

What's the Deal with PERA?: A brief explainer on the org that's taken local news by storm



You may have heard the acronym PERA thrown around quite a bit in the news lately, but unless you've been paying incredibly close attention, you may be wondering: What on Earth is PERA? Let's take a closer look at the Providence External Review Authority.

What Is the Providence External Review Authority?

The Providence External Review Authority (PERA) is a civilian group established in 2002 to oversee the Providence Police Department.

What Is the Purpose of PERA?

PERA conducts outreach, reviews police procedures and investigates allegations of police misconduct.

Direct from the ordinance (the city council law that created the organization), PERA shall:

"...create and implement community outreach programs, review policies and procedures of the Providence Police Department, and review allegations of misconduct on the part of sworn officers of the city police department, including investigating the same, conducting hearings and making findings of fact with respect to those allegations."

What Kinds of Misconduct Does PERA Investigate?

Allegations specifically mentioned and defined in the ordinance include discrimination, harassment, inappropriate language or conduct, theft, or use of excessive force, though it is not limited to these.

This is how the ordinance defines each of these allegations, paraphrased for readability:

- Discrimination is bias on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual or gender orientation, disability, age, gender or economic status.
- Harassment is threats, demands or repeated (verbal or physical) annoyances or abuse.
- Inappropriate language or conduct is harsh, violent, profane or derogatory verbal or nonverbal language or action, including profanity, racial, ethnic, sexist or racial slurs.
- Theft is the taking of any thing of value without the consent of the rightful owner and with the intent to keep it from them.
- Excessive force is the use of greater force than reasonably necessary to repel an attacker or terminate resistance, but it does not include force that is necessary to enforce the law.

Who Makes Up PERA's Board?

PERA's board has nine members: one is appointed by the mayor, one by the president of the Providence City Council and the rest by most of the members of the Providence City Council. There also is a specific note that says no more than two former police officers can be on the board, and neither active law enforcement officers nor their immediate family may serve on the board.

What Are PERA's Shortcomings?

In the wake of the Sergeant Hanley incident and the nationally covered Jhamal Gonsalves police-moped collision, in addition to the myriad incidents of police brutality across the United States this year, PERA has advocated for a larger role in these very public investigations.

The authority, however, has many roadblocks in its way: budget constraints and lack of proper investigative tools to properly conduct independent civilian oversight being chief among them.

In its Summer 2020 Bi-Annual Report, PERA outlined nine recommendations “as a means to immediately and substantively address the demand for justice and reform facing Providence.” Within these, PERA asks that city leaders endorse a civilian review of Providence Police Department’s use of force policies, requires that PERA is informed of every misconduct complaint against the department, and requires police officers who witness excessive force to intervene or face disciplinary action.

Read all of the recommendations on page 9 of the report.

Can I Submit a Complain About the Police to PERA?

You may file a complaint with PERA if you are a victim or witness to police misconduct, or if you are a parent, legal guardian or immediate family member to a victim of police misconduct.

Read PERA’s complete Complaint Intake and Review Procedures [here](#).

Submit a complaint to PERA [here](#).

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