Reducing the Demand for Police Services: A Non-Emergency Approach

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Abstract

This paper discusses various alternatives that law enforcement agencies utilize for responding to non-emergency calls for police services, rather than sending an officer in-person to every call received in the dispatch center. My purpose was to research other agencies in the state of Florida, similar in size to the Tallahassee Police Department, to see what alternatives they offer to citizens wanting to file a police report that doesn't necessarily require police presence. Four outside agencies were surveyed, along with employees from the Tallahassee Police Department, to obtain information about their response to non-emergency calls for service. As someone who's looking to free-up patrol officers' time in order to conduct more proactive or community policing-oriented work in the field, this information was actually positive in nature.

Introduction

Throughout our nation, law enforcement agencies are tasked daily with managing and prioritizing police calls for service, oftentimes requiring extreme creativity on the part of the Shift Commander. We all know emergency calls regarding one's personal safety and welfare are the number one priority for those working in public safety. But what about the increasing non-emergency or seemingly non-police related calls dispatch centers are barraged with daily? How do call takers politely tell citizens their requests are less important than someone else's request without fear of a complaint?

With the introduction of Computer Aided Dispatch Systems (CAD) and 9-1-1 in the mid to late 1960's, law enforcement agencies were able to begin prioritizing calls and using call stacking capabilities. Unfortunately, 9-1-1 became so popular and over-utilized, it actually created a dramatic increase in non-emergency calls coming into dispatch centers, thus tying up the emergency lines.

Although law enforcement was able to manage calls for service more effectively, the problem came with explaining to an irate citizen their request was much lower on the totem pole compared to several higher priority calls that were already holding. The concern was whether this would cause an increase in citizen complaints. Definitely not something the Chief, Mayor or City Manager wants to hear about their cops.

With law enforcement agencies being tasked with doing more with less, as population growth and jurisdiction sizes continue to grow, police and sheriff executives are struggling to provide quality service with limited resources. Command staff members are being tasked with thinking outside the box, digging into their creative

toolboxes, and finding other alternatives to an actual in-person police response to many calls for service.

My research explores how several agencies throughout the United States found themselves in a tug of war with providing quality police services, but not having the manpower to do it effectively. With advancing technology, data mining, and innovative management strategies, law enforcement agencies are no longer required to be everywhere in order to be successful at reducing crime. In fact, because of these new ideas and practices, officers may actually have more time to be out in the community and in a position to be more proactive than merely reactive.

Literary Review

Over the years several alternatives have been explored and implemented by law enforcement agencies all over the country when it comes to finding more efficient ways to respond to non-emergency calls for service. Prioritizing emergency calls is a no-brainer, but when it comes to responding in a timely manner to non-emergency calls, or choosing not to respond at all, can be difficult and sometimes controversial. When I say not responding at all, I mean deciding whether to send an officer to a call that truly has nothing to do with police work, keeping the peace, or public safety. With budget cuts, hiring limitations, and already limited resources, law enforcement have had to find ways to be more efficient while maintaining quality service.

One well-known non-emergency call system is known as 311. There are three 311 systems to choose from: Model 1 – Basic Police, handles only non-emergency police calls; Model 2 – Basic City, handles only city services, no police calls; and Model 3 – Integrated – handles both city and police non-emergency calls. (Solomon & Uchida, piii, 2003).

In 1996, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) announced its intent to relieve the burden of incoming 911 calls to police communication centers for the past 30 years. The COPS Office requested the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reserve 311 for use as a national number for non-emergencies. In 1997, this request was honored and 311 was reserved for use as a national, voluntary, non-toll, non-emergency phone number. In 2000, the COPS awarded 10 jurisdictions with enough funding to establish a 311 system, with Baltimore, MD Police Department being the first. Other jurisdictions soon followed to include Birmingham, AL, Dukes County, MA, Framingham, MA, Houston, TX, Los Angeles, CA, Miami, FL, Orange County, FL, Rochester, NY and finally Austin, TX. The largest 311 operation in North America operates in Toronto which was implemented in 2009. (Solomon & Uchida, p5, 2003)

Baltimore Police Department found that installing a non-emergency call system offered many advantages for their agency. The decrease in emergency calls flooding their communication center was most beneficial, thus validating the true function of 911. Secondly, marketing and memorizing the three-digit phone number was simple and it truly empowered the community when deciding whether a call should be considered a true emergency. (Mazerolle et al, p1, 2, 2003)

When implementing something new and innovative, you must always consider the negative impact or downside to the new way of conducting business. Baltimore PD had to consider the high implementation costs of a 311 system, as well as the lack of caller and location identifiers that you have with 911 calls. 311 calls usually arrive to a call center "blind" or anonymous. The anonymous phone call lacks the ability for call takers to recover disconnected or dropped calls, even if the call taker was transferring the call to 911. Other disadvantages that surfaced once the system was in place included failure to record incoming calls, loss of statistical data for hot spot areas, underuse of neighborhood policing resources, such as Crime Prevention, and a common dispatch policy in place that covered both 311 and 911 systems. (Mazerolle et al, p2, 2003)

Introduction of 311 in Baltimore fundamentally changed how citizens reported certain crimes and disorder to 911. For example, before 311, police received approximately 700 calls per week regarding domestic disturbances. After 311, these type calls on 911 decreased by about 200 per week. Other calls with a resounding decline included juvenile disturbances, parking violations, suspicious persons and vehicles, traffic crashes, and reports of criminal mischief. Even more astonishing was the decline in loud noise complaints received on 911. Although loud noise complaints actually increased, most of these calls came in via 311. Other reported increases in criminal activity included drugs, auto theft, larceny, gambling, and aggravated assaults were beginning to come in on 311 rather than 911. Researchers speculate that the ability to report crime anonymously actually contributed to the increase in call volume on the 311 phone lines. Baltimore PD found approximately 30% of previous calls made on 911 now came in on 311. (Mazerolle et al, p117, 119, 2003).

Baltimore's 311 system was intended to reduce the response burden on patrol officers and improve the quality of policing. 911 calls were reduced to 34% and widespread acceptance of the new 311 system by the community as an alternative reporting source for non-emergency calls was astounding. Although on the surface the results of the new system showed potential, there were underlying problems that appeared. The number of priority one calls increased by more than 27%. (Solomon & Uchida, p3, 2003). There was also a major decrease in priority five calls (54%) coming in on both 911 and 311. The police literally stopped dispatching these calls after the introduction of 311. Researchers of the Baltimore PD 311 system believe the non-response contributed to the total decline in priority five calls received. Citizens may have become discouraged or put off from calling the police about low priority matters if they thought that the police wouldn't respond in person. Priority five calls are basically a citizen request for service where the officer's primary function will be fact-finding, reporting, or referrals. (Mazerolle et al, p.4-8, 2003)

Initially, much of Batimore's 311 system showed improvement – the overall burden on 911 was reduced and citizen satisfaction with calling 311 was high. However, researchers noted three deficiencies where the implementation of 311 showed little effect on the improvement in police practices for the agency as expected. Response times for priority one calls made on 911 were not lowered. Officers still responded to most 911 calls in the same manner as before. Secondly, because the dispatch policy was never updated and revised, officers continued to be dispatched to both 911 and 311 calls for service (except priority five calls). Officers either didn't know or were indifferent about

whether a call was made on 911 or 311. Lastly, officer's discretionary time was only marginally increased for proactivity. Almost two-thirds of the officers surveyed by researchers of the 311 system did not perceive any change in their "downtime" or time they weren't tied up on a call for service. Those surveyed were about split in half as to whether they felt 311 had changed their work routine for the better. (Mazerolle et al, p4, 5, 2003).

In 1998, the Austin, TX Police Department (APD) estimated that 40-50% of their 911 calls were either police non-emergencies or situations that were not appropriate for a police, fire or medical response. They realized that 311 offered a potential solution if implemented and marketed correctly to their community, thus planning and preparation began. APD then made several organizational changes to encourage better customer service and more citizen feedback. 311 was one of these changes. In September 2001, merely six days after the tragedy of September 11th, Austin PD implemented their 311 system. They seized the additional media coverage and imparted on the community the added importance of keeping the 911 lines free and clear except for true emergencies. APD selected the Model 1 311 system – Basic Police only, for three primary reasons – funding availability, ease of implementation, and intended purposes for the system. (Solomon & Uchida, pi, ii 2003).

APD found the same problem Baltimore PD found when looking at their 911 system. It was working too well and citizens were using it for the most minor non-emergency calls, i.e. a citizen calling to report problems with his neighbor's crowing rooster. The APD Police Chief realized citizens had no other alternative to calling 911 other than not call the police at all. Call takers were forced to either tactfully answer citizen's questions or dismiss the call altogether. Thus, he tasked his staff with finding a way to implement 311. As previously stated, the United States Department of Justice COPS provided funding for Austin's 311 system. (Solomon & Uchida, p10, 11, 2003).

Over the years many other law enforcement agencies have implemented the 311 system to manage calls for service. But let's look at other alternatives Police Chiefs and Sheriffs have introduced to their agencies to help lighten the load if you will, while continuing to provide quality service to their communities. Faced with high incident of calls for service, but not having the resources to keep up, Akron Police Chief Michael Matulavich tasked his staff with finding a solution. Using information system data, the department conducted a detailed analysis of their calls for service. They looked at nature of the calls, time spent on the calls, and then the locations the calls were generated from that appeared to be excessive. The information collected validated what the officers already knew. For some addresses, the officers had responded to over 100 times in one year. The department knew they had to take responsibility and make some changes, by working smarter and engaging the community to help reduce the demand for services. (Matulavich, p1, 2006)

Akron PD formed a committee made up of department members as well as citizens, and analyzed the calls for service that drained their resources on a consistent basis. The committee looked at ways to reduce the demand for certain services, in certain areas, while at the same time improving those services provided. One such area the committee focused on was Landlord Education. The department pulled data that showed much of the high crime activity was taking place in high rental communities. They brought

together landlords, neighborhood residents, city agencies, a representative from the Fair Housing Advocate Association, a civil court magistrate, and city prosecutor to discuss nuisance abatement, landlord-tenant rights, the eviction process, and ways home owners can better design their applications and screening process of potential renters. There was overwhelming attendance with more than 200 landlords representing over 1,000 of the city's rental properties. This effort was a huge factor in lowering the rate of calls to these rental sites. (Matualvich, p2, 2006).

Akron PD also looked at modifying theft reports taken at convenience stores and gas stations. The committee found that over 500 misdemeanor theft reports were taken over a year's time. In most cases the stores didn't wish to prosecute and were only filing a report for insurance purposes. The reporting process was changed. In cases where there was no suspect to arrest and the store didn't want to prosecute, they called the police department and received a tracking number. This tracking number served as verification of the report for insurance companies, thus alleviating an actual response from an officer. In cases where the store wished to prosecute, an officer was sent to take a report. To implement the change, the police department worked with store managers, sent letters outlining the new process, and held an orientation with them in order to answer any questions or concerns. Again, this is another step in the right direction to help reduce police response. (Matulavich, p2, 2006).

Several other process changes were implemented by Akron PD that brought much success to the overall improvement in services provided to their citizens; report writing training for local retailers; increased traffic enforcement at high crash sites; formed mental health alliances and worked with outreach programs to provide follow-up at repeat locations where 911 was called routinely for afflicted persons. The agency received 244 fewer calls the following year. They attacked repeat call locations at 37 identified sites that officers responded to 1,967 times in one year. The effort resulted in a 57% decrease for calls at those addresses and they reduced false alarm calls by ensuring alarm users were properly licensed and cited for false alarms. They've seen a 10% reduction in false alarm calls and they increased traffic enforcement and education in residential areas where there were high reports of speeding. The education involved teens and their parents alike. They utilized a Prostitution Reduction Campaign, which sought out to gain support of judges, prosecutors, and jail personnel, along with the department's increased enforcement and undercover sting operations. Prostitution arrests have decreased by 26%, and complaint calls decreased by 15%. They implemented a Juvenile-Victim Panel to help reduce juvenile crime rates and recidivism. They reorganized the department to assure efficiency and smarter work processes. Calls for service were assessed for each shift. Based on the analysis, shifts were relocated and staffed with sufficient officers to handle the call volume. Today, on-duty staffing nearly mirrors the hourly demand for services. No mention was made as to whether more officers were hired to fit the demand. Based on internal and external feedback, Chief Matulavich advises the quality of service provided is even better than before implementation of the new initiatives. (Matulavich, p2, 2006)

When implementing any new way of doing business, whether it be 311, telephone reporting, online citizen reports, etc., it is recommended that law enforcement agencies do the following to ensure success:

- Make sure to have a firm set of goals and options

- Ensure all technology and human resources are in place

- Develop a strong Public Awareness Campaign to inform the community and gain acceptance

- Review and modify dispatch policies

- Carefully monitor caller satisfaction and feedback

- Facilitate program evaluation

No matter what an agency decides to do, citizens must still believe you care. (Mazerolle et al, p6, 7, 2003)

Method

Two surveys were conducted when doing my research about reducing the demand for police services. I not only wanted to interview the sworn members of the Tallahassee Police Department, but also a representative from other police agencies similar in size to TPD located in the state of Florida.

Tallahassee Police Department (Internal)

All 376 sworn and two non-sworn members were sent surveys electronically via e-mail. They were asked to complete the survey using the link provided to Survey Monkey. I did not ask their names on the survey, only their current rank and years of service. The survey was sent out on May 17, 2013 with a deadline to return the survey on June 30, 2013.

Purpose of the survey

For those sworn members who respond to non-emergency type calls for service and write police reports for those calls as part of their normal duties, what percentage of their shift do they feel these type calls demand. Do they feel their agency provides sufficient alternatives to responding to non-emergency calls and what types of calls do they consider non-emergency? What experience or knowledge do they have with other law enforcement agencies and how they handle non-emergency calls for service rather than sending an officer to the scene?

External Survey

I surveyed the following police departments in Florida comparable in size to TPD in regards to the number of sworn members they have: Miami Beach, Hialeah, Hollywood, and Gainesville.   These agencies were selected based on previous research conducted in the past reference labor issues and calls for service.   I asked similar questions as those asked in the internal survey I sent to TPD members, however I also asked for the following information:

- What shift their Patrol officers work, i.e. 8 hours, 10 hours, 12 hours, or a hybrid shift.

- What alternative methods they use to respond to non-emergency calls for service rather than sending an officer to the call in person.

- Are there any non-emergency calls for service their department does not respond to in person and requires the citizen to use an alternative method to report the call?

Strengths/Weaknesses in survey

The strength of my internal survey was the large number of members surveyed and the expectation that I would yield a large number of responses.   My hope was that because the survey was anonymous and confidential, it may result in a large return.   On the other hand it could be a weakness if those surveyed internally felt it wouldn't remain confidential.   I did not yield the high return rate I originally expected, possibly because I didn't send out enough reminders to my agency members requesting them to complete the survey.   Only two reminders were sent after the original e-mail request went out.   My low results may have also been due to vacation and/or sick leave, training, or it was viewed as a low priority and was forgotten.

A strength of the external interviews was that I spoke to the agency representative directly, as well as sent them my written survey.   I knew they would have to do some research for some of the questions before being able to respond, however, I wanted to make contact over the phone as well to put a voice with my request.   A weakness I found was the availability of the persons I wanted to survey.   After finding out who to speak with at the agency, it was challenging to find them in the office or returning my phone call. Conflicting work schedules and time away from work for both myself and the agency contact was a challenge.   I was able to speak with three of the department contacts (Miami Beach, Hollywood and Gainesville), but not Hialeah.   I did however receive the survey back via e-mail.

Results

Internal Survey Results

  The internal survey was developed using Survey Monkey and contained 11 questions. It was sent to all 376 sworn members and two non-sworn members of the Tallahassee Police Department. The two non-sworn members work in a unit of the Patrol Division called Teleserve. They take non-emergency calls for service over the telephone where the complainant requests a police report, including supplement reports to an original case already filed. Teleserve also takes non-emergency reports from citizens (walk-ins) who come directly to the department to file a police report. The two Teleserve members are also tasked with permitting all Taxi Cab and Vehicle for Hire drivers in the city of Tallahassee. This includes coordinating alcohol and drug screening of all applicant drivers.

  Of the 378 members the survey was sent to, 101 members responded, for a return rate of 26.72%.

Question #1 – Current Rank
- **Officers/Investigators** 68 or 68.69%
- **Sergeants** 15 or 15.15%
- **Lieutenants** 11 or 11.11%
- **Captains or above** 5 or 5.05%
- **Civilians** 0 or 0%

Two members skipped the first question indicating their rank.

Question #2: Years of Service
- **0 – 4 years** 7 or 7.07%
- **5-10 years** 14 or 14.14%
- **11-20 years** 46 or 46.46%
- **21 or more years** 32 or 32.32%

Two members skipped this question.

Question #3: What area of the department are you assigned?
- **Patrol** 44 or 44%
- **Criminal Investigations** 27 or 27%
- **Special Operations** 13 or 13%
- **Training and Dev.** 8 or 8%
- **Other** 8 or 8%

One person skipped this question.

Question #4: Do you respond to calls for service?
- **Yes** 56 or 55.45%
- **No** 45 or 44.55%

Question #5:   If you responded "yes" to question #4, what type of calls do you respond to?
- **Emergency calls only**   3 or 5.17%
- **Non-emergency calls**   3 or 5.17%
- **Both type calls**   52 or 89.66%

Only the 56 members who answered "yes" to question #4 should have answered this question, there were actually 58 members that answered this question.

Question #6:   What percent of the shift do feel you spend on non-emergency calls for service?
- **0-20%**   13 or 23.21%
- **21-40%**   3 or 5.36%
- **41-60%**   6 or 10.71%
- **61-80%**   12 or 21.43%
- **81% or more**   22 or 39.29%

Question #7:   Do you feel TPD provides sufficient alternatives for reporting non-emergency calls for service?
- **Yes**   63 or 63.64%
- **No**   36 or 36.36%

Two members did not answer this question.

Question #8:   If you have experience with how other law enforcement agencies respond to non-emergency calls rather than sending an officer in person, please indicate what they are. (More than one selection could be made)
- **311 Non-emergency reporting system**   9 or 15.52%
- **Skype reporting**   1 or 1.72%
- **CopLogic**   25 or 43.10%
- **Online self-reporting**   43 or 74.14%
- **Walk-ins**   37 or 63.79%
- **Civilian report takers**   39 or 67.24%

43 members skipped this question

If the respondent was not familiar with any other law enforcement agencies and how they respond to non-emergency calls, they were told to skip this question.

Question #9:   Do you feel there are some non-emergency calls for service TPD should not respond?
- **Yes**   93 or 94.90%
- *No*   *5 or 5.10%*

Three members did not answer this question.

Question #10:   What type of non-emergency calls should TPD no longer respond?

- **Gas Skips/Retail Theft – no suspect information**   64 or 70.33%
- **Delayed Burglaries – no evidence/suspect information**   22 or 24.18%
- **Alarms with History of False Activations**   22 or 24.18%
- **ID Theft/Financial Crimes - no suspect on-scene**   32 or 35.16%
- **Quality of Life Issues – non-police related**   63 or 69.23%
- **Animal Calls – non-threatening/no injury**   84 or 92.13%

Respondents were also asked to indicate any other type calls not listed, however this will be discussed in more detail later in this report. More than one selection could be made.

External Survey Results

Miami Beach PD

A Police Sergeant with 11-20 years of experience answered the external survey. He indicated the officers at their agency worked 10-hour shifts four days a week with three days off. Their agency has between 201-250 sworn members working in the Patrol Division, which includes all ranks.   His current position did not require him to respond to calls for service, emergency or non-emergency.   The sergeant indicated his agency accepts walk-ins and telephone reporting to take non-emergency calls for service.   He said his agency must respond to <u>all</u> non-emergency type calls for service if requested by the complainant; however they try to get people to report the incident over the phone instead.
The sergeant indicated their department is very customer service oriented and responds to just about any type of call for service if requested to do so by the public.

Hollywood PD

A Police Major with 21 plus years of experience responded to this survey. He advised the officers in Patrol work 10-hour shifts four days per week with three days off. The hours are 7a-3p, 1:30a-11:30p and 10p-8am. Each shift has a 1.5 hour overlap. Although they have 101-150 sworn members, currently they have 44 vacancies in Patrol. The Major indicated the only alternative to responding to non-emergency calls for service is offering citizens their Telephone Reporting Unit (TRU).   TRU is a 24/7 customer assistance phone line to help citizens with minor incident reports.   More details about TRU will be discussed later in this report.   The Major stated their agency responds to all type non-emergency calls for service, whether it be in-person, using TRU, or as a walk-in.

Gainesville PD

The Public Information Officer for Gainesville PD responded to this survey.   He's a sworn officer with 5-10 years of experience.   He indicated their Patrol officers work 10-hours shifts four days a week with three days off.   They currently have 101-150 sworn

patrol members which includes all ranks.   The patrol officers respond to all type calls for service, both emergency and non-emergency.   He said Patrol officers spend on average approximately 21-40% of their work day responding and/or writing reports for non-emergency calls for service.   The alternatives Gainesville PD offers to citizens rather than sending an officer in person for non-emergency calls is they take walk-in reports, as well as have civilian report takers that handle the walk-ins or take reports over the telephone.   The officer said there are several non-emergency calls for service their agency does not send an officer to the scene to take a report, i.e. gas skips and retail thefts where there is no suspect information, ID theft and other financial crimes where there is no suspect on-scene, and quality of life issues that are non-police related.   They offer a referral to the appropriate agency that can assist the caller.

Hialeah PD

A Police Sergeant with 5-10 years of experience responded to this survey via e-mail only.   He indicated most of the officers working in the Patrol Division work four 10-hours days a week with three days off.   The agency has between 101-and 150 sworn members of various ranks working in Patrol.   The sergeant indicated his agency accepts walk-ins and telephone reporting to take non-emergency calls for service.   He said his agency must respond to <u>all</u> non-emergency type calls for service if requested by the complainant; however they try to get people to report the incident over the phone instead.

Discussion

Throughout this study I've found there are many alternatives to sending patrol officers to every call for service that's reported to their agency, especially for non-emergency calls for service.   The good news is the Tallahassee Police Department offers many more alternatives than other agencies our size throughout the state of Florida for handling these type of calls:

- Teleserve (telephone reporting)

- Walk-ins

- CopLogic (online reporting)

In 2012, TPD officers, including the two non-sworn Teleserve Unit members, wrote 34,889 police reports.   During the months of January through June 2012, Teleserve alone wrote 1,112 of those reports.   During this same six-month time period, citizens self-reported via online reporting 1,430 incidents, which is not included in the yearly total of reports for 2012.

Those citizens that choose to use the CopLogic system to self-report an incident, can either come to the police department and use the stand alone kiosk or file the report from their own home computer.   The department's Office of Inspections found that the

new system saved the tax payers of the city of Tallahassee $40,040 during that six month time period.   They figured the average officer's rate of pay for one hour - $28.00 multiplied by 1,430 reports saved $40,040 during that six month time period.   This is a huge cost savings to our city, not to mention the drain on manpower for our patrol units. Tasked with going from call to call in an ever growing city, and not being given additional officers to handle those calls, this new self-reporting system is extremely beneficial to our agency.

Another benefit to our agency is the two-person Teleserve Unit.   Although they alleviate some of the burden from patrol officers as well, unfortunately there are only two of them in the unit handling the abundance of non-emergency calls and supplement reports they already do.   Not to mention the time they must dedicate to permitting the taxi and vehicle for hire drivers.   In other words, these two members are overwhelmed with responsibility.   Future concerns are after July 2012 when this two-person unit becomes a one-person unit due to retirement of one of the members.   It is unknown at this time if the department plans to replace that member, do away with the unit once the second member retires next year, or increase the unit all together.

My survey results yielded many comments from department members, as I expected it would.   I welcome those comments in hopes of it prompting further discussion with Command Staff members tasked with implementing a plan for "doing more with less."   We've actually been doing that for years, quite successfully I might add, but the rubber band can only stretch so far before it breaks – and we're close to the breaking point.   Some of the more interesting comments and suggestions were:

- Even though we have other means of reporting non-emergency calls, we spend a lot of time going to these calls just to make the public happy. If we had more officers it would not be a big issue, however since the city refuses to hire more officers we should limit our officers to priority calls and not force them to break from one call to handle another call as a course of practice.

- The calls should be screened by the call taker. Example was a call yesterday where we were dispatched to a loud vehicle noise complaint. There is nothing a police officer can do and that should be told to the person that is calling it in. *At this time the city of Tallahassee does not have a noise ordinance to enforce.

- Music calls, medical calls of any sort (the fire department and EMS responds to all), lost cell phones, civil issues, parenting instead of police issues (children won't listen to their parent so the parent calls the police.

- Loud noise/party calls with no police authority (anonymous complainant)

- Parking lot crashes with no injuries

- Noise complaints, civil disputes, verbal disturbances, ungovernable juveniles

- Apartment complexes are occupied by tenants that are under a contract with a landlord. Both parties agreed to obey or follow a set of established rules. It is the responsibility of the landlord to enforce violations of those rules, i.e., loud noise/music. And it is the responsibility of the tenant to file grievances with the

state/city if the landlord is not enforcing the rules per the contract. This is not a police function.

- The department has to be more willing to tell people, for some types of calls, that online or over the phone service is their only option. The "service" that we're truly supposed to be providing is making the city as safe as possible and taking criminals off of the streets. We simply can't continue to use up resources on non-police matters in an attempt to try and make everyone happy. Focus on what we're supposed to be doing and ultimately you make the majority of the community happy.

- TPD should respond to most calls unless they are not law enforcement related. We should be focused on Community Service; too many times we are getting away from the "service" part of it. We would be well served to be trained and reminded that we are here to assist the public, too many people around TPD believe that the public is here to assist us. More community service/communication is needed.

There were so many more beneficial comments and suggestions, but those above reflect the general consensus of the respondents to this survey. The officers truly want to do a good job for our citizens and provide the best customer service possible, but they struggle with being pulled in a million different directions on a daily basis. This ultimately leads to frustration on the part of the officer and the public as well who may feel slighted in the service they're provided.

Although I wasn't surprised to read the results of the internal survey, especially the comments and suggestions offered, as a middle manager it's important to be in touch with those working under you. If we aren't listening to our people, are we truly being a good leader? I suspect some of the respondents wrote such detailed comments in hopes of our Command Staff members reading this survey and possibly implementing some of their suggestions. I also hope they trusted me as a leader in this agency and felt they could voice their opinions, or maybe it was merely because the survey was truly anonymous and confidential and there would be no repercussion.

The other law enforcement agencies I surveyed offered telephone reporting and allowed citizens to walk-in and file a report at the agency. Other than those two options, there wasn't anything innovative or new that TPD wasn't already doing. Hollywood PD has what's called a Telephone Reporting Unit (TRU), which is staffed 24 hours a day seven days a week. This unit is housed in the Communications Section (dispatch area) of the department, although the number of persons working at one time may only be two. I'm not sure what their number of calls coming into the unit is, but I suspect they're as overwhelmed as the rest of us providing this service. This unit assists callers with minor incident reports that can be investigated over the phone, much the same as TPD's Teleserve Unit. TRU cannot be used for reports for the following reasons:

- When the Crime Scene Unit must respond for processing the scene

- Response by an officer will aid in the investigation

- An officer is requested to respond by the caller

TRU handles the following type reports:

- Thefts – no suspect on-scene or no suspect information
- Reports for insurance claims
- Thefts with a loss of less than $1,000
- Frauds not exceeding $1,000 loss – no viable suspect
- Vandalism and graffiti less than $1,000 damage
- Obscene or annoying phone calls – no threats made
- Lost or stolen property – exceptions are prescription drugs, firearms, explosives, police credentials or potential evidence available.
- Traffic complaints
- Bicycle thefts

Again, if a caller requests or demands an officer respond, the agency sends an officer in person to take the report.

Recommendations

I don't feel my external surveys yielded any useful results to my agency when thinking of implementing a new program to help alleviate non-emergency calls for service. This was rather disappointing as I had hoped to learn something new and innovative. It actually made me realize that at TPD we're doing a lot of good things for our citizens already, but maybe we can improve our current processes.

I would increase our Teleserve Unit adding an additional three civilian members. With four members in the unit they could easily handle non-emergency calls for service for those callers not requesting an officer, as well as the taxi and vehicle for hire permitting. The unit would work two shifts, 7a-3p and 12p-8p. This allows for a three hour overlap for lunch breaks and the morning shift members to stop taking calls at 2pm in order to finish their reports from the day. At 8pm the Duty Officer can continue to take walk-ins and phone reports as they do now. When officers are on light duty/limited duty due to injuries, surgeries, administrative issues, etc., they could be assigned to this unit to assist with non-emergency callers and walk-ins to the department.

Another recommendation would be to add an additional CopLogic kiosk in the department lobby. This may actually be more cost effective in the long run than hiring additional employees, although with our agency being very customer service oriented, this may not be the best answer. Being able to speak with an actual person is much better received, especially with those citizens who are upset, feel violated, or frustrated over their situation.

Although there is no perfect solution to alleviating non-emergency calls for police services, there are alternatives to assisting our patrol officers on the street and freeing them from being bogged down with reports in order to concentrate on proactive police work. That proactivity may not always be arresting people and putting bad guys in jail, but also making those important contacts with residents and business owners in our community. It's important to establish long-lasting relationships between all interested parties, the police and the citizens, who only want our city to be a safer place to live, work, and play.

Lieutenant Rhonda Scott has been in law enforcement since 1989 serving the Tallahassee Police Department. She has been a Public Information Officer, Field Training Officer, DARE Officer, and Crime Prevention Officer before being promoted to Sergeant in 2004. As a Sergeant she supervised a patrol shift, the Crime Prevention Unit, and was an Administrative Patrol Sergeant. In 2010, she was promoted to Lieutenant. During this time she was a Patrol Watch Commander, Assistant Patrol Sector Commander, and is currently the Communications Liaison. Lieutenant Scott has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions – Internal

1. What is your current rank? (Circle one)
   a. Officer
   b. Sergeant
   c. Lieutenant
   d. Captain or above
   e. Civilian

2. What are your current years of service in law enforcement?
   a. 0-4 years
   b. 5-10 years
   c. 11-20 years
   d. 21 years or more

3. What area of the department are you currently assigned?
   a. Patrol
   b. Criminal Investigations
   c. Special Operations
   d. Training and Development
   e. Other

4. Does your current position require you to respond to calls for service and/or write offense reports (including supplements) for those calls?
   a. Yes
   b. No   (Go to question 7)

5. If you selected "Yes" in the previous question, please indicate what type of calls you respond to:
   a. Emergency calls only
   b. Non-emergency calls,   i.e. delayed calls, civil issues, financial crimes, quality of life issues
   c. Both

6. If you respond to or write reports for non-emergency calls for service throughout your work day, what percentage of your shift do you feel these type calls demand?
   a. 0-20%
   b. 21-40%
   c. 41-60%
   d. 61-80%
   e. 81% or more

7. Do you feel TPD provides sufficient alternatives for reporting non-emergency calls for service rather than sending an officer to these type calls?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. If you have experience with how other law enforcement agencies respond to non-emergency calls for service rather than sending an officer in person, please indicate below:
   (Circle all that apply)
   a. 311 non-emergency reporting system
   b. Skype reporting
   c. CopLogic
   d. Online self-reporting
   e. Walk-ins
   f. Civilian report takers
   Please add any other alternatives not listed above:

   _____

   _____

9. Do you feel there are non-emergency calls for service TPD should not respond to at all?
   a. Yes
   b. No (Go to question 11)

10. If you selected "yes" in the previous question, what type non-emergency calls should TPD no longer respond to?
    (Circle all that apply):
    a. Gas skips/Retail Theft – no suspect information
    b. Delayed burglaries – no evidence or suspect information
    c. Alarms with history of false activations
    d. ID theft/Financial crimes – no suspect on-scene
    e. Quality of life issues – non-police related
    f. Animal calls – non-threatening, no injury
    g. Other:_____

11. Please provide any other comments, thoughts, ideas that may be helpful to my research.

    _____

    _____

Appendix B

Survey Questions – External

1. What is your current rank? (Circle one)

    f. Officer
    g. Sergeant
    h. Lieutenant
    i. Captain or above
    j. Civilian

2. What are your current years of service in law enforcement?
    a. 0-4 years
    b. 5-10 years
    c. 11-20 years
    d. 21 years or more

3. What shifts do your Patrol officers work?
    a. 8 hour shift
    b. 10 hour shift
    c. 12 hour shift
    d. Combination of the above

4. How many sworn members does your agency currently have working in the Patrol Division (please include all ranks)?
    a. Less than 50
    b. 51-100
    c. 101-150
    d. 151-200
    e. 201-250
    f. More than 250

5. Does your current position require you to respond to calls for service and/or write offense reports (including supplements)?
    a. Yes
    b. No (Go to question 7)

6. If you answered "Yes" to question 5 above, please indicate the type calls you respond to.
    a. Emergency calls only
    b. Non-emergency calls, i.e. delayed calls, civil issues, financial crimes, quality of life issues
    c. Both type calls

7. If you respond to or write reports for non-emergency calls for service throughout your work day, what percentage of your shift/work hours do you feel these type calls demand?   **If you do not respond or write reports for non-emergency calls, please go to question 8 now?**
    a. 0-20%
    b. 21-40%
    c. 41-60%
    d. 61-80%
    e. 81% or more

8.   What alternatives does your agency offer to citizens rather than sending an officer to all non-emergency calls for service?   (Circle all that apply)
    a. 311 non-emergency reporting system
    b. Skype reporting
    c. CopLogic
    d. Online self-reporting
    e. Walk-ins
    f. Civilian report takers
    g. Others_____
       _____

9. Are there non-emergency type calls for service your agency does not respond to at all?
    a. Yes
    b. No (Go to question 11)

10. If you answered "Yes" to question 9, what type non-emergency calls does your department not respond to (circle all that apply):
    a. Gas skips/Retail Theft – no suspect information
    b. Delayed burglaries – no evidence or suspect information
    c. Alarms with history of false activations
    d. ID theft/Financial crimes – no suspect on-scene
    e. Quality of life issues – non-police related
    f. Animal calls – non-threatening, no injury
    g. Other:_____

11. Please provide any other comments, thoughts, ideas that may be helpful to my research.
    _____