

Office of the Mayor Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

Mayor Durkan, Chief Best Announce Plan to Relaunch Seattle’s Community Service Officer Program, Hire 12 Officers and Supervisors to Help Residents Navigate Services Like Emergency Shelter, Engage with Communities, and Support Youth-Focused Programming

April 17, 2019 by [Kamaria Hightower](#)

Program Non-Sworn Officers Will Help Connect Residents Involved in Non-Criminal Calls with Services Like Housing, Transportation, Food, and Support for the Elderly

SEATTLE (April 17, 2019) – After extensive input from community, Mayor Jenny A. Durkan and Chief of Police Carmen Best announced the City of Seattle will relaunch its Community Service Officer Program and the Seattle Police Department will hire 12 new Community Services Officers (CSOs), including two supervisors, to help residents and businesses involved in non-criminal calls navigate services, engage with communities and neighborhoods, and support programming for at-risk youth.

The CSO program previously operated for 33 years, until 2004, when it was discontinued due to budget limitations. In the 2017-18 Biennial Budget, the Seattle City Council set aside funding for Community Service Officer (CSO) program development in 2017 and initial implementation in the second quarter of 2018. Mayor Durkan’s [2018 budget](#) provided the resources needed to implement a new CSO Program under the vision of Chief Best.

“We must continue to build trust between communities and the Seattle Police Department, and we must constantly renew our City’s commitment to true community-based policing,” said Mayor Durkan. “Relaunching our Community Service Officers Program reflects our promise to make Seattle a safer, more inclusive place for all. With these new Community Service Officers and under Chief Best’s leadership, we can do more to connect residents with the services they need, engage with communities and neighborhoods, and support at-risk youth. I thank the City Council for being stalwart supporters of that program and helping make sure we had these resources.”

“The Community Service Officer program has a rich history within our department and our community,” said Chief Carmen Best. “I am pleased that this program is being restored and will once again support our police officers in their work to promote public safety in our neighborhoods.”

“I am excited for the Seattle Police Department to roll out this critical public safety program that will provide a helpful resource to both the community and our police officers,” said [Councilmember M. Lorena González](#) (Position 9, Citywide). “The Seattle City Council has championed the [revival](#) of the CSO Unit since 2016, and I believe the program’s renewal will allow Seattleites to receive additional public safety

services by these community-based service officers, while sworn officers gain additional capacity to focus on crime prevention and investigations.”

“When I initiated the effort to reestablish the CSO program, it was because I heard from my constituents that they want a better public safety response in their community, but understood police departments have challenging jobs and are stretched,” said [Councilmember Mike O’Brien](#) (District 6, Northwest Seattle). “These civilian law enforcement representatives will have a people-centered approach to their work, with an emphasis on building community trust, assisting vulnerable populations, crime prevention, and social services in a cost-effective way.”

“Bringing back Community Service Officers will be a valuable addition to policing in Seattle, especially in the Southwest Precinct, where a [top community concern](#) is police capacity,” said [Councilmember Lisa Herbold](#) (District 1, West Seattle and South Park). “I was proud to co-sponsor legislation to bring back CSOs. These unsworn officers can prioritize non-emergency community services associated with law enforcement, freeing up police officers to better respond to 911 calls. Given the challenges Seattle and other large cities face in hiring new officers, bringing back the CSO program is an important step.”

SPD’s Community Service Officer Unit will be staffed by non-commissioned officers who are trained and work as liaison personnel between the community and the SPD, and support SPD’s community-oriented policing strategies. CSOs respond to and address public safety concerns that do not immediately require a police officer or other agency response. CSOs do not carry weapons or enforce criminal laws but will work to bridge the gap between non-criminal service calls and a variety of public safety-related community service and outreach work throughout Seattle’s communities.

To help determine the focus and meet the needs of the communities serviced, SPD in partnership with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), engaged community-based organizations in the process, hosting more than 30 meetings throughout the city. SPD will conduct additional community engagement over the coming months with stakeholders to obtain additional feedback before the City begins the hiring process for the CSO roles.

Community Service Officers will engage residents and businesses across the City and SPD is working with the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) to develop a comprehensive outreach strategy to recruit a diverse applicant pool that is representative of Seattle’s diverse communities. The SPD seeks to fill the open CSO positions with individuals from demographic groups currently underrepresented in the Police department, including elders, immigrants, and individuals with past involvement in the criminal justice system.

The City’s new CSOs have three key responsibilities:

Help Residents Navigate Services: The officers will respond to non-criminal calls that do not require the enforcement authority of a sworn police officer. They will evaluate the needs of residents, including people experiencing homelessness, at-risk youth, individuals struggling with substance use disorder, and the elderly. They will also connect people with available City services and programs like diversion opportunities,

youth programming, emergency services (e.g., housing, food or other), elder services, and behavioral health services. They will also help mediate conflict, such as family, landlord/tenant and neighbor disputes, investigate the cause and identify solutions or refer parties to appropriate services (e.g., counseling or legal assistance).

Engaging with Communities and Neighborhoods: CSOs will help develop and execute outreach plans and maintain relationships with community partners and cultivate new partnerships. They will prepare outreach materials, including but not limited to brochures, pamphlets or other written and web-based materials, attend relevant community events and meetings, and coordinate special events, projects or activities.

Support Programming for At-Risk Youth: CSOs will help develop youth-focused programming, facilitate opportunities for youth to interact with SPD Police Officers, and build and maintain relationships with community-based youth organizations and service providers. They will also provide service referrals for youth and their families, and attend SPD, school and community-hosted events and activities.

When hired, the City's CSOs work assigned areas of the City on foot or in marked CSO vehicles, responding to radio dispatched calls for service. CSOs may assist with mediating non-violent disputes (for example, family, neighborhood, and landlord/tenant) and provide follow-up on calls for non-criminal emergency services. They will work closely with dispatchers, police officers, parking enforcement officers, crime prevention personnel and various social service agencies to coordinate police and social services and exchange information.