



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

DECEMBER 1, 2022

Audit Follow-up on Sex Offense Case Investigations and Outcomes

The Prosecuting Attorney's Office (PAO) has completed one recommendation and made key progress on its two remaining recommendations to improve its response to sex offense cases and to meet the needs of victims. The PAO is also using data on case timeliness to help identify areas where additional staffing may help alleviate caseloads and to ensure victims are being helped earlier. The PAO has partnered with the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC) to start the process of providing the agency with information about new sex offense cases more efficiently. By doing so, KCSARC victim advocates can more quickly connect with victims on these cases to ensure they receive proper advocacy and support throughout their case process. The PAO is continuing to take significant strides to ensure that victim and defendant race data is collected accurately and sensitively. To learn and apply best practices and to properly train PAO employees on how to collect demographics accurately and sensitively, the PAO is partnering with the United Indian Health Institute. And a pilot program has been set up to identify best ways to gather self-reported race data.

In the last follow-up, the Sheriff's Office completed six of its nine audit recommendations. For the remaining recommendations, the Sheriff's Office has begun to develop and articulate case triage criteria that it is informally applying when responding to sex offenses cases. The Sheriff's Office has indicated that there are many factors it considers when triaging cases. This is primarily done informally and relies on the professional judgment of individual staff. Documenting triage criteria could support consistency and efficiency of Sheriff's Office Special Assault Unit's (SAU) case management decision-making. This could help the unit use its limited resources effectively and help provide information that Sheriff's Office leaders can use to make informed decisions about resource allocation and budget requests for additional staffing, when needed.

By fully implementing the remaining recommendations, PAO and the Sheriff's Office can ensure that sex offense victims receive key resources and cases are prioritized consistently and equitably.

Of the 12 audit recommendations:

	7 DONE		4 PROGRESS		1 OPEN
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.		Partially implemented Auditor will continue to monitor.		Remain unresolved Auditor will continue to monitor.	

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.



Recommendation 1	On August 2, 2021	DONE	
Recommendation 2	On August 2, 2021	DONE	
Recommendation 3	On August 2, 2021	DONE	
Recommendation 4	On August 2, 2021	DONE	
Recommendation 5		DONE	

The King County Sheriff’s Office should ensure training officers and sergeants receive training on the new sex offense checklist (Recommendation 4) and handout (Recommendation 1).

STATUS UPDATE: The Sheriff’s Office currently provides annual training to sergeants on how to appropriately respond to sex offense cases. In 2021, SAU leaders developed an additional annual training on the victim resources handout developed in response to Recommendation 1. The victim resources handout includes resource information for victims and survivors of sexual assault. In 2022, SAU leaders integrated the Patrol Sexual Assault Investigations worksheet/checklist into the online sexual assault investigations annual training. Officers must complete this training by the end of 2022.

IMPACT: By completing this recommendation, SAU leaders have helped ensure that patrol officers remember all the key procedures for a sex offense response. Patrol officers are often the victim's first point-of-contact with law enforcement, and the experience can influence their willingness to continue participating in an investigation. Training on the worksheet/checklist can help patrol officers remember procedures and avoid mistakes that could significantly impact the ability of the prosecutor to prove a case.

Recommendation 6	PROGRESS	
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The King County Sheriff’s Office should develop and implement a process to ensure detectives refer victims to advocacy services in all sex offense cases.

STATUS UPDATE: SAU sergeants require detectives to include information about advocacy services on their reports, which now, at the top of each report, include a checkbox to indicate whether an advocacy referral was made. Sergeants also require detectives to include this information so that, in cases where referrals are not made, sergeants can follow-up with detectives to learn why and ensure referrals are happening in all cases. This requirement is not yet documented in standard operating procedures.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the requirement to provide advocacy services in all sex offense cases must be documented in SAU standard operating procedures. Completion of this recommendation will help detectives and their supervisors ensure that all victims are connected with advocacy services. Resources, like connection with a victim advocate, can help support a victim and build trust throughout the process. Victims with advocates may be more likely to continue through the potentially traumatic criminal justice system. Regardless of case outcomes, victim services can help victims recover from the crime in other ways.

Recommendation 7

On August 2, 2021

DONE



Recommendation 8

PROGRESS



The Prosecuting Attorney's Office should provide all victims whose cases are referred to its office with information on advocacy and other resources at the time it receives a sex offense case referral.

STATUS UPDATE: The PAO has worked collaboratively with KCSARC to establish a process to ensure victims are connected with advocacy services early in their case. The PAO granted KCSARC access to PAO's Power BI Dashboard which allows KCSARC to show new referrals received from the SAU in real time. This way, KCSARC can follow-up with victims based on this information. KCSARC indicated there is still some work remaining to ensure it can easily identify new case referrals under this new process.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, PAO should continue to work with KCSARC to ensure it can easily identify new sex offense referrals in PAO's Power BI Dashboard. Completing this recommendation will help ensure victims are connected to services quickly and early in the case process.

Recommendation 9

PROGRESS



The King County Sheriff's Office Special Assault Unit should develop and document criteria for how they triage case investigations.

STATUS UPDATE: The Sheriff's Office indicated that there are many factors it considers when triaging cases. Currently, SAU detectives informally apply triage criteria to decide which cases to prioritize and primarily relies on the professional judgment of individual staff. For example, SAU staff indicated that it, generally, will often prioritize cases involving children, or cases that are more recently reported.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the Sheriff's Office needs to document criteria for how it triages case investigations. At the time of the audit, SAU leaders said documenting case triage would be helpful for communicating to leadership how they prioritize limited resources. Completion of this recommendation could improve the consistency and efficiency of the SAU's case management decision-making. This could help ensure that the unit is using its limited resources as effectively and equitably as possible.

Recommendation 10

OPEN



The King County Sheriff's Office Special Assault Unit should communicate to Sheriff's Office leadership how it triages its resources and associated impacts on case investigations.

STATUS UPDATE: This recommendation is contingent upon completing Recommendation 9, which remains in progress.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, SAU needs to complete Recommendation 9 and communicate triage decisions to leadership. At the time of the audit, SAU leaders said documenting case triage would be helpful for communicating to leadership how they prioritize limited resources. Completion of this recommendation will increase transparency about the impacts of the SAU's limited resources on cases and victims. This information can help the Sheriff's Office make informed decisions about resource allocation and budget requests.

Recommendation 11

DONE



The Prosecuting Attorney's Office should develop and use case filing timeliness metrics to assess its effectiveness, including whether the strategy of using additional case filing staff is successfully reducing case backlog.

STATUS UPDATE: The PAO has a data dashboard to track the number of cases it has under review. It also develops reports to show detailed breakdowns of individual attorney workloads. The PAO indicated that this helps the agency reallocate resources as needed in an effort to minimize backlogs and to reach its goal of reviewing every case within 60 days of receipt. To help do this, the PAO SAU meets with criminal division leadership monthly to discuss the backlog and resource needs.

IMPACT: By completing this recommendation, the PAO will be better able to identify areas where additional staffing may help alleviate caseloads. Addressing backlogs and ensuring cases are processed efficiently will help ensure victims are being helped as early as possible.

Recommendation 12

PROGRESS



The Prosecuting Attorney's Office should collect and track demographic data about defendants and victims, use the information to assess outcomes, and develop plans to respond to any identified disparities.

STATUS UPDATE: The PAO case management system has been updated to allow for accurate recording of self-identified race/ethnicity information, as recommended by the Urban Indian Health Institute. The Institute is working to set up appropriate training for PAO employees on how to collect demographic information and is working on a victim services portal that would allow victims to report their information as well. The PAO has also set up a pilot, partnering with social workers who interact with defendants of King County in relation to the County's incarceration alternative programs. As a pilot, these social workers have begun collecting self-identified

information as part of their intake process for those alternative programs. The PAO indicated that this pilot will help inform its strategy on how its staff will properly collect this data in the future.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the PAO will need to finalize how to track victim and defendant race and gender data most appropriately and begin tracking it in its systems. In addition, the PAO will need to use this data to analyze any identified disparities and develop a plan to help address them. Completion of this recommendation will help the PAO identify potential outcome inequities and identify strategies to mitigate them. This can lead to more equitable outcomes for victims and defendants and help address systemic biases in the legal system.

Anu Sidhu conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov.