



DENVER AUDITOR
TIMOTHY M. O'BRIEN, CPA

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Police officer understaffing will remain without improved strategies

DENVER – Opportunities for improvement persist for the Denver Police Department regarding officer retention, strategic planning, and community policing according to a follow-up report on a 2023 audit from Denver Auditor Timothy M. O'Brien, CPA.

“By not following best practices for retention, Denver limits itself in keeping quality officers. An understaffed department impacts officer morale, 911 call response times, and community perception,” Auditor O'Brien said.

Our original audit of police operations and staffing included 16 recommendations. The Denver Police Department agreed to implement all recommendations. In our follow-up report, we found the department fully implemented five recommendations, partially implemented four, and did not implement seven recommendations.

The Denver Police department should review and update its existing recruitment program to align with leading practices. It developed three broad recruiting goals with objectives, but we found the goals lacked specific information like how the objectives would be measured and the timeline for meeting each goal. Department leaders said they intend to rewrite the recruitment program plan to include specific measurements.

The department has not yet developed and implemented processes to identify the primary causes for low retention. To understand how to retain officers, the department needs to know why staff choose to leave. When the city contracted with a vendor to administer its citywide exit survey in 2023, the police department response significantly increased from 6.25% to 61%. Despite this improvement, the department has no policies around reviewing and analyzing surveys for trends that could improve retention.

The Denver Police Department did fully implement our recommendation to develop, document, and implement diversity goals. It created a standalone “Racial Equity Action Plan.” A committee meets every two weeks to work on strategies to achieve these goals. In 2024, 16.11% of applicants identified as Black or African American, exceeding Denver’s Black or African American 2023 population of 8.9%.

“Progress has been made to keep officers in Denver,” said Auditor O’Brien. “It’s good to see the department move toward better diversity practices, but there’s more work to be done.”

The department created a “Community Policing Engagement Plan,” but we found it did not meet most of the elements from our original audit recommendation to develop a community policing strategic plan, nor did the department demonstrate this plan had been effectively communicated to all relevant officers, staff, or external stakeholders.

We recommended Denver Police conduct a survey of Denver residents to gauge their perception of the department. A survey in late 2023 concluded with 6,341 responses; 3,157 of them included written comment. The results led to the department creating a program where local businesses can request an officer visit and discuss crime, crime prevention, and safety.

“Receiving public comments and then responding with a new program where officers are meeting face-to-face with the people they serve is significant for building trust,” Auditor O’Brien said. “It shows that Denver police listen to public feedback.”

Building strong relationships with neighborhood businesses and community organizations can help heal relationships between Denver Police officers and the people they serve. Without a comprehensive strategy, however, the police department’s efforts will remain siloed across the city. And without overall strategic guidance and better recruitment and retention efforts, the Denver Police Department will remain understaffed – which could put officers’ safety, health, and wellness at risk as well as risk community members’ safety.

[Read the Follow-Up Report](#)
[Read the Audit](#)

You can find more information about the Auditor and recent audits [on our website](#).

About the Auditor’s Office

Denver’s Auditor is publicly elected and answers to the voters. The role of the Auditor is to help minimize risks, improve internal controls, maximize efficiencies, and strengthen accountability.

About Auditor O’Brien

Denver Auditor Timothy M. O’Brien, CPA, has more than 40 years of auditing and accounting [experience](#). Auditor O’Brien strives to bring greater clarity, transparency, and accountability to Denver’s city government for its residents. Elected in 2015 – and reelected in 2019 and 2023 – Timothy O’Brien is distinguished from his predecessors as a professional auditor.

Auditor O’Brien and his office have won many national awards for their work, including seven Knighton Awards from the [Association of Local Government Auditors](#):

- 2023 Knighton Distinguished Award — “[Homeless Encampments](#)”
- 2022 Knighton Exemplary Award — “[Residential Trash, Recycling, and Compost Services](#)”
- 2021 Knighton Distinguished Award — “[Airport Parking Shuttle System](#)”
- 2020 Knighton Exemplary Award — “[Neighborhood Sidewalk Repair Program](#)”
- 2019 Knighton Distinguished Award — “[Denver Preschool Program](#)”
- 2018 Knighton Distinguished Award — “[Affordable Housing](#)”
- 2015 Knighton Exemplary Award — “[Rocky Mountain Human Services](#)”

Auditor O’Brien also received the [David M. Walker Excellence in Government Accountability Award](#) in 2022 from the National Intergovernmental Audit Forum and the [ADA Access Award](#) from the Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition in 2018 for his work on behalf of people with disabilities. Auditor O’Brien received the [2017 Outstanding CPA in Government Impact Award](#) from the [American Institute of CPAs](#). He was honored with the [2016 Jonathan Holtzinger Award of Excellence](#) by the Colorado Chartered Financial Analyst Society for demonstrating the highest standards as a financial and investment professional.

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