

Richland County Sheriff's Department

2020 Professional Standards Report on Complaints, Defensive Actions, Traffic Collisions, and Assaults on Richland County Deputies

Professional Standards Unit



Leon Lott
Sheriff

Updated: July 2021

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MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

MISSION STATEMENT

It is our mission, as trusted public servants, to prevent crime and the fear of crime by providing excellence in law enforcement services, accountability, and connections with our communities.

CORE VALUES

Our mission is supported by our core values: “A passion for service, integrity, accountability, and professionalism”

2020 PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS REPORT AT A GLANCE

Richland County Demographic Profile: Our Community

- 415,759
 - White: 45.4%
 - Black: 48.7%
 - Asian: 3.0%
 - American Indian and Alaska Native: 0.4%
 - Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander: 0.1%
 - Two or more races: 2.4%
 - Hispanic: 5.3%
 - Under 18 yoa: 21.4%
 - 65 yoa and over: 13.2%
 - Female: 51.8%

U.S. Census Bureau. (2019, July 1). *State & County QuickFacts: Richland County, South Carolina*.

Retrieved July 1, 2021 from

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/richlandcountysouthcarolina,US/RHI325219#RHI325219>.

Richland County Sheriff's Department Demographic Profile: Our Employees

As of July 9, 2021, the Richland County Sheriff's Department employed 624 sworn deputies. Of these deputies, 457 are male and 167 are female. In addition, the Richland County Sheriff's Department employs 137 civilian employees. Of these civilians, 46 are male and 91 are female.

Richland County Sheriff's Department Statistics: Our Workload

Calls for service:

2019 calls for service: 156,895

2020 calls for service: 154,115

1.77% decrease in calls for service from 2019 to 2020

INTRODUCTION

All of us have witnessed the detrimental effects controversial police actions have had on relationships between law enforcement agencies and various communities throughout the country. We understand that every interaction a Richland County Sheriff's Department Deputy has with a citizen, whether through an enforcement action or community engagement, is an opportunity to build trust and enhance the reputation of the sheriff's department and increase citizen satisfaction with the services we provide.

The citizens of Richland County expect and deserve the utmost professionalism from Richland County Sheriff's Department. To ensure Department employees are demonstrating exemplary conduct in interactions with the community as well as their coworkers, the Department is committed to a professional standard process that handles complaints of officer conduct and investigates use of force incidents in a fair, consistent and transparent manner.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS UNIT

We are proud to be part of an organization that places a high value on integrity and community trust. The Professional Standards Unit is charged with ensuring the level of trust and confidence the community has in its sheriff's department is safeguarded and that our agency remains deserving of that trust. We also ensure the rights of our employees are protected and all persons involved in an inquiry are treated with dignity and respect.

RCSD realizes that some misconduct allegations can generate significant community concern. Professional Standards Investigators are assigned to investigate such allegations thoroughly so that commanders overseeing case reviews can make informed, unbiased decisions regarding complaint dispositions. Professional Standards staff assumes no active role in determining the final adjudication of any alleged violation. The unit also represents the department and the Sheriff when a case disposition is appealed to one of the community oversight boards.

The men and women who are assigned to the Professional Standards Unit take their responsibilities seriously and are dedicated to the unit's mission. The sergeants that comprise the unit's investigators have superior investigative skills; have the ability to communicate effectively with the public, and their commitment to both the department and the community we serve.

The Professional Standards staff is always willing to assist the public in addressing their concerns.

Please feel free to contact any unit member with any questions or concerns you may have. To learn more please visit www.rcsd.net.

The Professional Standards Staff:

Deputy Chief Roxana Meetze

Captain Stephen Gaither

1st Sergeant Eleanor "Squeak" Savage

Investigator Larry Harrison



FUNCTIONS OF THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS UNIT

The Professional Standards Unit performs several critical functions to help the RCSD reach its goals:

➤ **Protection of the Public:**

The public has the right to expect efficient, fair, and impartial law enforcement; therefore, any allegation of misconduct by department personnel must be investigated and properly addressed to ensure the maintenance of these qualities.

➤ **Protection of the Employee:**

Employees must be protected against false allegations of misconduct. Although being the subject of an investigation may be unpleasant or uncomfortable, the best protection for an employee is a complete and thorough investigation conducted in a timely manner that clearly and unequivocally supports the employee's honesty and integrity if that is indeed the case.

➤ **Protection of the Department:**

The department often is evaluated and judged by the actions of its individual members. It is imperative that the entire organization not be subjected to public censure because of the misconduct of one member. When the public is confident that the department honestly and fairly investigates and addresses all allegations against its members, it is less likely that citizens will raise a cry of indignation over alleged incidents of misconduct.

➤ **Removal of Unfit Personnel:**

Personnel who engage in serious acts of misconduct or who have demonstrated that they are unfit to handle law enforcement responsibilities must be removed from the department for the protection of the public, fellow employees, and the department.

➤ **Correction of Procedural Problems:**

The department constantly seeks to improve its efficiency and the quality of its personnel. Occasionally, investigations by Professional Standards disclose faulty procedures that otherwise may have gone unnoticed.

COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT

Sheriff's Department-community partnerships are critical for improving the quality of life in our community by preventing and addressing crime. These partnerships rely on community's trust, which is why the RCSD welcomes community oversight and strives to be transparent in its disciplinary process. RCSD works with two different organizations that provide oversight of issues brought to the Professional Standards Unit: the Command Disciplinary Review Committee, and the Citizens Advisory Council.

Citizens Advisory Council

The Richland County Sheriff's Department community-based council, the Citizens Advisory Council, was formed in an effort to increase the department's professional competence and accountability to the citizens of Richland County. Members review and comment on citizen complaints, disciplinary actions taken against deputies and/or employees, and internal policies and procedures, and then provide the Sheriff with an objective viewpoint.

The Citizens' Advisory Council convenes approximately four (4) times a year or as requested by the Sheriff or his designee.

➤ **Duties of the council:**

1. Review citizens' complaints against deputies and/or employees of the Sheriff's Department.
2. Review disciplinary actions against deputies and/or employees of the Sheriff's Department.
3. Review internal policies and procedures of the Sheriff's Department. The Citizens' Advisory Council will then examine each case to determine if they feel the department's actions are justified or unjustified. If the Citizens' Advisory Council determines the department's actions are unjustified, then Professional Standards will be requested to revisit the case.

The Citizens' Advisory Council is comprised of a diverse cross-section of Richland County residents, to include; ministers, retired military veterans, and community leaders. Members are basis for appointed by the Sheriff and serve at his discretion. Service on the council is on a voluntary basis for an indeterminate period of time.

FILING A COMPLAINT

Complaints against employees of the Richland County Sheriff's Department can be submitted in a variety of ways:

- **Online:** Visit RCSD's website at www.rcsd.net, and select "Officer Complaints" to complete the "Employee Complaints" form.
- **In person:** Request to speak to the employee's supervisor at any time, or file your written complaint at the Richland County Sheriff's Department headquarters located at 5623 Two Notch Road, Columbia, South Carolina. You can also visit any region office and ask to speak to a supervisor.
- **Email:** RMEETZE@RCSD.NET
- **Phone:** Call the Professional Standards Unit at (803) 576-3000 or (803) 576-3090.

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATIONS

The Richland County Sheriff's Department has a responsibility to prevent unethical and improper conduct among our employees, and to give them the very best preparation to make sound, appropriate, and responsible decisions.

RCSD has Standard Operating Policy and Procedures that establish policies for topics ranging from Use of Force to Towing Vehicles; however, to make internal discipline matters clearer, RCSD employees also have Rules of Conduct that must be followed. These rules cover the broader categories of behavior and performance expectations to which we hold all employees accountable. Additionally, the RCSD utilizes the Axon in-car and body worn camera systems to capture the activities of our personnel when interacting with the public in an official capacity.

We recognize that despite our best efforts, there will be times when citizens, fellow employees or supervisors perceive an employee's behavior to be inappropriate. When this occurs, staff uses a well-established process for receiving, investigating, and adjudicating complaints. Complaints regarding employee conduct are classified as either internal or external

The RCSD disciplinary process mandates the adjudication of complaint allegations by a supervisory chain of command. The Professional Standards Unit personnel serve to advise the chain of command on the investigation and disciplinary process, but do not participate in determination of the final disposition. There are four outcomes to which a complaint allegation can be adjudicated based on evidence of the alleged behavior and an evaluation of the appropriateness of the employee's behavior: sustained, not sustained, exonerated, and unfounded.

If an allegation is sustained by the Command Disciplinary Review Committee, the Committee will discuss and impose a corrective action consistent with the department's disciplinary philosophy. The unit reviews every internal investigation for consistency with the disciplinary policy and philosophy, and works with the committee to resolve any inconsistencies.

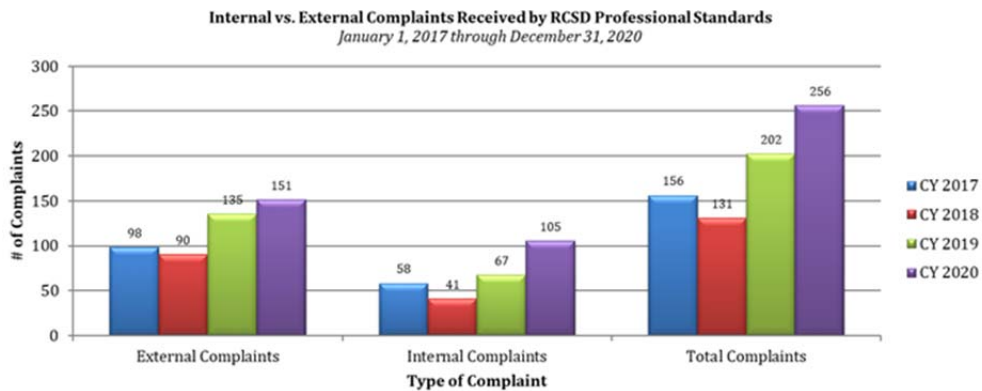
Upon disposition of a complaint allegation, Professional Standards sends a letter to the complainant to advise them that their complaint has been thoroughly investigated and resolved. RCSD makes every effort to investigate and adjudicate all complaint allegations within a reasonable amount of time a complaint is made. However, there are circumstances, including case complexity and witness availability, which prevent this goal from being achieved in every instance.

- *Exonerated*: The acts that provided the basis for the complaint or allegation occurred, but the investigation revealed that they were justified, lawful and proper.
- *Sustained*: The investigation disclosed sufficient evidence to prove the allegation made in the complaint.
- *Non Sustained*: The investigation failed to disclose sufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation made in the complaint.
- *Unfounded*: The allegation is false. The incident never occurred or the employee was not involved in the incident, or the investigation conclusively proved that the employee's alleged act or actions never took place.
- *Not Involved*: The alleged activity did not involve the Sheriff's Dept personnel.

COMPLAINTS AND DISPOSITIONS

The Richland County Sheriff's Department's Professional Standards Unit evaluated 256 complaints during CY2020. Of these complaints, 151 were external complaints while 105 of the complaints evaluated by the unit were internal complaints. (Figure 1) For comparison, the number of internal and external complaints by year since January 1, 2017 are included in the below chart.

Figure 1: Complaints received by the Richland County Sheriff's Department's Professional Standards Unit: January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2020. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)



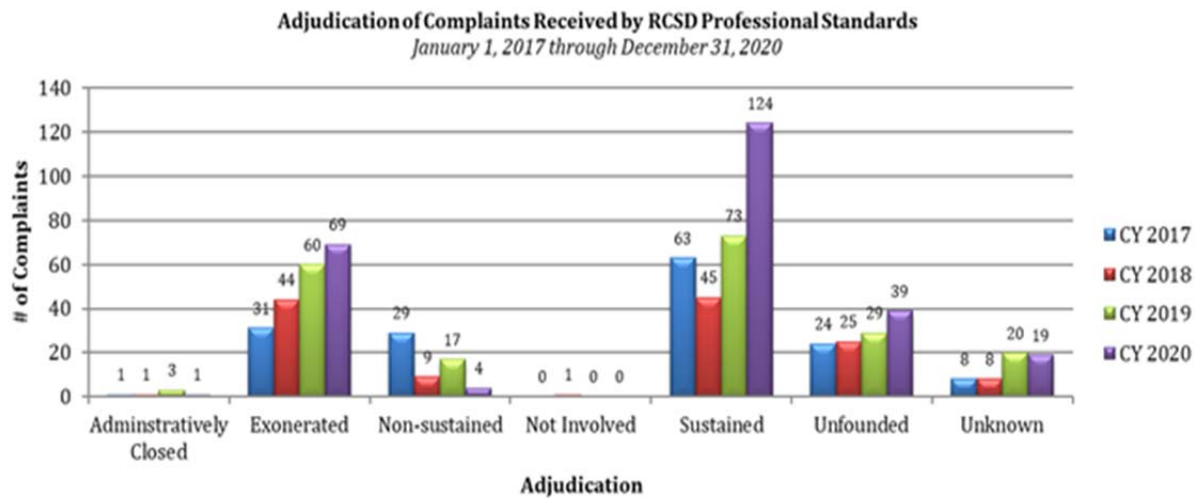
A complete table with complaints broken down by policy violation and year (since January 1, 2017) is included on page 13 (Table 1)

Table 1: Complaints by allegation type (policy violation). (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

Policy Violation	External Complaints				Internal Complaints				Total
	CY 2017	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020	CY 2017	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020	
105 II(A) (1-4) - Code of Ethics	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
105 II(C) - Obedience to Laws, Ordinances, Rules	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	5
105 II(C) (3) - Supervisory personnel will not knowingly issue order which violates law or policy.	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
105 II(F) - Information Policy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
105 II(F) - Rules of Conduct	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
105 II(F) (1) - Insubordination, act that discredits/jeopardized the effective functioning of the service.	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	1	6
105 II(F) (1B) - Disclosing confidential information to unauthorized persons.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
105 II(F) (12) - Conduct detrimental to operations of the department.	6	6	7	12	12	7	6	9	65
105 II(F) (13) - Unauthorized leaving assigned area	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	7
105 II(F) (14) - Careless/improper work performance.	45	62	76	66	8	2	4	15	278
105 II(F) (17) - Failure to supervise.	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	10	14
105 II(F) (18) - Inattention to or dereliction of duty.	6	1	1	0	6	5	8	9	46
105 II(F) (2) - Abusive/Threatening language to citizens or co-workers, racial/ethnic jokes, slurs or profanity.	1	3	0	12	7	3	4	3	33
105 II(F) (3) - Rudeness	19	11	11	20	1	0	1	4	67
105 II(F) (4) - Fighting or Horseplay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
105 II(F) (7) - Any form of dishonesty.	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	6
105 II(F) (9) - Fabrication of department records.	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
105 II(H) - Failure to perform duty	0	0	1	1	0	2	7	7	18
105 II(I) (5) - Officers shall not fail to make required reports or records.	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	6
105 II(K) - Subject control/ Defensive Action	1	2	4	3	2	0	1	0	13
105 II(M) - Use of alcohol	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
105 II(O) - Use of tobacco	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	5
105 II(P) - Care of Equipment, Uniform and Property	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	6
105 II(Q) - Firearms Policy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
105 II(S) - Special Duty Assignment violation	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
107 Harassment / Discrimination	4	0	4	6	3	0	4	2	23
1600 - Use of Body Worn Camera	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	5	11
402 II(6)(4) Internet Social Media Policy	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
603-C Use of Taser	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	5
606 II(E) - Failure to properly secure firearm.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
701(E)(2) - Accident involving a Sheriff's Department vehicle	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
702 II(A) (1) (c) (4) (b) (8) - Engage in high speed pursuit for minor traffic violation.	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
703 I - Dept. vehicles will be operated in a safe manner at all times.	9	2	4	1	0	2	0	6	24
703 Operation of Vehicles	1	2	5	2	0	1	1	0	12
709 Courtroom Conduct	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
714 I(D) - Property/Evidence improperly disposed of.	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	3
901 II(A) (2) (g) - Failure to thoroughly investigate an incident	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	5
Defensive Action	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4
False Arrest	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Harassment	1	0	0	6	4	0	2	0	13
Insubordination	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Misconduct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other/Unknown	3	1	11	4	3	1	1	5	29
Profiling	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Pursuit Violations	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5
Rudeness	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Traffic	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Total	98	90	135	151	58	41	67	105	745

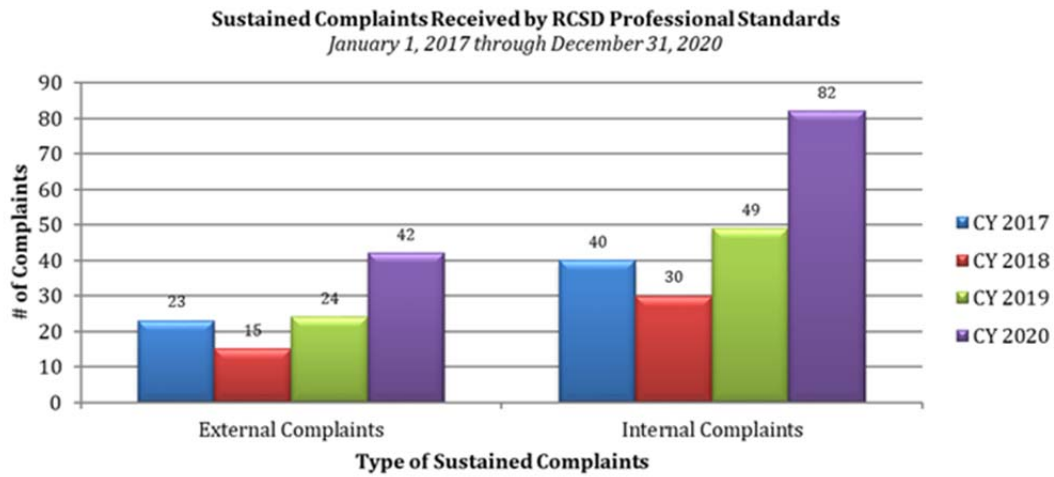
Complaints received by Professional Standards are adjudicated in one of the following ways: administratively closed, exonerated, non-sustained, not involved, sustained, or unfounded. In CY2020, one complaint was administratively closed, 69 complaints were exonerated, 4 complaints were non-sustained, zero (0) complaints were not involved, 124 complaints were sustained, 39 complaints were unfounded, and 19 complaints do not currently have an adjudication.

Figure 2: Adjudication of complaints received by the Richland County Sheriff's Department's Professional Standards Unit. *(Source: RCSD Professional Standards)*



Of the 256 complaints received by the unit in CY2020, 124 were **sustained** at the conclusion of the investigation. Of these sustained complaints, 42 were external complaints and 82 were internal complaints. (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Sustained complaints received by the Professional Standards Unit. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)



Various actions are taken when a complaint against an employee is sustained through an investigation. Actions can range from no action taken to termination. In CY2020, sustained complaints resulted in 13 written reprimands, 22 training initiatives, 16 verbal reprimands, and 2 employees being placed on probation. In addition, 20 employees were terminated following sustained investigations. (Table 2)

Table 2: Action taken on sustained complaints. *(Source: RCSD Professional Standards)**

Action	CY 2017	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020	Total
No Action Taken	0	2	1	3	6
Probation 30	6	0	0	2	8
Probation 60	2	0	0	0	2
See Action Taken Notes	7	10	10	16	43
Suspension 1 Day	3	0	0	0	3
Suspension 2 Day	2	0	0	0	2
Suspension 3 Day	0	0	1	0	1
Suspension 4 Day	0	0	1	1	2
Termination	7	5	7	20	39
Training Initiative	10	12	16	22	60
Verbal Reprimand	13	9	7	16	45
Written Reprimand	7	5	22	13	47
Unknown	6	2	8	31	47
Total	63	45	73	124	305

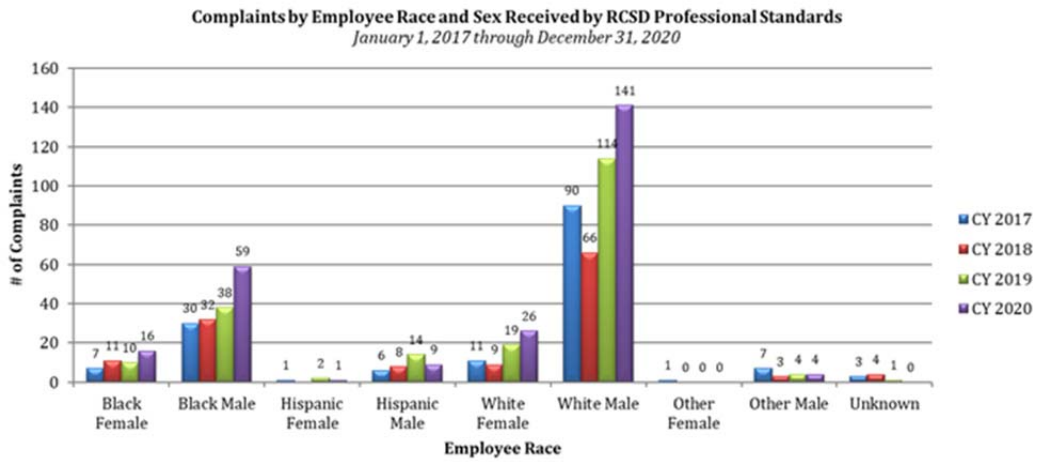
Table 3: Complaints by division of deputy's assignment at the time of the complaint.
(Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

Division	CY 2017	CY 2018	CY 2019	CY 2020	Total
Administration	1	0	1	3	5
CAT Team	8	6	6	16	36
Civil Process	4	6	5	2	17
Code Enforcement	0	0	2	0	2
Community Services	0	3	0	0	3
Desk	7	14	14	22	57
Evidence	0	0	0	1	1
Fugitive Task Force	0	0	0	5	5
Gang Task Force	0	4	0	0	4
Internal Affairs	0	0	0	2	2
Investigations	8	6	3	6	23
K-9	4	1	7	7	19
Lab	1	0	2	1	4
Narcotics	5	0	1	0	6
PIO	1	0	1	0	2
Posse	0	1	0	0	1
Professional Standards	2	3	0	0	5
Region 1	9	8	15	21	53
Region 2	16	12	17	23	68
Region 3	9	9	23	12	53
Region 4	15	5	28	48	96
Region 5	6	2	7	3	18
Region 6	10	13	16	21	60
Region 7	14	7	8	9	38
Region 8	9	7	8	12	36
School Resource	12	10	18	13	53
Special Projects	0	0	1	0	1
Special Response Team	7	0	0	1	8
Special Teams	0	0	0	1	1
Traffic	2	5	4	3	14
Training	2	6	10	10	28
Victims Assistance	0	1	3	4	8
Warrants	0	0	1	0	1
Youth Services	1	0	0	2	3
Uniform	0	0	0	4	4
Special Operations	0	0	0	2	2
911 Communications	0	0	0	1	1
Other/Unknown	3	4	1	1	9
Total	156	133	202	256	747

Table 4: Complaints received by race and sex of employee between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards and RCSD Personnel Staff)

Race and Sex of Employee	# of Complaints	% of Complaints
Black Female	16	6.25%
Black Male	59	23.05%
Hispanic Female	1	0.39%
Hispanic Male	9	3.52%
White Female	26	10.16%
White Male	141	55.08%
Other Female	0	0.00%
Other Male	4	1.56%
Unknown	0	0.00%
Total	256	100.00%

Figure 4: Complaints received by race and sex of employee. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)



DEFENSIVE ACTION REPORTS

Figure 5: Defensive actions involving a Taser. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

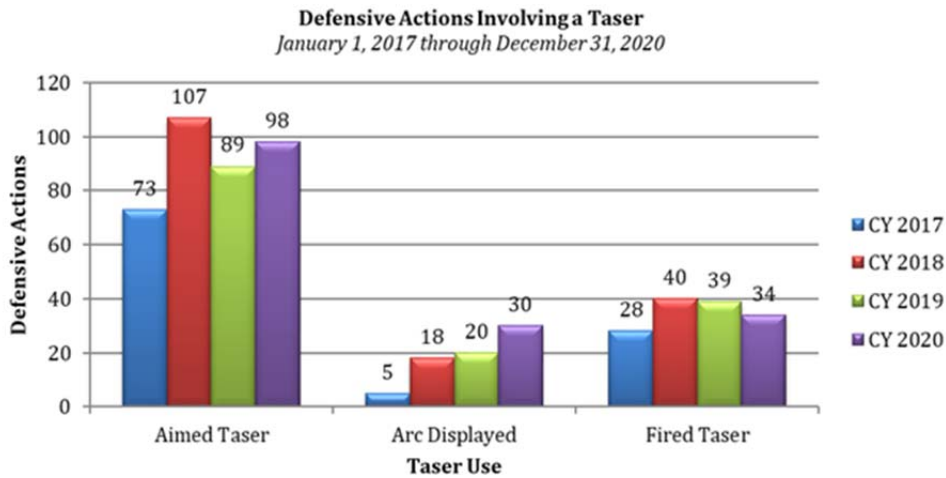


Figure 6: Defensive actions involving a firearm. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

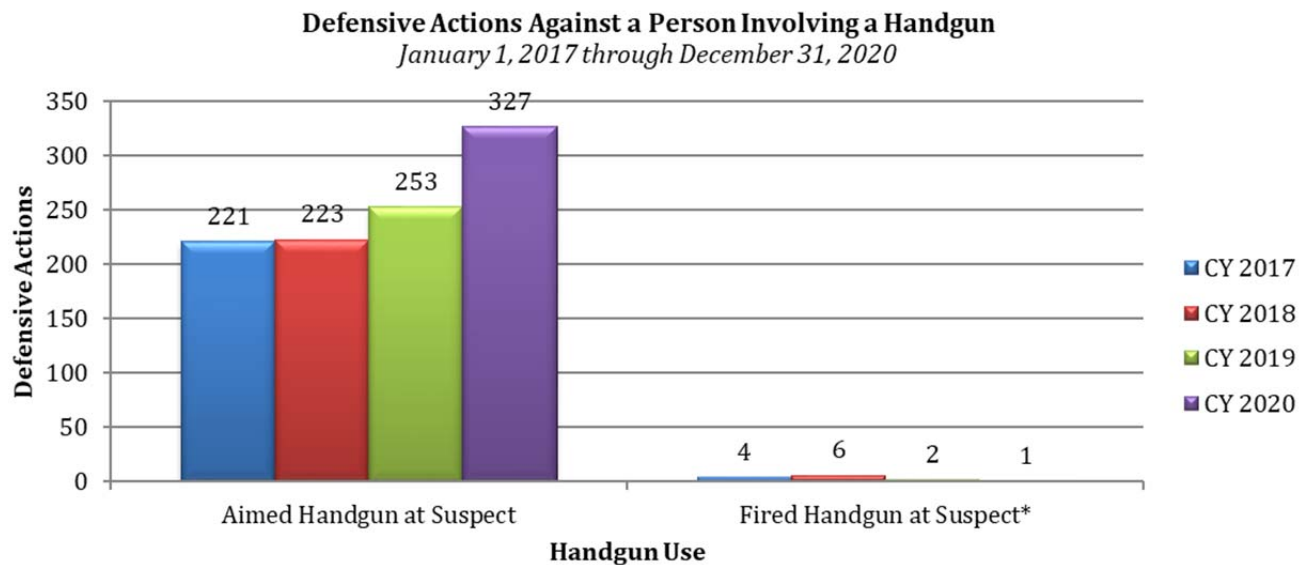


Table 5: Race and sex of suspects involved in defensive action reports. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

Incident Date	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White		Other		Unknown	Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male		
CY 2017	0	0	36	235	0	3	11	39	0	0	18	342
CY 2018	0	1	51	309	0	2	12	56	0	1	50	482
CY 2019	1	0	38	335	1	5	11	55	0	0	30	476
CY 2020	0	3	108	493	1	9	39	78	0	1	35	767
Total	1	4	233	1372	2	19	73	228	0	2	133	2067

Table 6: Race and sex of employees involved in defensive action reports. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

Incident Date	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White		Other		Unknown	Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male		
CY 2017	0	1	7	44	1	22	28	304	1	9	1	418
CY 2018	0	3	16	65	0	11	33	395	1	15	12	551
CY 2019	0	0	10	81	5	25	47	396	0	20	6	590
CY 2020	0	4	20	93	14	16	92	518	1	15	18	791
Total	0	8	53	283	20	74	200	1613	3	59	37	2350

VEHICLE PURSUITS

January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2020

**NOTE: more than one suspect and/or deputy may be associated with a single pursuit. For this reason, the number of suspects involved and the number of deputies involved may not equal the number of actual pursuits that occurred in a given year.*

Figure 7: Race and sex of suspects involved in vehicle pursuits. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

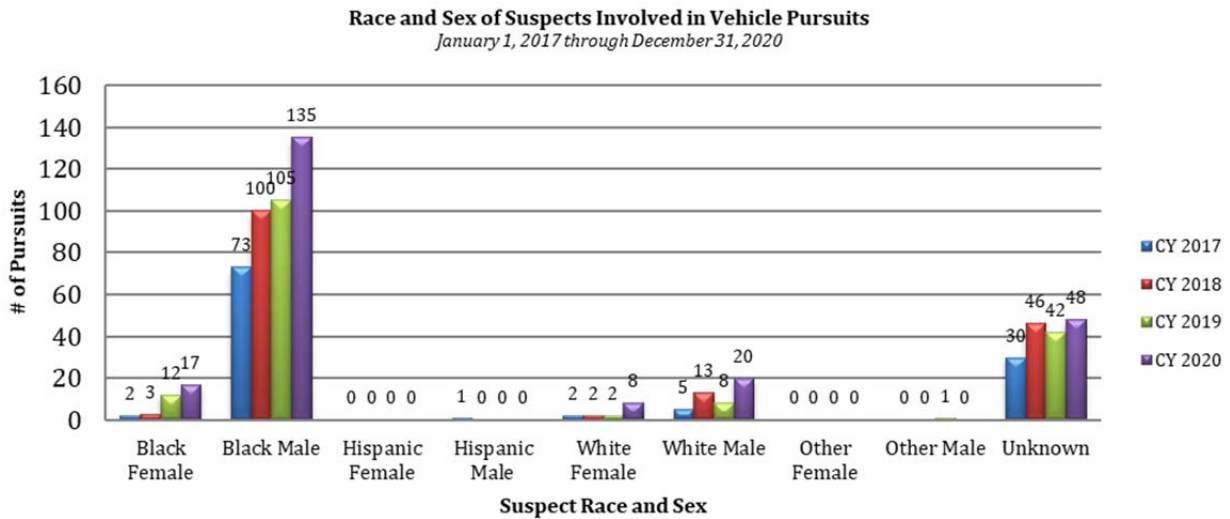


Figure 8: Race and sex of deputies involved in vehicle pursuits. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)

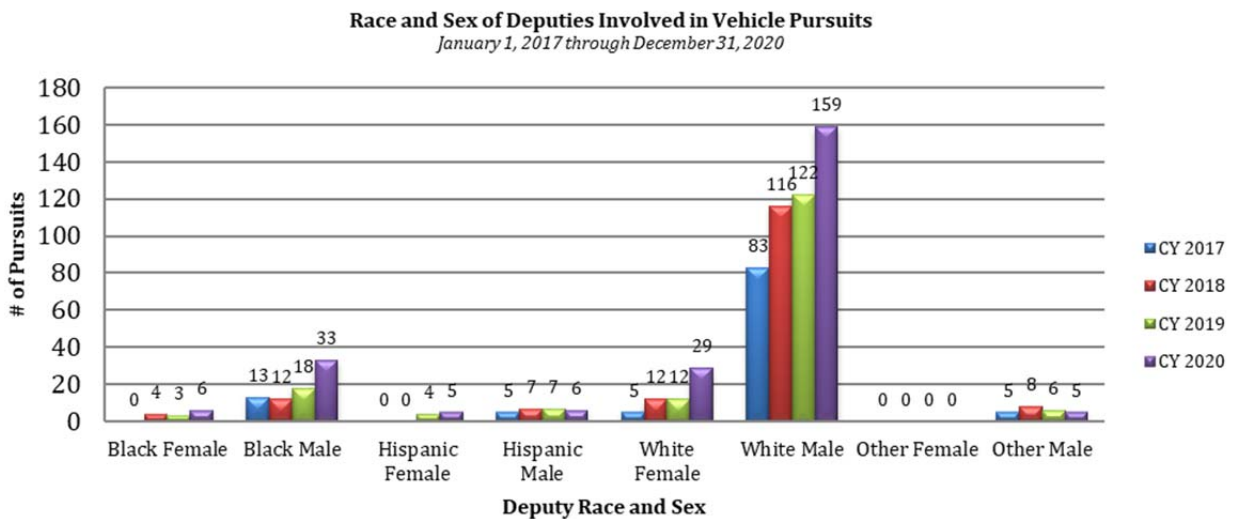
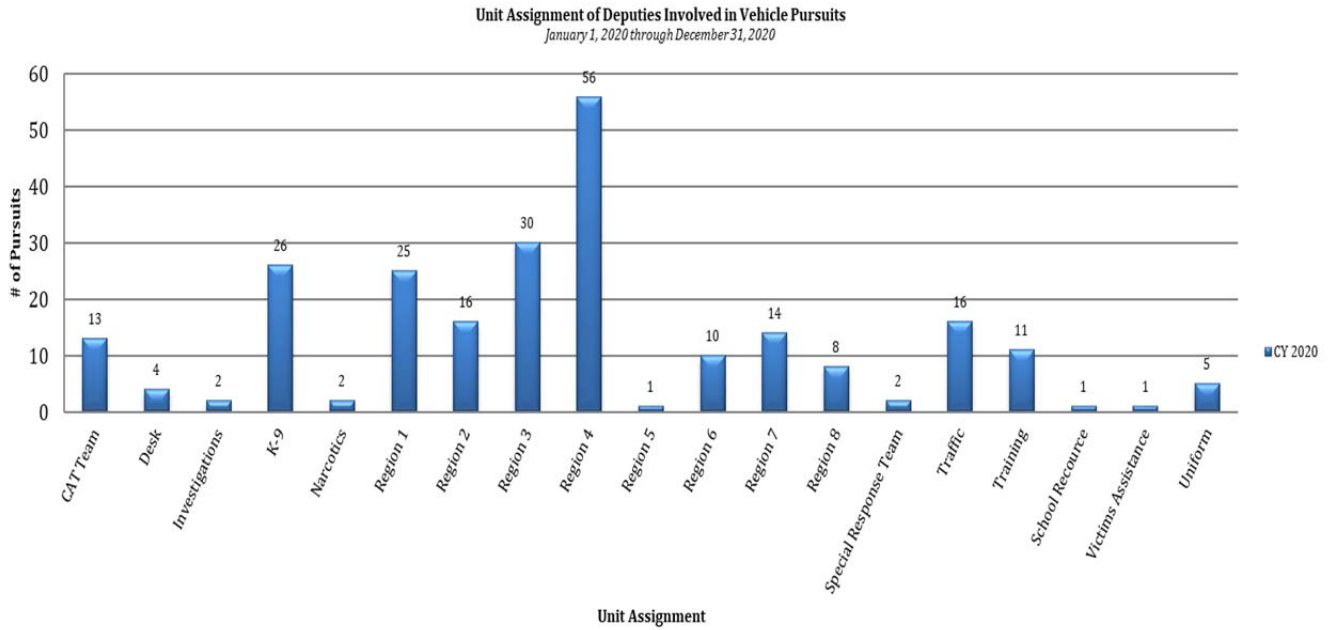


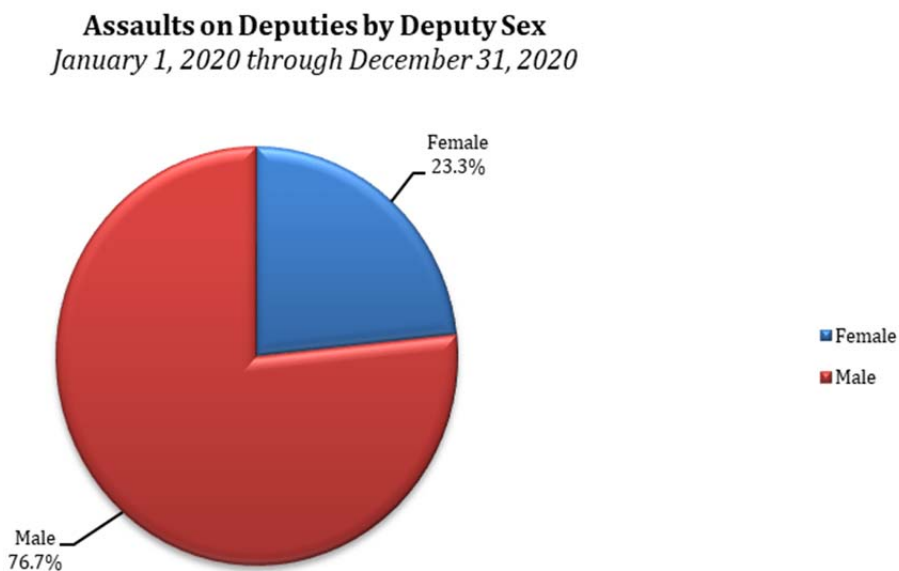
Figure 9: Unit assignment of employees involved in vehicle pursuits. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards)



ASSAULTS ON DEPUTIES

January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020

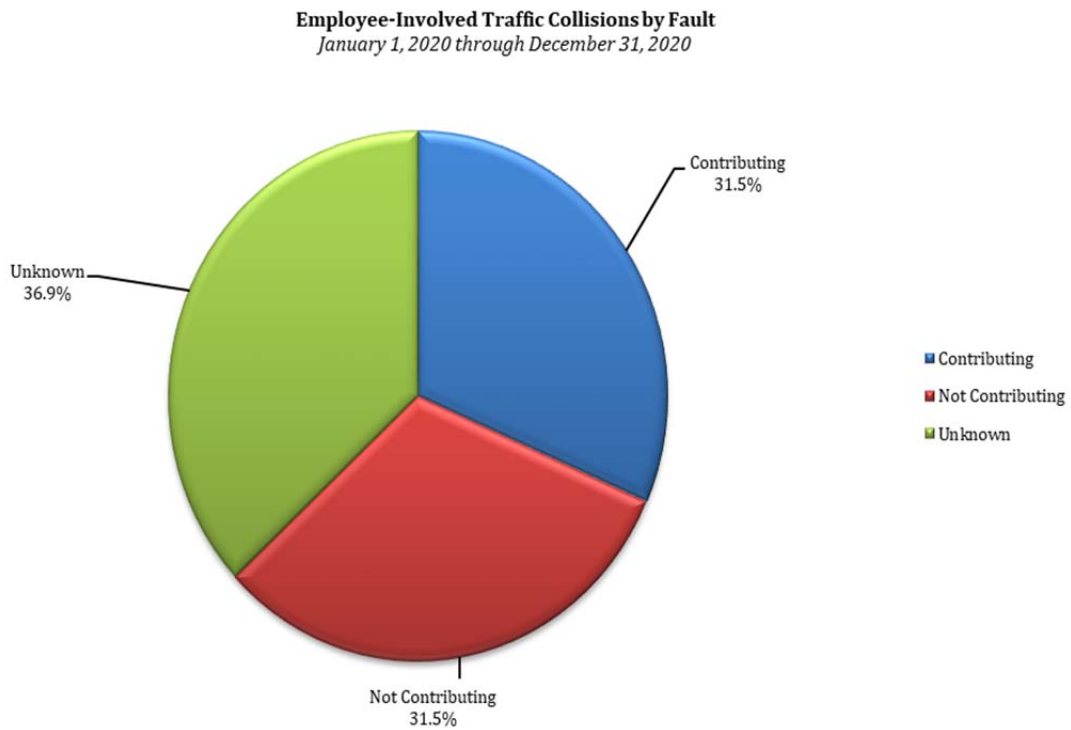
Figure 10: Assaults on deputies by deputy sex. (Source: RCSD Professional Standards and Records Management System)



EMPLOYEE-INVOLVED TRAFFIC COLLISIONS

Traffic collisions with an unknown fault status are pending review by the accident review board.

Figure 11: Employee-involved traffic collisions by fault. (Source: RCSD Special Projects Division & RCSD Professional Standards)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Please recognize this 2020 annual report is based on data that is not static, and is subject to change following publication. While the Richland County Sheriff's Department strives to share accurate, timely information with the community, there are factors which influence these changes. One way the Department attempts to minimize these changes, or updates, is by adjudicating 2020 case investigations prior to publishing this annual report. This is important because the annual report is based on the calendar year, and a complaint from an event in December may take several months to adjudicate, depending on the severity of the allegation and length of the investigation. With that caveat, please use this report to help understand the yearly trends related to our internal investigations and our commitment to thoroughly investigating all citizen complaints.

In an effort to continue providing the citizens of Richland County with agency transparency and accountability, the Richland County Sheriff's Department continued the use of body-worn cameras in CY2020. The Richland County Sheriff's Department Professional Standards Unit will continue to evaluate citizen and internal complaints as they are presented.

