



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

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CITIZENS COMPLAINED MORE THAN 26,000 TIMES IN 2002 ABOUT EXCESSIVE POLICE FORCE

EVIDENCE IN ABOUT 8% OF COMPLAINTS JUSTIFIED DISCIPLINARY ACTION

WASHINGTON — Large state and local law enforcement agencies with 59 percent of the nation's sworn officers received 26,556 citizen complaints about the police use of force during 2002, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. The rate was 6.6 complaints per 100 full-time sworn officers. Eighty-four percent were made against large municipal departments, BJS said.

About eight percent of the complaints were officially sustained, that is, there was sufficient evidence to justify disciplinary action against the officer or officers; 34 percent were not sustained; 25 percent were unfounded, meaning the complaint was not supported by facts or the alleged incident did not occur; 23 percent ended in exonerations because the police actions were lawful and proper and nine percent ended in other dispositions, such as complaint withdrawal, etc.

The percentage of officially sustained complaints ranged from six percent among county police departments to 12 percent among sheriffs' offices. However, the BJS report said, caution must be exercised when interpreting complaint data inasmuch as volumes, rates and dispositions may well vary by agency characteristics, such as the size and type of the agency as well as the policies and procedures related to the handling of complaints.

Approximately 19 percent of large municipal police departments had a civilian complaint review board or agency within their jurisdictions.

The report, "Citizen Complaints About Police Use of Force" (NCJ-210296), was written by BJS statistician Matthew Hickman. Following publication, the report can be found at:
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ccpuf.htm

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics statistical reports programs, please visit the BJS Web site at: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

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