPA disposition categories function as an accountability system in three concrete ways:

1. **They create a transparent public record of oversight outcomes.** By classifying each reviewed case in a consistent way, the Board and the public can understand whether APD's investigative outcomes are being affirmed, conditionally affirmed with improvements, or challenged as unsupported.
2. **They separate individual-case conclusions from system reform needs.** "Concur with Recommendations" is especially important because it identifies preventable drivers of force and complaints even when individual conduct is not sustained for discipline. This supports reform without requiring an all-or-nothing misconduct finding.
3. **They produce measurable performance and response expectations.** These categories enable quantitative tracking and structured follow-up, including:
  - o How often APD's findings align with independent oversight
  - o How often OIPA identifies systemic issues requiring corrective action
  - o Whether recommendations receive timely, written responses and implementation steps

This is how oversight shifts from anecdotal concerns to auditable accountability in the form of recommendations. These recommendations are transmitted through the CPOB to the Mayor and City Council and are tracked to promote accountability and follow-through.

## Complaint Intake

Complaints and matters subject to review are received through multiple channels, including citizen submissions, referrals, and notifications of use-of-force incidents from APD. OIPA does not limit its review activity to use-of-force incidents; it also independently reviews APD investigations of complaints alleging misconduct and other matters requiring oversight, regardless of whether a formal complaint has been filed in OIPA. This approach recognizes that not all significant encounters result in citizen complaints, but may still warrant independent review due to their seriousness, complexity, or potential risk.

Upon receipt, matters are logged, tracked, and assigned for review in accordance with Charter requirements and established oversight procedures.

## Classification of Cases

Each matter is classified based on its nature and scope, which may include:

- Use-of-force incidents
- Allegations of policy or procedural violations
- Concerns related to supervisory review, documentation, or investigation quality

Classification ensures that cases are reviewed using the appropriate legal, policy, and oversight standards and allows OIPA to identify trends across similar types of incidents.

## **Why this process matters**

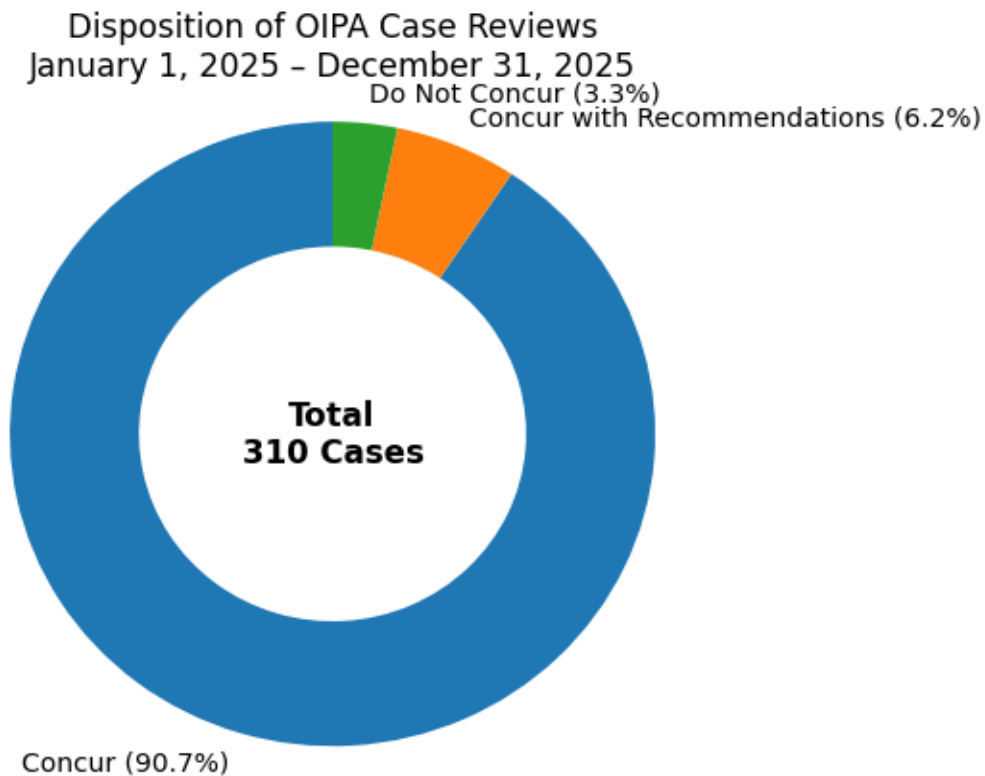
This structured review, intake, and classification process ensures that civilian oversight in Akron is:

- **Consistent** – cases are evaluated using defined standards
- **Independent** – reviews are conducted outside the police chain of command
- **Transparent** – outcomes are publicly reported and documented
- **System-focused** – individual cases inform broader reform efforts

By linking individual case reviews to systemic analysis and public reporting, the oversight process supports both accountability and continuous improvement in policing practices.

# USE-OF-FORCE OVERSIGHT AND CONSTITUTIONAL POLICING ANALYSIS

## Scope and Volume of Review Activity



**Figure 1. Disposition of OIPA Case Reviews (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025).** Most cases reviewed in 2025 resulted in concurrence with APD findings, with a smaller subset resulting in concurrence with recommendations or non-concurrence.

During the 2025 reporting period, OIPA reviewed 310 uses of force incidents and citizen complaints.

OIPA’s review of use-of-force incidents applies to a structured constitutional-policing framework that combines legal standards, methodical case review, and systemic risk analysis. This approach ensures that force is evaluated not only for legal sufficiency, but also for policy compliance, officer safety, and opportunities to prevent future harm.

## Legal Standards Applied

OIPA evaluates use-of-force incidents primarily under the Fourth Amendment “objective reasonableness” standard articulated by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Graham v. Connor*, which asks

whether an officer's actions were objectively reasonable in light of the facts and circumstances confronting the officer at the time, without the benefit of hindsight.<sup>2</sup> The analysis considers the totality of circumstances, including the severity of the alleged offense, the immediacy of any threat to officers or others, and the level of resistance or flight.

For incidents involving deadly force, OIPA applies the principles set forth in *Tennessee v. Garner*, which restrict the use of deadly force against a fleeing person unless the officer has probable cause to believe the individual poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others.<sup>3</sup>

These constitutional standards establish the legal floor for use-of-force analysis. OIPA evaluates whether APD investigations correctly applied these standards and whether conclusions are supported by the available evidence.

### What OIPA seeks to find

Beyond legal sufficiency, OIPA examines risk factors and systemic indicators that affect both officer safety and community outcomes. These include:

- **Proportionality and necessity:** Whether the type and level of force used were proportionate to the actual threat and resistance encountered, and whether less intrusive alternatives were reasonably available, consistent with DOJ use-of-force principles.<sup>4</sup>
- **De-escalation:** Whether officers employed time, distance, communication, and tactical repositioning where feasible to reduce the need for force, consistent with national guidance emphasizing the sanctity of life and the operational value of slowing encounters when safe to do so.<sup>5</sup>
- **Officer-created jeopardy:** Whether tactics or decision-making unnecessarily escalated the encounter or increased the likelihood of force, including rushed engagement, avoidable loss of distance, or poor coordination.<sup>6</sup>
- **Restraint safety and medical response:** Whether restraint methods, monitoring, and post-force medical care reflected duty-of-care considerations and evolving best practices aimed at preventing positional asphyxia and medical distress.<sup>7</sup>
- **Supervisory review integrity:** Whether supervisors conducted meaningful, evidence-based reviews that reconciled evidence, articulated legal and policy justification, and identified lessons learned, consistent with national accountability and oversight standards.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

<sup>3</sup> *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1 (1985).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Policy on the Use of Force*, Justice Manual §1-16.000

<sup>5</sup> Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), *Guiding Principles on Use of Force* (Sanctity of Life; De-escalation; Proportionality).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Justice and national public-safety guidance addressing restraint-related medical risk and post-force duty of care, including research on positional asphyxia and in-custody medical response.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *Principles for Promoting Police Integrity and Accountability*.

These factors allow OIPA to distinguish between cases in which force may be legally justified yet still reveal policy, training, or supervisory gaps requiring corrective action.

By using standardized dispositions and trend reporting, OIPA ensures that civilian oversight is not only independent, but measurable and actionable, supporting accountability for individual outcomes when warranted and driving continuous improvement through transparent, trackable reform recommendations.

## Review Methodology

OIPA's review is not a reinvestigation of incidents, but an **independent audit of APD's investigative and decision-making process**. Each review typically includes:

- Examination of investigative reports and supervisory findings
- Review of body-worn camera footage and other available evidence
- Assessment of compliance with APD policy and constitutional standards
- Evaluation of the thoroughness, consistency, and objectivity of the investigation

This methodology is consistent with U.S. Department of Justice guidance emphasizing that use-of-force reviews should assess not only outcomes, but the quality of supervision, documentation, and policy application.<sup>9</sup> OIPA's approach also aligns with national best-practice frameworks that stress accountability systems, evidence-based review, and feedback loops between investigations, training, and policy development.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Policy on the Use of Force*, Justice Manual §1-16.000.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, *Principles for Promoting Police Integrity and Accountability*.

# RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED, RESPONSES, AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOLLOW-UP

Between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2025, OIPA issued 39 recommendations to the Mayor and City Council arising from independent case reviews and systemic oversight findings. To ensure consistent accountability, all recommendations were evaluated using a uniform 45-day response benchmark<sup>11</sup>, regardless of year, subject matter, or case type.

Figure 2a. As shown in Figures 2a and 2b, delayed or missing responses significantly weakened the civilian oversight accountability loop by impeding implementation, trend analysis, and public transparency.

2025 Responses Received After 45 Days			
<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Date Submitted</u>	<u>Date Response Received</u>	<u>Days to Response</u>
24TR-0730	2/20/2025	7/15/2025	145
25TR-0014	3/20/2025	7/15/2025	117
2024-00136482	3/20/2025	7/15/2025	117
2025-00005105	3/20/2025	7/15/2025	117
2025-00008911	3/20/2025	7/15/2025	117
2024-00144811	3/20/2025	7/15/2025	117
2025-00010011	4/17/2025	7/15/2025	89
2025-00021800	4/17/2025	7/15/2025	89
2025-00017987	4/17/2025	7/15/2025	89
2024-00124312	2025-04-17	7/15/2025	89
2025-00014926	4/17/2025	7/15/2025	89

Figure 2b.

2025 Recommendations Awaiting a Response		
<u>Case Number</u>	<u>Date Submitted</u>	<u>Days Outstanding as of 2026-02-09</u>
2024-00077110	2/20/2025	354
2025-00016602	4/17/2025	298
2025-00033127	6/23/2025	231
2025-00029868	6/23/2025	231
2025-00043144	7/17/2025	207
2025-00061337	9/18/2025	144
2025-00065373	9/18/2025	144
2024-00111977	9/18/2025	144
2025-00100289	10/16/2025	116
2025-00088595	10/16/2025	116
2025-00091845	10/16/2025	116
2025-00094701	10/16/2025	116
2025-00092383	12/1/2025	70
2025-00101709	12/1/2025	70
2025-00034827	12/1/2025	70
2025-00119298	12/18/2025	53
2025-00097950	12/18/2025	53

<sup>11</sup> The 45-day benchmark was suggested by the Mayor and APD, since the Charter does not address this matter. CPOB and OIPA agreed to this timeframe.

Applying this standard, only 7 recommendations (**17.95 percent**) received a response within 45 days. An additional 15 recommendations (**38.46 percent**) received responses after the 45-day benchmark, while 17 recommendations (**43.59 percent**) remained outstanding as of February 9, 2026. These figures demonstrate that delayed or absent responses are not confined to a single reporting year but represent a persistent challenge affecting the civilian oversight accountability process.

Uniform response standards and timely written replies are therefore essential to closing the oversight accountability loop and translating independent review into measurable institutional improvement.

### **Why delayed or missing responses undermine transparency**

When recommendations do not receive timely written responses, several transparency failures occur:

- **No clear public record** of whether the City or APD accepts, rejects, or defers reforms, and on what basis.
- **No implementation pathway** (owner, timeline, deliverables, and status) that can be tracked by CPOB, Council, or the public.
- **No closed-loop accountability**, meaning recurring issues identified in case reviews remain unresolved and reappear in subsequent incidents.

## **Risks created by delayed or outstanding responses**

Sustained inaction or delayed responses increase risk for APD, the city, and the community in several predictable ways:

### **Risk to APD**

- **Repeat-event risk:** unresolved policy/training gaps recur across incidents, increasing the likelihood of similar force events and complaints.
- **Supervisory integrity risk:** delay signals that review findings may not result in corrective learning, weakening supervisory accountability and internal performance standards.

### **Risk to the City of Akron**

- **Litigation and cost exposure:** when known risk factors persist without documented corrective action, the City becomes more vulnerable to claims that it failed to address foreseeable issues, often the exact type of argument that escalates settlement values and litigation costs.
- **Governance risk:** delayed responses impede Council and executive leadership from demonstrating meaningful oversight, progress, and stewardship to the public.

### **Risk to the community**

- **Trust and legitimacy erosion:** civilian oversight depends on the public seeing that concerns lead to action. When responses are delayed or absent, public confidence declines, community cooperation suffers, and reform efforts lose credibility.
- **Safety and harm prevention risk:** many recommendations are preventative in nature. Delays mean missed opportunities to reduce the likelihood of future injury, escalation, or avoidable force.

## **Accountability Follow-Up**

OIPA and the CPOB continue to track recommendations through a formal status matrix and to seek written responses that include: (1) concurrence status, (2) an implementation plan or rationale, and (3) measurable timelines. This follow-up is necessary to ensure that recommendations are not simply received but acted upon in a way that advances meaningful police reform and reduces risk.

# POLICY, TRAINING, AND SYSTEMIC REFORM THEMES

Civilian oversight is most effective when it moves beyond isolated incident review and focuses on recurring patterns that signal systemic risk. During calendar year 2025, OIPA issued policy, training, and disciplinary recommendations across multiple cases that, when aggregated, revealed consistent themes cutting across officers, units, and incident types. Organizing recommendations thematically allows the CPOB, APD leadership, the mayor, and City Council to distinguish systemic conditions, such as policy ambiguity, training gaps, or weak supervisory enforcement, from individual case-specific conduct.

## Required Reporting Categories and Systemic Implications

### Use of Force & Proportionality

Across 2025 case reviews, OIPA repeatedly identified concerns related to proportionality, necessity, escalation thresholds, and the use of high-risk tactics, including head and neck strikes. While individual incidents may meet constitutional thresholds, recurring deficiencies in articulation, alternative tactics analysis, and escalation control point to system-wide policy and training vulnerabilities, not isolated officer error.

**Systemic implication:** Without clear, enforced standards emphasizing proportionality and necessity, force decisions become inconsistent across similar encounters, increasing the likelihood of avoidable injury, complaints, and litigation exposure.

**Failure to address:** Unresolved proportionality issues normalize escalation and undermine public confidence, creating long-term risk even when individual uses of force are deemed “objectively reasonable.”

### Juvenile Encounters

OIPA’s 2025 recommendations highlight recurring issues in juvenile and school-based encounters, including the absence of youth-specific de-escalation guidance, restraint limitations, and coordination with schools and behavioral-health partners. These cases demonstrate that youth encounters require distinct policy frameworks, not ad hoc adaptation of adult policing models.

**Systemic implication:** Juvenile encounters reflect policy design and training priorities more than individual officer intent. Inadequate youth-centered guidance increases the risk of harm and criminalization of developmentally typical behavior.

**Failure to address:** Failure to reform juvenile encounter practices disproportionately harms youth, damages community trust, and exposes the City to heightened legal and reputational risk.

## WRAP / Restraint Safety

Multiple 2025 cases raised concerns about WRAP and other full-body restraint devices, including thresholds for use, duration, monitoring, medical response, and documentation. These issues are inherently systemic, as restraint safety depends on policy clarity, training consistency, and supervisory enforcement.

**Systemic implication:** Restraint-related risk is not controlled by individual discretion alone; it requires institutional safeguards, clear policy thresholds, and medical oversight.

**Failure to address:** Unaddressed restraint safety issues elevate the risk of serious injury or death and create substantial liability exposure where known best practices are not implemented.

## CEW & Pursuits

OIPA identified recurring concerns involving CEW deployment and foot or vehicle pursuits, particularly around decision-making thresholds, articulation, and supervisory review. These incidents illustrate how policy ambiguity and inconsistent training can lead to unpredictable outcomes.

**Systemic implication:** Inconsistent guidance on CEWs and pursuits results in uneven application of force and difficulty defending decisions after the fact.

**Failure to address:** Failure to clarify standards increases the likelihood of injury, secondary incidents, and post-incident accountability failures.

## Supervisory Accountability

Across nearly all thematic areas, supervisory review quality emerged as a central factor. OIPA's recommendations emphasize that supervisors function as the primary compliance and quality-control mechanism within the policing system.

**Systemic implication:** When supervisors fail to rigorously evaluate force, documentation, and policy compliance, problematic practices persist regardless of individual officer intent.

**Failure to address:** Weak supervisory accountability allows individual errors to harden into institutional norms, undermining both internal discipline systems and civilian oversight credibility.

## Documentation & Body-Worn Camera (BWC) Compliance

Recurring BWC activation and documentation issues were identified across multiple cases in 2025. These failures affect not only individual investigations, but the entire accountability infrastructure, including oversight, discipline, and public transparency.

**Systemic implication:** Accurate documentation and continuous BWC activation are prerequisites for fair review, officer protection, and public trust.

**Failure to address:** Documentation and BWC failures impair investigations, weaken the City’s litigation posture, and erode confidence in both policing and oversight outcomes.

### Systemic Issues Versus Individual Issues

A central purpose of thematic reporting is to distinguish systemic reform needs from individual accountability determinations. While individual cases may warrant discipline or corrective action, many 2025 recommendations reflect conditions that recur regardless of which officer is involved. These conditions, policy gaps, training deficiencies, inconsistent supervision, cannot be resolved through discipline alone.

<p><b>Systemic issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appear across multiple cases and reporting periods</li><li>• Persist despite individual case resolution</li><li>• Require policy revision, training redesign, supervisory enforcement, or structural change</li></ul>
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Addressing only individual cases without resolving systemic drivers ensures that similar incidents will recur, undermining the preventative purpose of civilian oversight.

## **Mental Health Crisis Response and Behavioral Health Encounters (*Cross-Cutting Theme*)**

Across multiple 2025 case reviews and Board discussions, OIPA identified recurring issues related to law enforcement responses to individuals experiencing mental health crises, emotional distress, or behavioral health emergencies. These incidents often intersect with other thematic areas, use of force, de-escalation, restraint safety, CEW deployment, and supervisory review, underscoring that mental health crisis response is not a discrete issue, but a system-wide operational challenge.

OIPA’s recommendations reflect concerns regarding recognition of crisis indicators, tactical decision-making during behavioral health encounters, and the adequacy of available alternatives to enforcement-driven responses. In several cases, force outcomes were influenced not by criminal conduct, but by the escalation of encounters involving individuals in crisis, where communication breakdowns, rushed engagement, or limited access to specialized resources contributed to avoidable risk.

**Systemic implication:** Mental health crisis encounters expose the limits of traditional enforcement models when applied to non-criminal behavioral health situations. These incidents are driven less by individual officer intent and more by policy design, training emphasis, resource availability,

and supervisory guidance. Without clear, enforceable standards prioritizing de-escalation, time, distance, and crisis-appropriate response options, officers may default to tactics that escalate rather than stabilize encounters.

**Failure to address:** Failure to implement reforms related to mental health crisis response increases the likelihood of:

- Use of force in situations better addressed through stabilization and support
- Injury to individuals in crisis, officers, or third parties
- Repeated high-risk encounters involving the same individuals
- Public perception that police are serving as a de facto mental health system without adequate tools or safeguards

Unaddressed systemic deficiencies in crisis response also expose the City to heightened legal risk where known vulnerabilities, such as inadequate training, unclear policy, or insufficient coordination with behavioral health partners, remain unresolved.

### Relationship to Other Reform Themes

Mental health crisis response issues are closely linked to several other required reporting categories:

- **Use of Force & Proportionality:** Crisis-related behavior is often misinterpreted as resistance, leading to force decisions that may be legally defensible but operationally avoidable.
- **WRAP / Restraint Safety:** Individuals in crisis face increased medical risk during restraint, requiring heightened monitoring and care.
- **CEW & Pursuits:** CEW deployment and foot pursuits involving individuals in crisis carry elevated escalation and injury risk.
- **Supervisory Accountability:** Supervisors play a critical role in identifying crisis indicators, evaluating tactical decision-making, and reinforcing de-escalation expectations.
- **Documentation & BWC Compliance:** Accurate documentation and continuous BWC recording are essential for evaluating crisis recognition, communication efforts, and decision-making under stress.

### Systemic Issues Versus Individual Issues in Crisis Encounters

Mental health-related incidents illustrate the importance of distinguishing systemic reform needs from individual accountability. While individual decisions are reviewed for compliance, repeated crisis-driven encounters point to institutional gaps that cannot be corrected through discipline alone.

### **Systemic crisis-response issues typically involve:**

- Insufficient or inconsistent crisis intervention training
- Lack of clear guidance on slowing encounters and prioritizing stabilization
- Limited access to or integration with behavioral health resources
- Inconsistent supervisory reinforcement of crisis-appropriate tactics

Addressing these issues requires coordinated policy reform, training investment, and inter-agency collaboration, not isolated corrective action.

### Implications of Failing to Address Mental Health Crisis Themes

When mental health crisis response deficiencies remain unaddressed:

- **APD** faces recurring high-risk encounters that strain officers and increase use-of-force exposure
- **The City of Akron** faces increased litigation risk and difficulty demonstrating good-faith reform when behavioral health risks are repeatedly identified
- **The community** experiences diminished trust, particularly among families and advocates concerned about crisis response outcomes

Civilian oversight identifies these themes not to assign blame, but to prevent future harm by aligning policing practices with the realities of behavioral health crises.

## **Recognition of APD Efforts and Ongoing Oversight Considerations**

OIPA and the CPOB also recognize that the Akron Police Department has taken meaningful and proactive steps to improve responses to mental health crisis situations. During the reporting period, APD continued efforts to expand Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) membership, increase crisis-focused training, and coordinate with mental health practitioners to provide service-oriented responses, rather than relying solely on traditional law enforcement interventions.

In addition, APD has trained all sworn officers in ICAT (Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics), a nationally recognized de-escalation training program developed by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). ICAT emphasizes slowing down encounters, improving tactical communication, assessing behavioral cues, and selecting response options that prioritize safety and stabilization, particularly during encounters involving individuals in crisis.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), *ICAT: Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics—A Training Guide for Responding to Critical Incidents Involving Persons with Mental Illness*.

APD's efforts to integrate ICAT principles, expand CIT capacity, and collaborate with behavioral health partners reflect an understanding that mental health crises require specialized approaches distinct from enforcement-driven policing. These initiatives align with national best practices that recognize policing as one component of a broader public-health response to behavioral health emergencies.

### **Why continued review remains necessary**

While these steps represent important progress, mental health crisis response remains an ongoing and evolving challenge across law enforcement agencies nationwide. Even with robust training and specialized teams, crisis encounters continue to present heightened risk due to factors such as:

- unpredictable behavior and communication barriers,
- limited availability or delayed access to behavioral health resources,
- pressure to resolve situations quickly in dynamic environments, and
- the cumulative effects of repeated crisis calls on officers and systems.

As a result, oversight bodies across the country consistently emphasize that crisis response practices must be continually evaluated, reinforced, and refined. Training alone is insufficient without:

- clear policy guidance supporting time, distance, and de-escalation,
- supervisory reinforcement and post-incident review focused on crisis-appropriate decision making, and
- sustained coordination with mental health professionals and service providers.

### Oversight Perspective

From an oversight standpoint, continued review of mental health crisis encounters is not an indictment of officer intent or departmental commitment. Rather, it reflects the reality that behavioral health response is one of the most complex and risk-laden areas of modern policing, requiring constant adaptation as community needs, legal standards, and best practices evolve.

Accordingly, OIPA's continued focus on mental health crisis themes is intended to:

- support APD's ongoing improvement efforts,
- identify gaps between training and practice,
- ensure that crisis-oriented policies are consistently applied, and
- reduce the likelihood of avoidable harm to individuals in crisis, officers, and the community.

Recognizing APD's progress while maintaining continuous oversight reinforces the shared goal of ensuring that mental health crisis encounters are handled with professionalism, compassion, and constitutional care, while acknowledging that this area of policing demands ongoing evaluation and improvement.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLES

Community engagement is a core component of Akron’s civilian police oversight framework. While case review, policy analysis, and recommendations provide essential accountability mechanisms, sustained community dialogue is necessary to ensure that oversight reflects lived experience, community expectations, and public trust concerns. In 2025, CPOB and OIPA advanced this commitment through structured community engagement initiatives, most notably the *Accountability Circles: Policing and the Path Forward*.

## Accountability Circles: Purpose and Structure

Accountability Circles are facilitated, deliberative forums designed to move beyond traditional listening sessions toward intentional dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared problem-solving. In partnership with Project Ujima, CPOB and OIPA convened circles that brought together:

- Clergy and faith leaders
- Community residents and advocates
- Akron Police Department officers and supervisors
- Civic and institutional stakeholders

These forums were structured to encourage candid discussion of policing experiences, oversight expectations, and pathways for reform, while maintaining a respectful and solutions-oriented environment.

## Leadership and Facilitation

The 2025 Accountability Circles were led and facilitated by Deputy Independent Police Auditor Keysha Myers and Ms. Crystal Jones (former CPOB Member), whose leadership was instrumental in establishing trust, maintaining productive dialogue, and ensuring that community voices were meaningfully integrated into the oversight process.

Their work emphasized:

- Creating space for historically underrepresented perspectives
- Ensuring that conversations moved beyond expression of frustration to identification of actionable themes
- Bridging the gap between community concerns and policy-level discussions

This level of facilitation is critical in accountability-focused engagement, as it allows difficult topics, use of force, culture, legitimacy, and trust to be addressed constructively rather than defensively.

## **Community Participation and Engagement Value**

Community participation in the Accountability Circles was not symbolic; it was substantive and outcome oriented. Participants engaged in discussions related to:

- Use-of-force expectations and proportionality
- De-escalation and crisis response
- Officer training and decision-making
- Cultural competency and legitimacy
- Transparency, communication, and follow-up

This engagement provided CPOB and OIPA with contextual insight that cannot be derived solely from case files or policy language. It also reinforced the principle that civilian oversight is most effective when the community is not merely informed of outcomes but actively involved in shaping reform priorities.

## **Outcomes and Next Steps**

Key themes and concerns raised during the Accountability Circles were documented and summarized for Board consideration. These discussions directly inform ongoing and future oversight work by:

- Highlighting areas where community expectations diverge from current policy or practice
- Identifying trust gaps that may not surface through formal complaints
- Providing qualitative data to complement case-level and trend-based analysis

Importantly, this engagement positions the CPOB and OIPA to enter the policy development phase of oversight work with a clearer understanding of community priorities.

## **Relevance to Upcoming Policy and Reform Efforts**

The Accountability Circles will play a critical role as Akron advances several major reform initiatives, including:

- The PERF-led use-of-force policy review, where community perspectives on de-escalation, proportionality, and accountability provide essential grounding for policy revisions
- General APD policy review, ensuring that updated policies reflect both constitutional standards and community expectations
- Review and implementation of recommendations arising from individual use-of-force incidents, allowing systemic reforms to be informed by both technical analysis and lived experience

By integrating community engagement into these processes, civilian oversight ensures that reform efforts are not developed in isolation but are responsive to the voices of those most affected by policing practices.

### **Why this level of engagement matters**

This form of structured community engagement strengthens oversight by:

- Enhancing transparency, through open dialogue about oversight findings and reform efforts
- Building accountability, by allowing community members to see how their input informs policy and recommendations
- Supporting legitimacy and trust, which are essential to effective policing and meaningful reform

Accountability Circles demonstrate that civilian oversight is not limited to reviewing what has already occurred but is actively engaged in shaping what policing should look like going forward.

Through the Accountability Circles, the CPOB and OIPA reinforced that community engagement is not ancillary to oversight, but a central mechanism for accountability, transparency, and sustainable reform, ensuring that policy development and institutional change are informed by both evidence and community experience.

# **TRANSPARENCY, PUBLIC REPORTING, AND TRUST-BUILDING**

Transparency and public reporting are foundational to effective civilian oversight. Oversight bodies derive their legitimacy not only from Charter authority, but from the public’s ability to see, understand, and evaluate how oversight functions operate and what outcomes they produce. In 2025, the CPOB and OIPA emphasized transparency through open meetings, accessible public reporting, and data-driven analysis, while carefully respecting legal, privacy, and investigative constraints.

## **Public Meetings and Open Governance**

The CPOB conducted its work through publicly noticed meetings, providing a visible forum for reviewing OIPA reports, deliberating on findings and recommendations, receiving public input, and taking formal action. Open meetings serve several critical oversight purposes:

- They allow the public to observe how oversight decisions are made, not just the final outcomes.
- They reinforce accountability by requiring Board members to deliberate and vote in public.
- They create space for community voices to inform oversight priorities and reform discussions.

In the context of law enforcement oversight, public meetings help counter perceptions that police accountability occurs behind closed doors and affirm that civilian oversight is answerable to the community it serves.

## **Publication of Reports and Plain-Language Communication**

Throughout 2025, OIPA and the CPOB prioritized the regular publication of reports, including Board reports, recommendations, and thematic analyses. These materials were designed to balance technical rigor with accessibility, ensuring that complex legal and policy issues could be understood by:

- City leadership and policymakers
- Community members and advocates
- Media and other stakeholders

Plain-language summaries and narrative explanations play an essential role in trust-building. Oversight that is technically sound but opaque fails to achieve its purpose. By clearly explaining what was reviewed, what conclusions were reached, and what actions were recommended, CPOB and OIPA strengthened public understanding of both the limits and the value of civilian oversight.

## **Data Transparency and Trend Analysis**

Data transparency is increasingly central to modern police oversight. In Akron, OIPA’s oversight model incorporates data-driven trend analysis to move beyond anecdotal concerns and assess patterns across multiple cases, reporting periods, and reform areas. This approach supports:

- Identification of recurring risk factors and systemic issues
- Measurement of concurrence, non-concurrence, and recommendation outcomes
- Tracking of response timeliness and implementation status

OIPA’s work is supported through collaboration with a dedicated data analyst, enabling more sophisticated analysis of use-of-force cases, recommendation tracking, and outcome trends. This partnership enhances the credibility and consistency of oversight findings and ensures that conclusions are grounded in verifiable data rather than isolated incidents.

## **Public-Facing Oversight Dashboard**

As part of its commitment to transparency, OIPA has articulated a goal of developing a public-facing dashboard that would present relevant, non-confidential data related to use-of-force incidents and oversight outcomes. A dashboard approach would allow community members, policymakers, and other stakeholders to:

- View aggregate data on use-of-force reviews and dispositions
- Understand trends over time rather than focusing on single incidents
- Track the status of recommendations and administrative responses

Importantly, such a dashboard would be designed to inform, not sensationalize, and would respect legal, privacy, and investigative limitations. The objective is to enhance understanding and accountability, not to compromise due process or ongoing investigations.

### **Why transparency and trust-building matter in Akron**

Trust is both a prerequisite for effective policing and a product of credible oversight. In Akron, transparency plays a particularly important role given the community’s expectation for accountability and reform. When oversight work is visible, data-driven, and clearly explained:

- The public gains confidence that concerns are taken seriously and reviewed independently.
- City leadership and the Akron Police Department benefit from clearer feedback loops that support improvement rather than speculation.
- Oversight findings are more likely to translate into meaningful reform because they are understood and tracked over time.

Conversely, the absence of transparency, whether through delayed reporting, inaccessible data, or unclear communication, can undermine trust even when oversight work is occurring behind the scenes.

## **Transparency Within Constraints**

CPOB and OIPA recognize that transparency must be balanced with legitimate constraints, including:

- Protection of ongoing investigations
- Privacy and personnel considerations
- Legal and contractual requirements

Transparency in oversight does not mean disclosure of all information at all times. It means clearly communicating what can be shared, what cannot, and why, while providing as much meaningful information as possible to the public.

Through open meetings, published reports, data-driven analysis, and planned expansion of public-facing reporting tools, the CPOB and OIPA continue to strengthen transparency and trust-building in Akron's civilian oversight system. These efforts reinforce that accountability is not only about outcomes, but about ensuring that the oversight process itself is visible, understandable, and worthy of public confidence.

# STAFFING, BUDGET, AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Effective civilian oversight depends not only on authority and independence, but on sufficient staffing, responsible budgeting, and operational capacity to carry out Charter-mandated responsibilities. CPOB and OIPA continued to operate within a lean staffing model, balancing growing oversight demands with fiscal discipline and careful resource allocation.

## Staffing Levels

During the 2025 reporting period, OIPA operated with a limited professional staff while supporting the work of a fully volunteer oversight board<sup>13</sup>. This staffing model required OIPA to manage:

- Independent review of use-of-force incidents and complaints
- Preparation of detailed Board reports and recommendations
- Policy and training analysis
- Community engagement and Accountability Circles
- Ongoing follow-up on recommendation responses and implementation

While this structure allowed core oversight functions to continue, workload analysis and experience during 2025 confirmed that staffing capacity is a limiting factor in how quickly and comprehensively oversight work can be completed. As oversight responsibilities have expanded, from individual case review to thematic analysis, policy development, data transparency, and community engagement, the demands placed on existing staff have increased correspondingly.

The FY2026 staffing request reflects a calibrated approach, maintaining a modest staffing level aligned with realistic workload demands rather than aspirational expansion, while recognizing that continued growth in oversight responsibilities will require sustained capacity planning.

## Budget Allocation and Fiscal Responsibility

The FY2025 budget supported essential oversight operations while reflecting responsible stewardship of public funds. Expenditures were aligned with core functions, and unexpended balances demonstrated that CPOB and OIPA exercised fiscal discipline rather than drawing down funds unnecessarily.

Budget priorities during 2025 focused on:

- Personnel and professional services necessary for independent review
- Limited consulting support for complex matters, including officer-involved shootings
- Training and professional development to ensure staff and Board members remain current on best practices

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<sup>13</sup> Board members received a nominal stipend of \$100.00 per regular or special board meeting attended.

- Community engagement activities tied to accountability and trust-building

The FY2026 budget request builds directly on this experience, aligning proposed expenditures with demonstrated need rather than speculative growth. Importantly, the budget reflects the understanding that effective oversight is a risk-management and accountability investment, not a discretionary expense.

## **Operational Capacity and Constraints**

Operational capacity refers to the ability of CPOB and OIPA to translate authority into action, to review cases in a timely manner, analyze trends, engage the community, and follow through on recommendations. In 2025, several capacity constraints were identified:

- Reliance on manual or fragmented data systems, limiting efficiency and trend analysis
- Increasing volume and complexity of use-of-force reviews
- Expanded community engagement expectations
- Growing need for data-driven reporting and public transparency

These constraints do not reflect a lack of commitment or diligence, but rather the reality that oversight functions have matured and expanded faster than infrastructure. To address this, the FY2026 budget includes targeted investments, such as a case management and database system, designed to improve efficiency, data integrity, and long-term sustainability without unnecessary staffing expansion.

## **Board Capacity and Compensation**

The CPOB operates as a working board, not a purely advisory body. Board members review complex constitutional-policing analyses, participate in committee work, engage in community forums, and devote substantial time outside formal meetings to oversight activities. The proposed adjustment to Board stipends reflects recognition of this workload and the importance of:

- Recruiting and retaining qualified, diverse members
- Reducing financial barriers to participation
- Supporting continuity and institutional knowledge

This investment remains modest relative to the scope of responsibility and the City's broader budget, while strengthening governance capacity and accountability.

## **Looking forward: Future capacity needs**

As Akron moves into the next phase of oversight, particularly with the PERF-led use-of-force policy review, broader APD policy analysis, and expanded public reporting, capacity needs will continue to evolve. Future demands are likely to include:

- Increased analytical workload tied to policy development and implementation tracking
- Sustained data analysis and dashboard maintenance
- Continued community engagement and accountability forums
- Ongoing monitoring of reform outcomes over time

CPOB and OIPA's approach to staffing and budgeting remains intentionally incremental: building capacity where it demonstrably improves oversight effectiveness, while maintaining fiscal responsibility and transparency.

The staffing, budget, and operational capacity of the CPOB and OIPA directly shape the City's ability to deliver meaningful, independent police oversight. Through disciplined budgeting, careful staffing decisions, and targeted investments in infrastructure, Akron continues to strengthen its oversight framework while remaining mindful of fiscal responsibility. As oversight responsibilities expand, sustaining this balance will be essential to ensuring that civilian oversight remains credible, effective, and capable of meeting community expectations.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS AND ONGOING REVIEWS**

Certain oversight responsibilities require specialized review processes, additional expertise, and dedicated project management beyond routine case review. CPOB and OIPA continued to engage in special projects and ongoing reviews designed to ensure that the City's most critical and complex incidents, particularly officer-involved shootings, receive thorough, timely, and independent examination, while maintaining continuity in day-to-day oversight operations.

### **Officer-Involved Shootings**

OIPA planned to conduct an independent review of the June 27, 2022, officer-involved shooting of Jayland Walker, consistent with its Charter responsibilities and established review protocols. A detailed scope of work was developed outlining the methodology, deliverables, and use of independent subject-matter experts to ensure a thorough, objective review.

During the 2025 budget cycle, OIPA requested funding to support this special review, and more than \$30,000 was initially allocated for a special services agreement. When OIPA proceeded to the vendor-selection phase, it was advised that the previously identified funds were not available at that time, and the review could not move forward as planned.

Since then, the CPOB and OIPA have met with City finance staff to clarify funding requirements for officer-involved shooting reviews and to plan for future capacity. Based on anticipated workload, OIPA will be requesting approximately \$80,000 to support the independent review of three to four officer-involved shootings during 2026, including the Jayland Walker incident. This funding level reflects both the complexity of these reviews and the need to conduct them without disrupting ongoing oversight responsibilities.

This approach ensures that officer-involved shooting reviews are conducted thoroughly, independently, and in a manner that preserves both operational continuity and public confidence in the oversight process.

Officer-involved shootings represent the highest-risk category of police use of force, with profound implications for public trust, officer well-being, community safety, and legal exposure. These incidents demand a level of review that is comprehensive, methodical, and demonstrably independent.

Consistent with best practices in civilian oversight, OIPA conducts independent assessments of use of force incidents, to include officer-involved shootings, through a constitutional-policing framework, examining legality, policy compliance, tactical decision-making, and alignment with national standards. Given the scope and intensity of these reviews, often involving extensive body-worn camera footage, forensic evidence, legal analysis, and complex timelines, OIPA developed a plan to utilize contracted subject-matter experts (SMEs) to support this work when appropriate.

## **Why external subject-matter experts (SME) are necessary**

The use of SMEs serves two essential oversight functions:

### **1. Preventing Operational Backlogs**

Officer-involved shootings require concentrated time and resources. Without supplemental expertise, these intensive reviews risk diverting attention from ongoing case reviews, recommendation follow-up, policy analysis, and community engagement. Strategic use of SMEs ensures that:

- High-priority incidents receive appropriate depth of review
- Routine oversight functions continue without delay
- Oversight remains timely and responsive

### **2. Strengthening Independence and Objectivity**

Officer-involved shootings raise heightened concerns regarding credibility and public confidence. Incorporating independent SMEs provides additional, objective perspectives that:

- Reduce the risk of analytical blind spots
- Enhance the rigor of legal and tactical assessment
- Reinforce public trust in the independence of oversight findings

Importantly, these SMEs will operate **under the direction and supervision of the Independent Police Auditor**, ensuring that:

- Oversight authority remains centralized within OIPA
- Analytical standards are applied consistently
- Findings and recommendations remain independent of the Akron Police Department
- Final conclusions reflect an integrated oversight judgment, not outsourced decision-making

This model allows OIPA to maintain independence while drawing on specialized expertise in constitutional law, police tactics, use-of-force analysis, and national best practices.

This layered approach reflects national best practices in civilian oversight, particularly for critical incidents where public confidence depends on demonstrable independence and expertise.

## **Case-Management System Development**

As oversight responsibilities have expanded, OIPA identified the need for a more robust case-management and tracking system to support both routine and special-project work. Effective case-management infrastructure is essential to:

- Track complex, multi-phase reviews such as officer-involved shootings
- Manage large volumes of evidence and documentation
- Monitor recommendation responses and implementation timelines
- Support data-driven trend analysis and public reporting

Development of improved case-management systems is therefore a core operational priority, enabling OIPA to manage special projects without compromising transparency, accountability, or efficiency.

## **External Partnerships**

Beyond SMEs, OIPA and the CPOB rely on strategic external partnerships to support specialized oversight functions. These partnerships may include:

- Policy and training experts aligned with national best practices
- Community-engagement facilitators for public-facing components of major reviews

All external partnerships are structured to preserve OIPA's independence, avoid conflicts of interest, and ensure accountability to the Board, the Mayor, City Council, and the public.

## **Systemic Importance of Special Projects**

Special projects and ongoing reviews are not isolated exercises; they inform broader reform efforts by:

- Identifying policy gaps revealed by critical incidents
- Highlighting training and supervisory deficiencies
- Informing thematic recommendations and future policy development

Failure to conduct thorough, independent reviews of officer-involved shootings carries significant risk. Without this level of scrutiny, systemic deficiencies may go unaddressed, public confidence may erode, and opportunities for meaningful reform may be lost.

Through the use of independent subject-matter experts, improved case-management systems, and carefully structured external partnerships, OIPA and the CPOB ensure that the City's most serious incidents receive the depth of review they require without compromising the continuity of day-to-day oversight. This approach strengthens accountability, preserves independence, and reinforces public trust in Akron's civilian oversight framework.

## **CHALLENGES, RISKS, AND STRUCTURAL LIMITATIONS**

Civilian oversight operates within a legal, contractual, and organizational environment that can either enable or constrain effectiveness. CPOB and OIPA continued to carry out their Charter-mandated responsibilities while navigating structural limitations that affect timeliness, access to information, and the full realization of oversight objectives. Identifying these challenges is not an assignment of fault, but a necessary component of transparent reporting and continuous improvement.

### **Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) Constraints**

Certain provisions of the 2025–2027 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between the City of Akron and the Fraternal Order of Police present structural limitations for civilian oversight. Despite sustained engagement and formal recommendations from the CPOB and OIPA, a number of proposed oversight-aligned reforms were not adopted in the final contract.

Foremost among these is the continued 120-day disciplinary time limit for bringing charges against officers. CPOB and OIPA jointly recommended extending this period to 365 days to accommodate the full oversight process, including APD investigation, OIPA review, Board deliberation, and mayoral response. Retaining the 120-day limit constrains the oversight timeline and creates a risk that serious matters may expire before the oversight process is complete, particularly in complex use-of-force cases.

Additionally recommended reforms that were not adopted included:

- Formal acknowledgment of the CPOB and OIPA within the CBA, aligning contractual language with Charter §68
- Limitations on arbitration in use-of-force and public-complaint cases
- Restrictions on officers reviewing body-worn camera footage prior to providing statements
- Modernization of complaint terminology and evidentiary standards
- Expansion of non-discrimination protections

While there was limited progress in expanding merit-exempt positions within internal accountability units, the absence of broader reforms preserves the status quo and limits alignment between labor agreements and Akron’s civilian oversight framework.

### **Access to Information and Process Integration**

Effective oversight depends on timely, direct, and comprehensive access to information. While OIPA receives necessary materials to conduct reviews, indirect or delayed access can affect efficiency and depth of analysis. Direct access to investigative files, body-worn camera footage, and related materials, subject to appropriate safeguards, is optimal because it:

- Reduces delays associated with repeated requests
- Preserves evidentiary integrity and context
- Supports timely completion of reviews within contractual timelines
- Enhances independence by minimizing reliance on intermediate processes

From an oversight perspective, access is not about control or duplication of internal investigations, but about ensuring that independent review can occur in parallel, rather than sequentially, with internal processes.

## Structural and Operational Impediments

Beyond contractual and access-related issues, several broader structural challenges affect oversight capacity:

- **Compressed timelines** that do not fully account for layered review and governance processes
- **Data and systems limitations** that require manual tracking and reconciliation
- **Expanding scope of oversight responsibilities** without proportional increases in infrastructure
- **Public expectations** that exceed what oversight bodies can deliver within existing legal constraints

These impediments do not negate the value of oversight, but they do shape what is feasible and underscore the importance of aligning authority, process, and resources.

## Risk Implications

If structural limitations remain unaddressed, they create identifiable risks:

- **Accountability risk:** oversight findings may not translate into enforceable outcomes
- **Transparency risk:** delays and constraints can be perceived as inaction, even when work is occurring
- **Legal and financial risk:** unresolved or delayed disciplinary matters increase exposure for the City
- **Trust risk:** community confidence in civilian oversight depends on both independence and effectiveness

Addressing these risks requires continued dialogue among City leadership, labor partners, oversight bodies, and the community.

## **Oversight perspective and path forward**

The CPOB and OIPA raise these challenges to strengthen, not undermine, the City's accountability framework. Civilian oversight is most effective when:

- Contractual provisions reflect oversight timelines and authority
- Information flows support independent, timely review
- Structural constraints are acknowledged and addressed transparently

Ongoing evaluation of these limitations, particularly in future labor negotiations and policy development, will be essential to fulfilling the intent of Akron's Charter and maintaining public trust in the oversight process.

By candidly identifying challenges, risks, and structural limitations, the CPOB and OIPA aim to promote informed dialogue and continuous improvement, ensuring that civilian oversight in Akron remains credible, independent, and capable of meeting community expectations.

# GOALS AND WORK PLAN FOR 2026–2027

The Goals and Work Plan for 2026–2027 translate the CPOB’s governance role and OIPA’s analytical responsibilities into a structured, multi-year roadmap for strengthening civilian oversight in Akron. Building on lessons learned in 2025, this work plan prioritizes systemic reform, data-driven accountability, and increased transparency, while remaining grounded in the practical limits of staffing, budget, and legal authority.

The 2026–2027 period represents a shift from establishing oversight processes to institutionalizing reform, ensuring that findings, recommendations, and community engagement efforts produce measurable and sustainable outcomes.

## Oversight Priorities

Oversight priorities for 2026–2027 focus on areas of highest risk, impact, and public concern. These priorities include:

- **Independent review of use-of-force incidents**, including officer-involved shootings and other serious uses of force, using constitutional-policing standards and national best practices.
- **Trend analysis across cases**, moving beyond individual incident review to identify recurring policy, training, and supervisory issues.
- **Accountability follow-through**, with increased emphasis on tracking recommendation responses, implementation status, and outcomes over time.
- **Community-informed oversight**, ensuring that lived experience and community expectations continue to inform reform priorities.

These priorities reflect the understanding that oversight effectiveness depends on focusing limited resources where they can most meaningfully reduce risk and improve policing outcomes.

## Policy and Training Initiatives

A central pillar of the 2026–2027 work plan is the development of evidence-based policy and training recommendations informed by data, case review, and community engagement. Key initiatives include:

- **Comprehensive review of APD policies**, with particular emphasis on use of force, de-escalation, supervision, discipline, and interactions with the public.
- **Collaboration with subject-matter experts and stakeholders** to assess policy gaps and align APD practices with constitutional standards and national best practices.
- **Integration of case-level findings into policy reform**, ensuring that lessons learned from individual incidents translate into systemic improvements.
- **Monitoring implementation**, recognizing that policy change without effective training, supervision, and follow-up does not produce meaningful reform.

These initiatives are designed to reduce legal exposure, enhance officer and community safety, and strengthen public confidence in policing practices.

## **Reporting Enhancements and Data-Driven Oversight**

The 2026–2027 work plan places significant emphasis on modernizing oversight infrastructure and reporting capabilities. A key priority is the creation of a functional, centralized case-management system and database to support:

- Efficient tracking of complaints, use-of-force incidents, and recommendations
- Automated reporting and trend analysis
- Improved data integrity and consistency across reporting periods
- Enhanced transparency through aggregated, non-confidential public reporting

This infrastructure will support more timely Board reporting, more robust trend identification, and the eventual development of public-facing reporting tools, such as dashboards, that allow stakeholders to understand oversight outcomes over time rather than through isolated cases.

## **Community Engagement and Education**

Consistent with prior sections of this report, the work plan emphasizes continued community engagement as a core oversight function, not a supplemental activity. Planned efforts include:

- Public forums and educational sessions explaining oversight processes and findings
- Collaboration with community organizations and civic leaders
- Feedback mechanisms to assess public understanding and trust

These efforts are intended to ensure that oversight remains accessible, understandable, and responsive to community needs.

### **Why this work plan matters**

The Goals and Work Plan for 2026–2027 reflect a deliberate effort to move civilian oversight from reactive review to proactive governance. By aligning oversight priorities, policy development, and reporting enhancements, the CPOB and OIPA seek to:

- Reduce recurring risk factors before they result in harm
- Improve consistency and accountability within policing practices
- Provide City leadership and the public with clearer measures of progress

Failure to advance this work would risk perpetuating the same systemic issues identified in prior reviews, undermining both accountability and public trust.

The 2026–2027 Goals and Work Plan establish a clear, achievable framework for advancing civilian oversight in Akron. Through focused oversight priorities, targeted policy and training initiatives, and enhanced reporting and data capabilities, the CPOB and OIPA are positioned to strengthen accountability, support meaningful reform, and ensure that oversight efforts result in measurable, lasting improvement.

## CONCLUSION

The 2025 Annual Report reflects a year of substantive oversight work by the CPOB and OIPA, grounded in Akron's Charter mandate and informed by constitutional principles, national best practices, and community experience. Taken together, the sections of this report demonstrate a civilian oversight system that is active, independent, and increasingly focused on translating review and analysis into meaningful institutional reform.

Throughout the reporting period, OIPA applied constitutional policing standards to review complaints and use-of-force incidents, ensuring that police actions were evaluated through the lens of objective reasonableness, proportionality, necessity, and duty of care. This work reaffirmed that constitutional compliance is the minimum standard for policing, not the ceiling, and that lawful outcomes must still be examined for systemic risk and opportunities to reduce harm.

The Board's governance role, exercised through publicly noticed meetings, deliberation, and formal votes, reinforced transparency and accountability in oversight decision-making. Through regular review of OIPA reports, acceptance and transmission of findings and recommendations, and thematic briefings, the CPOB provided civilian leadership and public accountability consistent with the Charter's intent.

Case-level review activity illustrated the scope and rigor of oversight conducted during the year. The use of standardized dispositions, concurrence, concurrence with recommendations, and non-concurrence, allowed oversight outcomes to be measured, compared, and understood. Trend analysis further demonstrated that oversight is not limited to resolving individual cases but is designed to identify recurring patterns that require policy, training, or supervisory intervention.

The report also highlights the importance of recommendations and follow-up as the bridge between oversight findings and institutional change. As noted in the section titled *Recommendations Issued, Responses, and Accountability Follow-Up*, delayed or absent responses to recommendations remain a significant challenge, underscoring that accountability depends not only on independent review, but on timely administrative engagement and implementation.

Policy, training, and systemic reform themes, ranging from use-of-force proportionality and juvenile encounters to restraint safety, mental health crisis response, supervisory accountability, and documentation practices, demonstrate that many oversight findings reflect system-level conditions rather than isolated conduct. Addressing these themes is essential to preventing recurrence, reducing risk, and advancing meaningful reform.

Community engagement efforts, particularly the Accountability Circles facilitated in partnership with community leaders, reaffirmed that civilian oversight is strongest when it is informed by lived experience and inclusive dialogue. These forums provided critical context for policy development and reinforced trust-building as an essential component of accountability.

Transparency and public reporting remained central to the oversight mission. Through open meetings, published reports, data analysis, and plans for enhanced public-facing reporting tools,

OIPA and the CPOB continued to strengthen the visibility and credibility of the oversight process while respecting legal and investigative constraints.

The report also candidly acknowledges challenges, risks, and structural limitations, including contractual constraints, access-to-information issues, and resource limitations, that affect oversight effectiveness. Identifying these barriers is not an exercise in attribution, but a necessary step toward aligning authority, process, and capacity with the City’s accountability goals.

Looking ahead, the Goals and Work Plan for 2026–2027 articulate a forward-focused strategy to deepen oversight impact through targeted priorities, policy and training initiatives, enhanced reporting infrastructure, and sustained community engagement. These goals reflect a commitment to institutionalizing reform rather than revisiting the same unresolved issues year after year.

### **Reaffirmation of commitment**

The CPOB and OIPA reaffirm their shared commitment to:

- **Constitutional policing**, grounded in legality, proportionality, and respect for civil rights;
- **Independence**, ensuring that oversight remains objective, credible, and free from undue influence; and
- **Community trust**, recognizing transparency, engagement, and follow-through as being essential to public confidence.

As Akron moves into the next phase of reform, the CPOB and OIPA look forward to working with City Council, the Mayor, APD leadership, and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) to translate the findings, themes, and recommendations in this report into concrete policy revisions, training enhancements, and accountability measures that strengthen constitutional policing and public trust.

Civilian oversight is not static. It is an evolving process that requires vigilance, independence, and collaboration. Through continued review, reform, and engagement, the CPOB and OIPA remain committed to strengthening accountability, supporting professional policing, and ensuring that Akron’s oversight system reflects both the letter and the spirit of the City Charter.