BUSINESS CARDS REVISITED: IMPROVING IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR MPD OFFICERS

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE

POLICE COMPLAINTS BOARD

TO

MAYOR MURIEL BOWSER,
THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AND CHIEF OF POLICE CATHY L. LANIER

May 20, 2015

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I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Since April 2005, the Office of Police Complaints (OPC) has had the authority to handle citizen complaints alleging that Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers failed to identify themselves when asked to do so. The enhanced jurisdiction was created by the First Amendment Rights and Police Standards Act of 2004 (Police Standards Act), enacted to address police misconduct during mass protests and First Amendment assemblies. In addition to expanding OPC’s jurisdiction and establishing heightened identification requirements for MPD officers during public demonstrations, the Police Standards Act reaffirmed general officer identification requirements.

Less than two years after the law’s enactment, OPC’s governing body, the Police Complaints Board (PCB), issued a report and set of recommendations entitled “Business Cards for MPD Officers.” In the report, PCB noted that after the Police Standards Act had taken effect, the agency had received complaints that MPD officers refused to identify themselves upon request, as well as complaints where officers attempted to identify themselves but the information was not successfully conveyed to the person because of illegible handwriting, the individual’s lack of paper or a pen, or for other reasons. To address these types of complaints, PCB suggested in its policy recommendation that MPD provide business cards to all of its officers. MPD adopted PCB’s proposal to furnish officers with business cards, but identifying officer information was not preprinted on the cards and their use was deemed optional.

In the eight and-a-half years after the issuance of the 2006 recommendation, OPC received nearly 400 complaints and inquiries alleging that MPD officers failed to identify themselves in some way. Forty-seven percent of the complaints and inquiries received contained an allegation that an officer outright refused to identify himself or herself. Four percent of complaints contained allegations that officers referred complainants to an illegible ticket or report. Eight percent of complaints received alleged that the officer retaliated against them by either writing them a ticket or arresting them after they requested the officer’s information. In seven percent of the complaints, the individuals to whom the subject officers failed to identify themselves were either alleged crime victims, witnesses to crime, or bystanders wishing to provide aid to injured persons. In some cases, people were so frustrated by their interactions with officers that they expressed reluctance to cooperate with law enforcement in the future. A sampling of the complaints received by OPC is included as an appendix to this policy recommendation.

Providing proper identification when requested improves trust and communication and facilitates better community relations. MPD General Order 201.26 recognizes this explicitly,

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3 See Appendix A, Metropolitan Police Department business card template.
4 In drafting this policy recommendation, OPC examined 375 failure-to-identify complaints and inquiries received by the agency from July 25, 2006, to December 31, 2014. Complaints are allegations against sworn officers that are detailed on an OPC complaint form and signed by members of the public. Inquiries are allegations made by people who then do not submit a signed, formal OPC complaint. One hundred and fifteen of the 375 complaints that OPC received during the above-referenced time period are classified as inquiries.
5 See Appendix B, Complaints Received by OPC.
stating that public cooperation with MPD “is dependent upon its respect for, and confidence in, the MPD and its members.” Proper officer identification is also crucial to MPD’s and OPC’s complaint investigation functions. Officers who refuse to provide identifying information stymie the investigation of citizen complaints, and their actions may lead to serious acts of misconduct being unaddressed. Accordingly, PCB recommends that MPD issue a revised directive to its force reiterating the Department’s stance on officer identification and requiring officers to verbally state their first name, last name, badge number, or provide a Department-issued business card upon a citizen’s request for officers to identify themselves. The directive should stress that officers must provide Department-issued business cards if individuals request them, and cannot refer people to a ticket or report. PCB also recommends that MPD create and conduct recruit and in-service trainings to supplement the policy. Finally, to assist officers in carrying out the directive’s requirements, PCB renews its call for MPD to provide officers with uniform preprinted business cards. These cards should include, at a minimum, the officer’s name, badge number, e-mail address, and Department website. 

II. RELEVANT LAW AND MPD POLICY

The Police Standards Act of 2004, which became effective on April 13, 2005, statutorily created identification requirements for MPD officers. Section 321 of the act, codified at D.C. Code § 5-337.01 (2015), states:

Every member of the Metropolitan Police Department (“MPD”), while in uniform, shall wear or display the nameplate and badge issued by the MPD, or the equivalent identification issued by the MPD, and shall not alter or cover the identifying information or otherwise prevent or hinder a member of the public from reading the information.

The Police Standards Act also granted OPC the authority to receive and resolve citizen complaints alleging an officer’s “[f]ailure to wear or display required identification or to identify oneself by name and badge number when requested to do so by a member of the public.” The legislation granted this additional authority to OPC so that the agency could enforce the new requirements placed upon MPD.

In addition to District law, MPD policy also contains identification requirements for officers. MPD General Order 201.26, “Duties, Responsibilities and Conduct of Members of the
Department,” mandates that “[w]hen requested to do so, members shall give their first and last name and badge numbers in a respectful and polite manner.”

III. POLICY CONCERNS

There are two main reasons why officers should identify themselves when requested by members of the public to do so. First, it promotes congenial interactions with the public and fosters trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the communities it serves. In contrast, failing to provide this information disempowers residents, and may leave individuals who are interacting with officers with the impression that officers are trying to evade responsibility for improper actions.

Second, officer identification improves police accountability by working to ensure that officers engaging in possible misconduct are identified, reported, and investigated. According to MPD’s 2009 Annual Report -- the earliest annual report on MPD’s website that contained citizen complaint data -- the Department received only two failure-to-identify allegations that year. In subsequent annual reports, MPD reported that it received zero failure-to-identify complaints in 2010, one failure-to-identify complaint in 2011, and zero failure-to-identify complaints in 2012 and 2013. MPD, however, was unable to identify the gender of the subject officer in 24% of complaints received in 2009, 3% of complaints received in 2010, 18% of complaints received in 2011, 10% of complaints received in 2012, and 19% of complaints received in 2013. Given that MPD was unable to identify the subject officer’s gender in a significant number of complaints received from 2009 to 2013, it appears that the officers in those cases remained completely unknown.

MPD’s decision to allow officers to create and voluntarily provide business cards to individuals is a significant step in the right direction. The measure, however, does not go far enough. The business card template MPD provided to OPC in 2006 does not appear to be used by MPD officers, who design their own cards. The cards officers create vary widely in color, font, use and placement of Departmental insignias, and inclusion of detailed contact information, making it unclear to citizens whether the cards are actually issued by an MPD officer or someone impersonating an officer. Additionally, there is no indication that the cards created are being reviewed and approved by MPD command staff. Two of the cards received by OPC from the same officer appeared particularly inappropriate. One card features a “skull and crossbones” logo with two firearms in place of the crossbones. A ribbon surrounding the firearms states, “Veneratio, Officium, Silentium,” which is Latin for “Respect, Duty, Silence.” The back of the card has the “Go to Jail” and “Get out of Jail Free” trademarks from a well-known board game. The second card also features the “skull and crossbones” logo, with knives in place of the crossbones and a cobra on the top of the skull. The back of the second card contains a biblical quote that reads, “The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are as bold as a

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9 MPD General Order 201.26 (effective April 5, 2011), Part V.C.I.e.
11 See Appendix C for examples of business cards created by MPD officers.
12 See Appendix D.
lion.” The lack of uniformity and questionable character of some of the business cards received makes it appear, at best, that MPD sanctions those kinds of cards, and at worst, could foster skepticism, fear, and mistrust of officers.

Requiring officers to print and design their own business cards may also create dissatisfaction and low morale among the rank-and-file members of the Department. Online estimated costs for a set of 500 business cards are as low as $9.99 for standard-issue personalized business cards. As of February 2014, MPD had 3,999 sworn employees. Therefore, it would likely cost the Department a minimum of $39,950 each year to provide officers with one set of business cards. Although such costs may seem significant, in fiscal year 2014, MPD had an approved budget of approximately 500 million.

The cost of business cards could vary significantly, however, depending on the type of card MPD decides to issue to its officers. The Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) provides their patrol officers with cards that contain only the Philadelphia Police logo, website, and social media information on which the officers can write their name and the report number. Lieutenants and higher-ranking personnel are provided personalized business cards. Personalized business cards without a gold seal cost the department $20 for 500 cards and those with a gold seal cost $35 for 500 cards. In Seattle, Washington, each police precinct prints and provides to its patrol officers cards that contain the contact information for that precinct as well as the Department’s website, but the cards do not contain any specific officer information. Detectives and higher-ranking personnel can make a special request for personalized business cards which are provided by the department. Seattle pays approximately $75 for a set of 500 personalized business cards, but receives a vendor discount for multiple orders.

In addition to officer identification, MPD could use preprinted business cards as a platform for social media and its own messaging. For example, along with the inclusion of its website address on the cards, the Department could add links to its Facebook and Twitter pages. The Department could also add messaging related to its core functions on the back of the cards, such as information regarding crime prevention tips, sexual assault reporting, or the District’s recently-enacted marijuana possession law. Thinking creatively, preprinted business cards can be an important community relations tool used by MPD to disseminate helpful information to the public. The cards should be printed, however, at the expense of the Department, not the officer. As public servants, and as part of their job duties, MPD officers closely interact with community members on a daily basis. It thus seems inequitable to require officers to shoulder the costs of providing something which is directly related to, and an integral part of, their enforcement responsibilities.

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14 Of course, due to their frequent interactions with the public, most officers would need more than one set of business cards a year.
IV. BEST PRACTICES

Enhanced officer identification is not a novel concept among law enforcement agencies. This section examines the identification requirements of police departments serving the following large metropolitan areas: New York City, New York; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington. The policies and practices of these three jurisdictions can prove instructive to MPD when re-examining its own procedures.

New York City, NY

Procedure 203-09 of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) Patrol Guide used to require NYPD officers to only “give name and shield number to anyone requesting them.” New York City administrative tribunals interpreting the patrol guide provision had determined that the directive mandated that officers provide an “affirmative response” to anyone requesting their name and badge number. In 2003, the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) conducted an analysis of failure-to-identify complaints lodged against the New York City Police Department (NYPD) over a four-year period.\(^{16}\) The analysis revealed that the number of allegations involving an officer’s refusal to provide his or her name and/or badge number had steadily increased, rising from 231 allegations in 1999 to 646 allegations in 2002. Additionally, a review of the 28 “refusal to identify” allegations substantiated between January and June 2002 revealed that 15, or 53%, of the allegations involved an officer providing no response at all to a complainant’s request for identifying information, while six, or 21%, involved an officer either responding to a complainant request by telling the person that the information was on a “summons” or simply gesturing to his or her badge. Seven, or 25%, of the 28 substantiated allegations pertained to officers taking some sort of negative action in response, such as hiding their badges, striking the complainant, or arresting the individual.

Due to the large increase in failure-to-identify allegations, and because it appeared that NYPD officers needed better direction regarding what constituted an “affirmative response” to a name and badge number request, the CCRB recommended that the NYPD clarify its patrol guide. The Department adopted the CCRB’s recommendation, and the amended language now reads: “Courteously and clearly state your rank, name, shield number and command, or otherwise provide them, to anyone who requests you to do so. Allow the person ample time to note this information.”

Portland, OR

In Portland, Oregon, officers carry business cards issued by the police department. Officers are required to distribute them in certain circumstances. Portland Bureau of Police Directive 312.50, the order governing officer identification, states:

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Bureau members will identify themselves by name and also offer their Bureau issued business cards as follows:

a. When a Bureau member has made a vehicle or pedestrian stop, the primary officer will offer their business card to the person detained.

b. During a call for service when face-to-face contact is made with a complainant, the primary officer will offer a business card to the complainant.

c. When a business card would improve customer service or customer relations due to the nature, duration or intensity of the contact or stop (i.e., when making an arrest, conducting a search or impounding a vehicle), the member will offer a business card.

When a citizen requests a business card from a member, the member will provide a card unless:

a. Providing a card would impair safety or compromise an investigation.

b. The request is clearly an attempt to harass, delay or manipulate the contact or investigation.\(^{17}\)

**Seattle, WA**

The Seattle Police Department’s officer identification requirements, while triggered only pursuant to a request from an individual, are still broad in their application. According to Seattle Police Manual 5.001 § VII.5, unless otherwise impractical, Seattle Police Department officers must, in response to an individual’s request for the officer to identify himself or herself, “provide their name, and Department serial number verbally, or if requested, in writing, or provide a Department-issued business card that contains their name and serial number.”

**V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To improve policy-community relations, reduce the number of failure-to-identify allegations that OPC receives, and decrease the number of complaints in which the subject officer could not be identified, OPC makes the following recommendations:

1. **MPD should amend General Order 201.26 to clarify that officers must verbally state their first and last name and badge number, or provide a Department-issued business card, upon a citizen’s request for the officer to identify himself or herself. The directive should also stress that officers must provide Department-issued business cards if individuals request them, and cannot refer people to a ticket or report.**

Amending MPD’s identification policy will improve the resolution of failure-to-identify complaints. By mandating that an officer verbally provides his or her full name and badge number upon a request by a member of the public, MPD would make it clear to its force that proper identification is a matter that the Department takes seriously. Requiring members to

\(^{17}\) City of Portland, Oregon, Bureau of Police, Executive Order 312.50 Identification/Business Cards (Sept. 21, 2009), https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/263997.
provide business cards upon request would help build trust and cooperation between the police and the community. It could also potentially reduce the number of failure-to-identify complaints to OPC, particularly those complaints alleging that the officers referred individuals to an illegible ticket.

2. MPD should incorporate a discrete identification training module into its recruit and in-service trainings.

A discrete training module would ensure that both recruit and veteran officers are aware of the importance that the Department places on their duty to provide proper identification. The training should emphasize the rationale behind mandatory identification — that all government employees, as public servants, are held accountable for their actions, and that the standard is even higher for sworn officers who rely on the public’s trust to properly perform their duties.

3. MPD should provide officers with preprinted business cards that include, at a minimum, the officer’s name, badge number, e-mail address, and Department website.

Although MPD adopted PCB’s prior report and set of recommendations to provide officers with business cards, officer information was not preprinted on the cards, and the use of the cards were optional. Given the significant number of complaints received since that time, PCB believes that mandatory use of preprinted business cards is now warranted. Since an officer’s name, badge number, and e-mail address should rarely change during the course of their career with MPD, OPC does not view this requirement as administratively onerous. In addition to the above-listed information being on the cards, MPD should look at the business cards of other police departments to determine whether other information, such as social media messaging, community education materials, crime prevention tips, or other useful information should be included and periodically updated.
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APPENDIX B
COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY OPC

The following is a sampling of the allegations contained in complaints received by OPC that are related to this topic. Such claims are not proof of misconduct by MPD officers; however, they do point to some serious issues regarding officer identification.

The female complainant asserted that she witnessed two trucks hit a small car parked in front of her home. The woman helped a young girl who was in the car to the woman’s front porch. She then called 311. An MPD officer soon arrived at the scene and began to interview the young girl. When the complainant tried to explain to the officer what she observed, the officer allegedly responded, “You have no role here,” and “If I need to talk to you, I’ll ask.” The complainant stated to OPC that she was offended because she was only trying to be helpful. Since the complainant had a pen and paper with her, she asked the officer for his badge number. The officer reportedly responded, “What do you need that for?” The complainant told the officer that she believed that it was public information. When the officer still did not provide the complainant with his badge number, she began to copy it from his badge. According to the complainant, the officer started to glare at her and appeared to be turning his body so that the complainant could not get his name. After copying the officer’s name from his nameplate, the woman went inside her house. The complainant told OPC that because of this incident, she “now refuse[s] to cooperate with any officer and [she] would not offer to help in the future.” OPC successfully resolved the complaint through mediation.

The male complainant alleged that he was sitting in his parked car in front of a neighborhood park when he was approached by an MPD officer. The officer told the man that he had been sitting in the car for over 30 minutes with the motor running. The officer then asked him for his driver’s license and registration. After receiving and reviewing the complainant’s information, the officer walked to the back of the man’s vehicle and began to take notes. After approximately 15 minutes, the officer walked back to the man’s car and handed him back his driver’s license and registration. When the complainant asked for the officer’s name and badge number, the officer responded that he would give it to him, but walked away without doing so. When the man followed the officer and again asked for his name and badge number, the officer reportedly pulled out his ticket pad and threatened to give him a ticket for jaywalking. The complainant then went back to his truck. OPC could not make a finding on the merits of this allegation.

The female complainant, who worked at a women’s shelter, was sitting outside a courtroom with a client waiting for a court proceeding to begin. An MPD officer and a man dressed in civilian clothes were sitting close by. As the complainant and the client were sitting there, a young man walked out of another courtroom carrying what appeared to be evidence. According to the complainant, the MPD officer said to the young man, “Tell her that next time if she doesn’t want to be beaten she shouldn’t do it.” The complainant immediately got up, walked over to the officer, and asked for his name. The officer responded, “Who do you think you are?”
The man accompanying the officer provided the complainant with a name that she did not hear clearly, and then both individuals began to walk away. The woman followed the two men and began to ask others in the courthouse to help her obtain the officer’s name. She eventually caught up with the two men and again asked the officer for his name. The officer supplied his last name and unzipped his jacket so that the complainant could view his nameplate. The complainant then walked away. She was later able to speak with a lawyer nearby who was able to obtain the officer’s first name and badge number. OPC successfully resolved the complaint through mediation.

The male complainant alleged that he was driving in his car when he saw two parked police vehicles. As the man drove by the patrol cars, one of the three MPD officers inside waved his hand and signaled for him to pull over. After the man pulled over to the side of the road, one of the officers approached and informed him that his headlights were not on. The officer then shouted at the complainant to get out of his vehicle. When the man complied, the officer slammed him against the vehicle and placed him in handcuffs. The officer next removed the man’s wallet and handed it to another officer. After the complainant’s information was verified, his wallet was placed on the roof of his vehicle. Shortly thereafter, the three officers told the complainant to leave. The man asked the officers for their names and badge numbers, but the officers refused and walked away. The complainant got into his vehicle and started to leave. He realized, however, that his wallet had not been returned to him. He tried to get the officers’ attention, but they just “looked at [him] and drove away.” The complainant then recorded the officers’ patrol car numbers as they drove away. The complainant was not able to recover his wallet. OPC identified the subject officers using the patrol car information provided by the complainant. An OPC complaint examiner sustained the failure-to-identify allegation against all three officers.

The male complainant was pulled over in his vehicle by two MPD officers. The officers asked the man for his driver’s license, registration, and insurance card, which he provided. When the complainant asked the officers why he was stopped, they told him that it was because the tags on his license plate were not registered to his vehicle. The second officer then asked the man to get out, step to the rear of his vehicle, and place his hands on the vehicle’s trunk. When the complainant complied, the second officer patted him down. Shortly thereafter, the first officer placed the man’s driver’s license and other materials on the vehicle’s trunk and told him he was free to go. The complainant responded by telling the officers that he wanted their names and badge numbers. The man then went back to the front of his car to get a pen and clip board. When he returned, he noticed that his information was no longer on his trunk. Subsequently, the man asked for the officers’ name and badge numbers. The first officer pointed to his badge number. The second officer told the complainant that “he should go to the precinct to get his name and badge number.” Moments later, the first officer returned with the complainant’s information and a warning for “dead tags.” OPC successfully resolved the complaint through mediation.
The female complainant stated that she was shopping at a clothing store in Chinatown when an MPD officer approached her. After the officer informed the woman that the store manager wanted her to leave the store, she agreed to depart. As the woman walked out of the store, the officer followed her. At one point, the woman asked the officer for a business card. He replied that he did not have one. The woman then asked the officer for his name and badge number. He allegedly ignored the woman and walked away. An OPC complaint examiner sustained the failure-to-identify allegation against the officer.

The male complainant stated that he was driving in northwest D.C. when he was pulled over by an unmarked police vehicle. Two MPD officers, wearing plainclothes and police vests, got out of the police vehicle. One of the officers asked the man for his driver’s license. The man provided it to him. After checking his information, the officer asked the complainant whether he could search his car. The officer told the man that the search would only take a few seconds. The complainant agreed to the vehicle search. The officer who made the request began searching the vehicle while the second officer started searching the complainant. According to the complainant, he never gave the officers permission to search him and the officers never asked. The search of the man’s car took approximately one minute. After the first officer finished searching the man’s vehicle, the officer told the man that he was free to go. The complainant then asked the officer for his name and badge number. The officer provided the man with his badge number, but the man did not hear the officer clearly state his name. The complainant then asked both officers for their names and badge numbers. In response, the second officer allegedly stated, “Just be happy you didn’t get a ticket and this isn’t turning into something more.” The man told OPC that he was “shocked” that the officers would not provide their identifying information. OPC tried to identify one of the officers using the badge number provided by the complainant. The badge number, however, belonged to an MPD officer who was confirmed to be on leave during the incident. After examining police paperwork, OPC could not make a finding on the merits of the allegation because the agency was unable to identify the subject officers.

The female complainant stated that as she was walking home, she saw two men sitting in a vehicle near her house. One man appeared to be unconscious while the other man appeared to be convulsing. The woman called 911 because she believed that the men needed medical attention. Before the ambulance arrived, the passenger of the vehicle woke up and put several items into a backpack. The passenger walked away from the scene, even though the complainant and a friend, who had arrived at the scene, implored the passenger to stay. Shortly thereafter, a MPD officer showed up. The complainant’s friend noticed that the passenger was nearby and requested that the officer speak to the passenger. According to complainant, the officer yelled, “I don’t have to do anything you say. You can’t tell me what to do. I don’t have to go and talk to him.” By this time, the complainant’s boyfriend had showed up. The complainant’s boyfriend asked the officer for her badge number. The officer replied, “I don’t have to give that to you. Why do you want it?” When the boyfriend responded that he had the right to know her identity,
the officer replied, “You don’t know what the law is.” An OPC complaint examiner sustained the failure-to-identify allegation against the officer.

The female complainant alleged that she was driving to work in northwest D.C. when she was pulled over by a marked MPD cruiser. The officer inside of the cruiser got out, approached the woman’s vehicle, and asked for her driver’s license, registration, and proof of insurance. The officer then explained to her that he stopped her because she had not yielded to a pedestrian in the crosswalk. The officer told the woman that she would be receiving a citation for the infraction. The complainant acknowledged to the officer that she had seen the pedestrian, but told him that she never saw the pedestrian trying to cross the street, explaining to him that she proceeded through the intersection with caution. The officer did not respond to the complainant’s statements and instead returned to his cruiser. A while later, the officer returned to the woman’s vehicle with a citation for failure to yield to a pedestrian. According to the complainant, upon receiving the citation she asked the officer for his name and badge number. The officer reportedly responded, “I don’t have to give you a damn thing,” and walked back to his cruiser. OPC successfully resolved the complaint through mediation.

The female complainant alleged that she drove to an MPD District police station to provide a tip on a murder that had occurred. When the woman approached the MPD officer who was at the front desk, she asked whether she could speak to a detective. In response, the officer informed the woman that she needed to provide the officer with identification. The woman looked in her book bag, but soon realized that she had left her wallet, which contained her identification, at work. She offered to give the officer her license plate number and a piece of mail with her name and address on it, but the officer responded that those items were not sufficient. The officer then told the woman to leave the station because she was driving around the city without a license. The complainant then asked the officer for her badge number. The officer responded, “I think you better get out of here, before I lock you up for not having an ID.” The woman then left the police station. She later called a crime hotline to report the tip. OPC successfully resolved the complaint through mediation.

The male complainant stated that he called the police after seeing his neighbor’s son, a young man, in his backyard. Two MPD officers arrived at the scene. The neighbor’s son told the officers that he had accidentally dropped his eyeglasses over the complainant’s fence, and entered the complainant’s backyard to retrieve them. After speaking briefly to the complainant, the officers considered the matter closed and decided to leave without taking a report. Because the complainant did not believe the young man’s story, and felt as though the officers did not fully investigate the matter, the complainant asked one of the officers for his name. The officer gave the man his last name only. The man then asked the same officer for his badge number. According to the man, the officer said that his name was enough and that his badge number was not necessary to have. The officers then left. OPC successfully resolved the complaint through mediation.
"The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are as bold as a lion."

Proverbs 28:1