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## Police response to calls for assistance: a major community problem

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POLICE RESPONSE TO CALLS FOR ASSISTANCE -- A MAJOR COMMUNITY PROBLEM

*on the west side,*

Some months ago, a drunken man broke into the home of his estranged wife, beat her, threatened to kill her and drove her into the basement of the house. The woman called from a basement phone for police assistance. Above, her former husband wrecked the house, attempted to set it on fire and roamed the first floor screaming and cursing for over an hour. Two hours after her call, a police patrol car appeared on the scene, *to find the husband gone and the house in shambles.*

*Insert (over) —>*

In 1970, over 1,000,000 calls for service were received by the Central Police Dispatch Center. Little is known about the response to these calls. Rumor and conjecture suggest that response can take as long as five hours in some cases. More reliable, yet still unsatisfactory, information suggests that response to some calls may take as long as three hours with the average response coming approximately 30 minutes to an hour after the call.

Some would agree that this response is too slow only in certain situations. A call about a robbery in progress or a man on the rampage with a dangerous weapon demands immediate response; a call to report a burglary of two days ago does not. Cars should be dispatched without hesitation to the site of a traffic accident which resulted in serious injury; attention to accidents involving only property damage may be less immediate.

According to a report prepared by Inspector Limber of the Police Division, less than 20% of all calls received are related to crime and only a portion of those require immediate response, -- to prevent injury, ~~or~~ death, or a crime in process.

But the people of this City have made it clear that they want more immediate response to all calls for assistance, and they want this without substantial increases in the taxes they pay and the revenues the City receives.

This dilemma can be resolved in two ways. We can reduce the number of calls for which the patrolmen are responsible and we can increase the number and efficiency of patrolmen responding to those calls.

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More recently, a teacher's aide in a near east side school was called by a neighbor that someone was ~~breaking~~ breaking into her home. Her neighbor called the police, the school called the police, the teacher's aide left school to go home. The police did not respond to the calls at all.

## Reducing the Calls for Which Police Should be Responsible

In <sup>this effort</sup> ~~the first case~~, it should not be our intent to discourage people from calling the police. Rather, it should be our intent to remove from patrolmen the burden and responsibility of responding to calls which need no response or which could be the responsibility of others. For example, police patrol cars now make periodic trips from the Red Cross blood bank to hospitals in the area with an immediate need for blood. This delivery service is surely an important one, but it need not be a patrolman's responsibility -- his talents are better used on patrol. The Red Cross should provide this service for itself.

Another example may be found in those calls reporting a sudden illness or personal injury where emergency ambulance service is needed. At present, patrol cars respond to these calls in the great majority of cases at an estimated cost of some \$3 million a year. Yet, this service does not require a patrolman. <sup>It has been</sup> ~~Tom Monahan~~ has proposed that responsibility for sudden illness or personal injury calls be transferred to the Fire Department and that the firemen establish 11 ambulance stations -- in present fire stations, in the district police station or at area hospitals. Each of these stations will have a two-man team and an ambulance and will respond to calls from the Central Police Dispatch Center for emergency service. The 11 fire ambulances and police back-up ambulances stationed throughout the city, coupled with the four large rescue squads will give the same excellent service the police now provide. The police ambulances will not be abandoned, but rather limited to two such vehicles in each of the six police districts. These will be used to back up the fire ambulance fleet.

This transfer will not only release patrolman from the time-consuming job of emergency ambulance service, but permit the use of police sedans rather than station wagons equipped for ambulance service at a savings of approximately \$1,000 per vehicle in the purchase price of patrol cars.

As a final illustration, though other examples exist, consider the response of traffic patrolmen to traffic accidents where only property damage occurs and the vehicle involved can be driven -- the so-called "fender-benders". Instead of assigning a patrolman to the scene, the drivers should remove their vehicles from traffic lanes and report by phone to the police. A civilian clerk can record their separate stories and keep on file a report for eventual submission to the insurance companies, if requested. This change would

save many man-hours of time for patrolman as it now takes as long as two hours for a two-man patrol car to complete one traffic accident investigation.

### Increasing the Number and Efficiency of Patrolmen on Patrol

It is clear that removing responsibility for some calls from patrolmen will release these men for important patrol duties. But, in addition to these changes, more men must be put on patrol, available to answer calls for assistance. This can be done -- without increasing police personnel -- by:

1. Transferring men from present clerical and secretarial duties to the patrol duty they were trained to assume;
2. Assuring that those police on patrol spend more of their time actually on patrol;
3. Reassignments which better match patrol personnel to the areas and times of crime concentration.

In 1968, then Deputy Inspector Gerity produced a report for the Administration recommending that 204 patrolmen be reassigned from basically clerical positions in various divisions of the police department to patrol duty. This sound recommendation by a police supervisory officer was not implemented by the Police Chief at that time nor later when Gerity, himself, was Chief, and this misallocation prevails today. Yet this recommended reassignment could have more than compensated for the recent cutback of 193 patrolmen at no cost to the City. More patrolmen must be on patrol, fewer patrolmen assigned to clerical and support roles.

Second, patrolmen assigned to patrol duty must spend more time on patrol. Simple changes in procedure can accomplish much in this objective. Processing of patrolmen reports, for instance, should not take hours out of his work week. (Recommendations for beneficial changes have been available for months. These should be implemented immediately!) Patrolmen should not wait at the site of a stolen or damaged vehicle for a ~~to~~ truck to arrive -- sometimes for as much as four hours. The location should be reported, flares set, if necessary, to assure traffic safety and the patrolman should return to patrol. Reports of burglaries, robberies and other crimes which

have already been committed should be taken on the telephone by the complaint clerks at Central Headquarters and referred from there to the Detective Division. This basically clerical task need not be performed by patrolmen. Basic supervision of patrolmen while on duty must be improved, to assure that patrolmen are not spending inordinate amounts of time in coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and other establishments around the City. Patrolmen on duty have been observed in bars in the flats and in the residence of a friend watching a football game. These instances have been reported to Chief Coffey, in a written memorandum by a summer intern in the Safety Department. Not only does this practice reduce the number of hours spent on patrol, but it does great injury to the image of the police.

Finally, the way in which overtime is accumulated and the manner in which it is compensated must be changed. In November of 1970, police had recorded over 900,000 hours of accumulated overtime -- as much as a million hours may be accumulated by now. (Chief Coffey resigned with \$38,000 of accumulated overtime pay -- close to two years of overtime!) Less than half of this overtime has been accumulated by patrolmen assigned to District Stations for patrol duty -- the majority by supervisory and clerical personnel.

Police Division personnel can get overtime in two ways -- by working beyond the required hours of a single tour and by accomplishing certain arrests or performing certain special duties (parades, funerals, special events). Example: overtime bonuses for arrests or special functions:

Arrest for homicide or other felonies	8 hours
Arrest for prostitution	2 hours
Traffic arrest (to & from home)	15 minutes
Parade detail	8 hours
Funeral detail	4 hours

These rules were rescinded by O'Connor, but have been reinstated under Acting Safety Director Carney. Overtime should be given only to individuals working hours beyond their required tour, it should be documented by time clock or administrative approval, and it should be paid, in cash, at least quarterly -- preferably along with the regular check. Accumulation of overtime or compensatory time off should not be permitted beyond some reasonable amount. Incentives for arrests should not be permitted beyond some reasonable amount. Incentives for arrests should not be in the form of overtime pay.

As a third change to make our patrol force more efficient, assignments should be related to the times and places where patrolmen are most needed. Calls for assistance are more likely to come from certain areas than others and more likely to occur at some hours of the day or days of the week than others. But the assignment of patrol cars and men does not now admit this characteristic. For example, in 1970, six patrol zones reported less than 300 Type I crimes during the whole year -- less than one a day. At the same time, 10 zones reported over 1,095 major crimes during the year, or over 3 a day. In both cases, the patrol cars and men assigned to the zone were the same. Monday through Thursday, most calls occur between 6:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. Friday and Saturday calls are concentrated in the hours from 9:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. Sunday calls are most prevalent during the middle of the day. Thus, some patrolmen receive few calls while others receive more than they can handle. A study now underway (with federal LEAA funds) should be completed without delay and the recommendations implemented.