



SUNRISE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Daniel J. Ransone
Chief of Police

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Internal Affairs Complaint Report Narrative

I. INTRODUCTION:

Subject Employee: Officer [REDACTED]

Complainant: Officer [REDACTED]

Witnesses: Officer [REDACTED], Officer [REDACTED], Officer [REDACTED]

Narrative:

At the end of 2023, Ofc. [REDACTED] was the subject officer in an Internal Affairs Investigation, case #23-07-01. During that investigation, Ofc. [REDACTED] sent me an email containing two attachments (photos of text messages), requesting they be added to her case. Since the photos had no relationship to her then case, a separate Internal Affairs Investigation was opened.

Both attachments contained a text message exchange between at least two people and the pictures appeared to have been altered. Both photos contained potentially inflammatory comments. Ofc. [REDACTED] said the text messages were written by fellow officers.

The Investigative Narrative section outlines the details of my investigation into this matter and my conclusion with respect to any policy violations will be found in the Investigative Findings and Disposition section.



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II. INVESTIGATIVE NARRATIVE:

During the months of **August 2023-January 2024**, Ofc. [REDACTED] was the subject officer in an Internal Affairs Investigation, case# 23-07-01. Ofc. [REDACTED] was the complainant.

On **November 8, 2023**, Ofc. [REDACTED] sent an email to my work email account with two attachments. They were both pictures, screenshots of text message threads between at least two people. They appeared to be from two separate conversations. All but one of the names had been blacked out. Officer [REDACTED] requested they be added to her current case.

On the same date, I responded to Ofc. [REDACTED] email and declined the request to add the text messages to her case, since they were unrelated.

However, I did complete a Preliminary Complaint Form and attached the photos which was then sent to the Chief of Police via Chain of Command.

On **November 8, 2023**, Chief Ransone authorized an investigation into the matter.

On **February 20, 2024**, I took a taped sworn statement from Ofc. [REDACTED]. She stated she sent me screenshots of text messages that had been sent to her by another officer. She confirmed she was not on the text message string. Ofc. [REDACTED] said she got the pictures from Ofc. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and had them for an undisclosed amount of time before she sent them to me.

Ofc. [REDACTED] stated Ofc. [REDACTED] told her this was a text thread that he was on with Officers [REDACTED], [REDACTED] (former employee), and [REDACTED]. Ofc. [REDACTED] stated she spoke with [REDACTED] and he also confirmed the same officers were on the text string.

I then asked why she (Ofc. [REDACTED]) wanted these pictures added to her case file and she stated, "Because Ofc. [REDACTED] is referencing having [REDACTED] to go and have his [REDACTED] lie and say she identifies as a black male because she was not promoted... on the promotion".

To specify, the controversial line in picture two is, "Tell her to go to HR and identify as a black male".

Ofc. [REDACTED] was told, by Ofc. [REDACTED] it was Ofc. [REDACTED] who authored the remark. She felt telling other officers to do this was a reflection on his character.

We then moved onto picture one and I asked her to specify what was offensive and she replied, "...That [REDACTED] is tellin' lies on me---in his words---banging Officer uh, [REDACTED]

To specify, the controversial line in picture one is, "...Unfortunately he thinks he's protected cuz he's banging [REDACTED] and has the commissioners on his side".

I then asked Ofc. [REDACTED] who is "he" in the text and she stated "[REDACTED]".

I then asked her if she ever brought these text messages to a supervisor and she replied, "Again I don't seek people out and do evil stuff to them. That's not what I do. If I got somethin' to say I'm gonna bring it to you, say what I gotta say. But he sought me out and I'm supposed to defend myself. And so...this is me defending myself to show that he's a liar and he's of bad character".

Ofc. [REDACTED] could not confirm whether Ofc. [REDACTED] confronted the other officers on the text thread or reported it to a supervisor.

On February 27, 2024, I took a sworn taped statement from Ofc. [REDACTED]. Also present was FOP REP Paul Maniates. Officer [REDACTED] first admitted he gave Ofc. [REDACTED] the text messages. He also stated it was him, Ofc. [REDACTED], and Ofc. [REDACTED] on the text string. He stated the pictures looked to be in the same condition he had given them to Ofc. [REDACTED]

I then asked Ofc. [REDACTED] if he had altered the photos in any way and he stated, "Well, what I did was, uh, just black out the, uh, actual names, at least attempted to, 'cause I can see one of them. One of them is, uh, noticeable, but I did attempt to black it out so that way, you know, she didn't have...you know, the names of everyone in there." Ofc. [REDACTED] never altered the text (words) itself, he just blacked out who wrote it.

Ofc. [REDACTED] could not remember the exact date but thought picture two was from December 2022 because of who was being promoted. Picture one was from messages a few months later since they were talking about Sgt. [REDACTED] who was in the unit at the time.

I then asked Ofc. [REDACTED] why he sent these screenshots to Ofc. [REDACTED] and he replied, "Well for number two (picture)...that one had bothered me because well I had talked with [REDACTED] about it because uh you know there's always like I made a statement in my complaint back in November...about all the racial derogatory comments always being made since I started here".

Officer [REDACTED] continued with, "...One of the major ones...they were always talking about whenever a black person got promoted...the Department wants to be woke... [REDACTED] said in there...just have [REDACTED] go to HR and identify as a black male."

Ofc. [REDACTED] stated he had a relationship with Ofc. [REDACTED] so he showed it to her, like "hey look at this nonsense". He also stated he was offended by what Ofc. [REDACTED] said in the text since he would make comments that black officers got promoted based off of race exclusively.

I then asked if he ever confronted Ofc. [REDACTED] or anyone else about the offensive text messages and he stated no, "You know, you start to get ostra-sized, which actually started happening to me, but that's another story". Ofc. [REDACTED] said he did not speak to his immediate supervisor about the comment but did tell Sgt. [REDACTED], who was not in the unit at the time.

We then moved onto picture one and Ofc. [REDACTED] could not recall why he sent that screen shot initially. I then showed him Ofc. [REDACTED] name in the conversation and he recalled why. He stated, "I thought that was uh pretty disrespectful to make an allegation about a woman who's married...I have never seen her present herself as anything other than a stand-up woman."

When asked if he still had these messages in his phone, Ofc. [REDACTED] stated he did not. Ofc. [REDACTED] stated he considered the officers in the text thread as friends at the time.

On March 6, 2024, I took a taped sworn statement from Ofc. [REDACTED]. He stated he went into SIS in June 2023 and does not recall the messages I showed to him. He believed he was given Ofc. [REDACTED] phone when he left the unit and that is why his name showed up in the pictures. He was never apart of the text string and has no independent recollection of it.

On March 8, 2024, I took a sworn taped statement from Ofc. [REDACTED]. I showed him both pictures and asked if he recognized the text thread at which time he did. He recalled himself, Ofc. [REDACTED] Ofc. [REDACTED] and possibly Ofc. [REDACTED] (formerly employed) being in the text thread.

Ofc. [REDACTED] thought the texts were similar to how he remembered and they had not been altered, other than the names being blacked out. He thought picture two was from the end of 2022 and picture one was from a few months later. Ofc. [REDACTED] said they are talking about Sgt. [REDACTED] in picture one.

Ofc. [REDACTED] stated that he believed [REDACTED] was Ofc. [REDACTED]. When asked about picture one and "doing dirt" I asked him what that meant and he replied, "Maybe doing something in the gray area for police work which is commonly done in SIS". I asked for clarification, he stated they do not commit crimes or violate policy, it would be more specific to having a beer "on duty" while working an undercover operation and needing to blend in with their surroundings. Ofc. [REDACTED] was not alarmed or concerned when he saw that in the text.

He was then asked to discuss the remaining portion of the text specific to “banging [REDACTED]” and “commissioners on his side”. I asked him why Ofc. [REDACTED] would say that and he responded, “Well two reasons, one is that I mean we heard endless rumors that he (Sgt. [REDACTED]) was having intercourse with [REDACTED] amongst others from the department and two he would openly brag about having side pieces and connections with the commission and stuff-stuff like that”.

Ofc. [REDACTED] clarified that he heard from Sgt. [REDACTED] own mouth he was having an intimate relationship with Ofc. [REDACTED] so he did not think Ofc. [REDACTED] was gossiping or spreading rumors since it was common knowledge within the unit they had an intimate relationship. He stated this was the same for the reference to the commissioners.

We then moved onto picture two, Ofc. [REDACTED] confirmed it was actually him and not Ofc. [REDACTED]. He confirmed that [REDACTED] was not in the text string and he was the one that said “[REDACTED] got skipped. Welcome to Sunrise!”. I then asked what he thought about Ofc. [REDACTED] response of her going to HR and identifying as a black male and he stated, “Within the unit within our small group we would commonly just make small jokes like that...including [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who both happen to be black males”.

Ofc. [REDACTED] did not think Ofc. [REDACTED] was trying to be offensive or inflammatory. According to him, it was common for the unit to touch on or joke about racially sensitive topics and the black males in the unit also made jokes related to race or skin color. Ofc. [REDACTED] said that neither Ofc. [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] (black males) ever expressed any discomfort to the text.

I then asked if he knew Ofc. [REDACTED] was sharing these text messages with Ofc. [REDACTED] and he stated, no and he assumed the conversations were being kept amongst only the people on the text thread.

At the conclusion of the statement, Ofc. [REDACTED] stated, “During the tenure of that Chief (Rosa)...it was not a secret that the department was trying to diversify, so stuff like this would be commonly discussed. So far as the Chief called [REDACTED] who didn’t get promoted, and told her from his own mouth that he regretted not promoting her and that there was ulterior motives at play. So, it wasn’t anything to be inflammatory ([REDACTED] statement). It was I mean at this point stating facts almost that the department is trying to diversify and they’re not trying to hide it”.

Ofc. [REDACTED] thought the statement by Ofc. [REDACTED] was just highlighting a true fact or topic that they had all discussed prior.

On March 8, 2024, I took a taped sworn statement from Ofc. [REDACTED]. I asked if he remembered being on this text thread and he stated “It looked familiar”. He said it was “possible” those were his texts with the letter [REDACTED] next to them. Ofc. [REDACTED] thought they could be him since he has a sarcastic nature but did not have an independent recollection.

Ofc. [REDACTED] then talked about picture one and how they were “venting” about their old Sergeant ([REDACTED]). He thought the messages were from March-April 2023. I then asked

what he meant in the last message on picture one, he responded, "That means in an undercover capacity you might have to sit down at a bar...they maybe selling cocaine. If you're gonna sit at the bar, you're not sitting in the bar and ordering a water or Diet Coke because you will stick out like a sore thumb". Ofc. [REDACTED] stated he was not referencing him violating policy or state statute.

I then moved onto the second portion of that text and ask Ofc. [REDACTED] about "banging [REDACTED] and "having the commissioners on his side". He responded, "It was just to speak fact. Something that our sergeant, [REDACTED] used to tell us regularly...".

I asked for clarification and Ofc. [REDACTED] confirmed, Sgt. [REDACTED] told him and others, he was having an intimate relationship with Ofc. [REDACTED] and had influence with one of the commissioners.

"I'm going off what he (Sgt. [REDACTED] said. He would show us receipts of several hundred-dollar dinners and hotel stays that he would take them and say, Oh look, I took my side piece over here..."

Ofc. [REDACTED] talked about Sgt. [REDACTED] buying Ofc. [REDACTED] expensive perfume from Sephora on her birthday as well.

I clarified who would have been in the chat and Ofc. [REDACTED] stated it would have been the "in house" guys but no supervisors. That would have been Officers [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] Ofc. [REDACTED] is no longer with the agency and Ofc. [REDACTED] is out of work for an extended period of time due to significant injury.

Ofc. [REDACTED] confirmed that Officers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were good friends with Sgt. [REDACTED] I asked if they ever confronted him for spreading rumors or gossiping about him (Sgt. [REDACTED] and he stated, "No, matter of fact, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] actually met with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and told him he was being sloppy as hell and to cut it out". Ofc. [REDACTED] stated he was never confronted by Sgt. [REDACTED] about the comment either.

We then moved to picture two and I asked Ofc. [REDACTED] why he would suggest for an employee to identify as a black male with HR and he replied, "Um, if it was in fact me, which I'll say like I said before, very sarcastic text, so yea. Um, my intent, if that was in fact me, was just going along with what we all knew to be the direction of the agency at that point...regularly spoken...by previous command that they're trying diversify. And they were skipping certain people because of what they looked like or their skin color and going with certain people of their skin color".

Ofc. [REDACTED] stated such specifics were widely discussed in the unit from the Sergeant down.

I then asked if he was trying to be offensive to the black males in the chat he stated "not at all". Ofc. [REDACTED] said there was never a time that Ofc. [REDACTED] Ofc. [REDACTED] or a supervisor came him to and told him his comments were offensive. He said they were all friends and they all typically had banter like what was seen in the pictures.

Ofc. [REDACTED] then showed me a text message string between himself and Ofc. [REDACTED] from January 7, 2023, which was only a few weeks after Ofc. [REDACTED] text the comment about identifying as a black male and going to HR. The photo will be attached, but the conversation highlights Ofc. [REDACTED] initiating racially charged comments.

I then asked if he knew Ofc. [REDACTED] was sharing these text messages with Ofc. [REDACTED] and he said no. I asked him why do you think Ofc. [REDACTED] did that and he responded, "Clearly to retaliate". Specifically, because Ofc. [REDACTED] was a witness in a separate IA case against their friend Sgt. [REDACTED]

Ofc. [REDACTED] also stated although it was possible and probable he was the one who sent the text, he was highly suspicious since there had been alterations already made to the pictures and conveniently cut off, not showing any responses to his comment. Additionally, he was also suspicious if it was him at all, since all the texts had presumably first name letters next to their texts but his letter represented his last name. Ironically enough, "[REDACTED]" would have been for [REDACTED] [REDACTED]



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III. INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS and DISPOSITION:

If Ofc. [REDACTED] allegations are true, Ofc. [REDACTED] would have violated the following policies:

19.6.3.6. Members shall not commit an act that, brings discredit upon the Department or otherwise impairs the operational efficiency of the Department or an act that prohibits or impairs the ability of Department personnel to perform their assigned duties.

19.6.3.20. Members will not criticize the Department or a fellow member when the criticism is reckless, obscene, unlawful, not based on fact, or tends to impair the efficiency or effectiveness of the organization, or the ability of supervisors to maintain discipline.

IV: CONCLUSION

On 11/8/23, Ofc. [REDACTED] sent this investigator an email containing two screenshots, of text messages between Officers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. It was two photos from separate days and conversations. Ofc. [REDACTED] confirmed in her statement Ofc. [REDACTED] had sent her the pictures sometime prior to her sending them to me, and that she was not personally in the text thread.

Both photos had been altered to conceal the identity of the person texting. However, one name was left visible and it read, "[REDACTED] Work". Next to each message is a letter, representing each officer's first name, except for Ofc. [REDACTED]. His messages were marked with a "[REDACTED]", presumably for his last name. Ofc. [REDACTED] admitted to altering the photos and said, "What I did was just black out the actual names, at least attempted to 'cause I can see one of them".

During their statements, all three officers had some recollection of the text conversation, but commented it had been some time since it had occurred. The only date left visible was from picture two, which showed “Dec 5 at 10:18 AM”. The above officers thought it was 12/5/22 since the message talked about promotions that occurred in December 2022. The second photo reflected a conversation from early 2023 since the text messages discussed their immediate supervisor at the time (SIS), Sgt. [REDACTED]. He was in the unit from January-April 2023.

At the completion of the interviews, it was determined Ofc. [REDACTED] was not in the text thread, even though his name is listed. The phone had belonged to Ofc. [REDACTED] prior to Ofc. [REDACTED] and the screenshots were taken *after* Ofc. [REDACTED] updated his phone to reflect the change.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] (former employee) and Ofc. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] may have also been on the text thread, but Ofc. [REDACTED] had no recollection of the text messages and did not wish to provide a statement. Ofc. [REDACTED] was unable to be reached due to his medical status.

Ofc. [REDACTED] raised concerns in whether the text (actual messages) or letter identifiers next to the messages, had been altered. He was forthcoming, stating the comments made in the messages were definitely typical of his personality, but questioned why the letters represented first names for everyone else, except him. In fact, if the pattern remained the same, “[REDACTED]” would have actually represented [REDACTED] which is Ofc. [REDACTED] first name, not Ofc. [REDACTED]. He also expressed concerns about potential content missing before and after the contentious texts.

For reference, Officers [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were members of the Sunrise Police Department’s Strategic Investigations Section (SIS) at the time these messages occurred. Officers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were also in the unit around this time. Their immediate supervisor was Sgt. [REDACTED], from January-April 2023. This was/is a full-time unit.

In Summary:

Concerning the below policy, I find the following:

19.6.3.20. Members will not criticize the Department or a fellow member when the criticism is reckless, obscene, unlawful, not based on fact, or tends to impair the efficiency or effectiveness of the organization, or the ability of supervisors to maintain discipline.

When trying to decipher the outcome of this case, there were many factors to consider before reaching a conclusion. This would be true for both contentious statements in the text strings. Intent and purpose are important components in my decision.

First let us discuss the statement in picture one:

“Unfortunately he thinks he’s protected cuz he’s banging [REDACTED] and has the commissioners on his side”.

The officers are discussing their current supervisor, Sgt. [REDACTED], at the time these messages were written. The tone of the message is clearly heated and more than one person is frustrated with Sgt. [REDACTED] behavior. The text suggested Sgt. [REDACTED] does as he likes because he is “protected” and receives this benefit because of the specific relationships mentioned.

Although the messages are cropped, there is no indication of anyone disputing Ofc. [REDACTED] comment which would only support his statement that the topic was commonplace. It would have benefitted the complainant to provide any opposing comments, if any were to exist. Also, Ofc. [REDACTED] said he was never confronted about his statement by anyone.

In Ofc. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] statements, they were adamant they were told the quoted statement by Sgt. [REDACTED] himself. Their statements are corroborated in an unrelated investigation (23-06-01), where numerous officers confirmed they were told or heard similar facts from Sgt. [REDACTED]

Additionally, it appears clear, the purpose of the statement was not to “gossip” or spread wrong information, but to comment on their direct correlation with Sgt. [REDACTED] behavior. Ofc. [REDACTED] chose to “vent” by texting his frustrations to fellow officers who shared the same frustrations.

Ofc. [REDACTED] statement was not *reckless, obscene, unlawful, or not based on fact*, since according to at least two of the officers, this was factual information being shared to them by at least one participating party. It could be argued that Sgt. [REDACTED] did not have such relationships with the listed parties and he was simply grandstanding amongst his peers. But that fact is irrelevant, since it was he (Sgt. [REDACTED] who conveyed the message with the intent for it to be believed. As their supervisor, it would be natural for the officers to receive the information as the truth. Ofc. [REDACTED] stated “...he spoke about it pretty regularly and showed evidence...”.

Based on the totality of the circumstances, this investigator finds the listed policy violation:

NOT SUSTAINED

Concerning the below policy, I find the following:

19.6.3.6. Members shall not commit an act that, brings discredit upon the Department or otherwise impairs the operational efficiency of the Department or an act that prohibits or impairs the ability of Department personnel to perform their assigned duties.

Like previously stated, there was a lot of consideration when deciding the outcome of this alleged policy violation and the appropriateness of this statement. Again, intent and purpose are important when making a final decision. I believe there must be great care taken when we attempt to censor officers and regulate their free speech, especially when it comes to officers' opinions.

This policy is being applied to picture two, specifically:

“Tell her to go to HR and identify as a black male”

From the interviews, all parties agreed Ofc. [REDACTED] is telling the group text who received the recent promotions. His [REDACTED], was “skipped” for the three officers listed, in the recent promotion. Ofc. [REDACTED] responded with the above quoted statement.

As stated above, the messages are cropped, and there is no indication of anyone countering or disputing Ofc. [REDACTED] comment. Again, it would have benefitted the complainant to provide any such statements, had they existed. Another noticeable factor in this particular picture, it was cropped only to capture a portion of the conversation. The texts after Ofc. [REDACTED] statement were intentionally blacked out since there was room left in the screenshot for more content.

Based off of his statement, Ofc. [REDACTED] made the comment to emphasis information he had been told previously. Specifically, the Agency was diversifying their ranks, divisions, and the Department as a whole. Ofc. [REDACTED] and Ofc. [REDACTED] claimed to have been told this as a fact, by members of the prior command staff. I would add that our Department has done such in the recent years to proudly reflect the community it serves.

Even with that said, one must circle back to Ofc. [REDACTED] statement and examine the appropriateness of such a comment. The comment was made to be humorous and not inflammatory. Ofc. [REDACTED] text string included a small group of people who he considered friends. He was gym partners with Ofc. [REDACTED] at the time these messages were created. It does not seem plausible Ofc. [REDACTED] was trying to be argumentative or inflammatory with his friends.

Ofc. [REDACTED] and Ofc. [REDACTED] stated the SIS Unit would often touch on racially sensitive topics (in a joking manner) to include Ofc. [REDACTED]. I have included a screenshot between Ofc. [REDACTED] and Ofc. [REDACTED] from 1/7/23, just a few weeks after the above quoted statement. In the text, Ofc. [REDACTED] stated he used “cool aid” to season a meat smoker.

Although there is not a true expectation of privacy in this text chat, there is a reasonable expectation the conversation would remain amongst them only, since there is level of trust and comradery inherent in this type of unit (SIS). I recognize the comment could be considered offensive by some and Ofc. [REDACTED] should consider that in the future, but in this context and with this audience, I do not believe his intent was to be malicious.

Additionally, the photo had been altered, which Ofc. [REDACTED] admitted to. I do find it somewhat concerning Ofc. [REDACTED] did not have a recollection of the message and was unable to say with certainty that he wrote it. Furthermore, the other officers on the text thread had their first name initial next to their texts, except for Ofc. [REDACTED]. He had the letter “[REDACTED]”, which presumably was for his last name, but ironically is the same initial as Ofc. [REDACTED] first name.

Lastly, a concern I had with this case as a whole was the delayed reporting of these text messages and the convenient timing of when they were brought forward. These messages were brought forward during an unrelated case, that Ofc. [REDACTED] was the complainant and Ofc. [REDACTED] was the subject officer.

There is no evidence an act was committed that discredited the Department, nor impaired the operational efficiency of the Department. Same applies to the latter part of the policy.

Based on the totality of the circumstances, this investigator finds the listed policy violation:

NOT SUSTAINED

Sgt. Jessica Stewart, Internal Affairs

Date

Dana Swisher, Deputy Chief

Date

Daniel J. Ransone, Chief of Police

Date

J Stewart
Sgt. Jessica Stewart, Internal Affairs

4/10/24
Date

D Swisher
Dana Swisher, Deputy Chief

4/15/24
Date

D J Ransone
Daniel J. Ransone, Chief of Police

4/19/24.
Date