

Audit of the Austin Police Department's Handling of Complaints

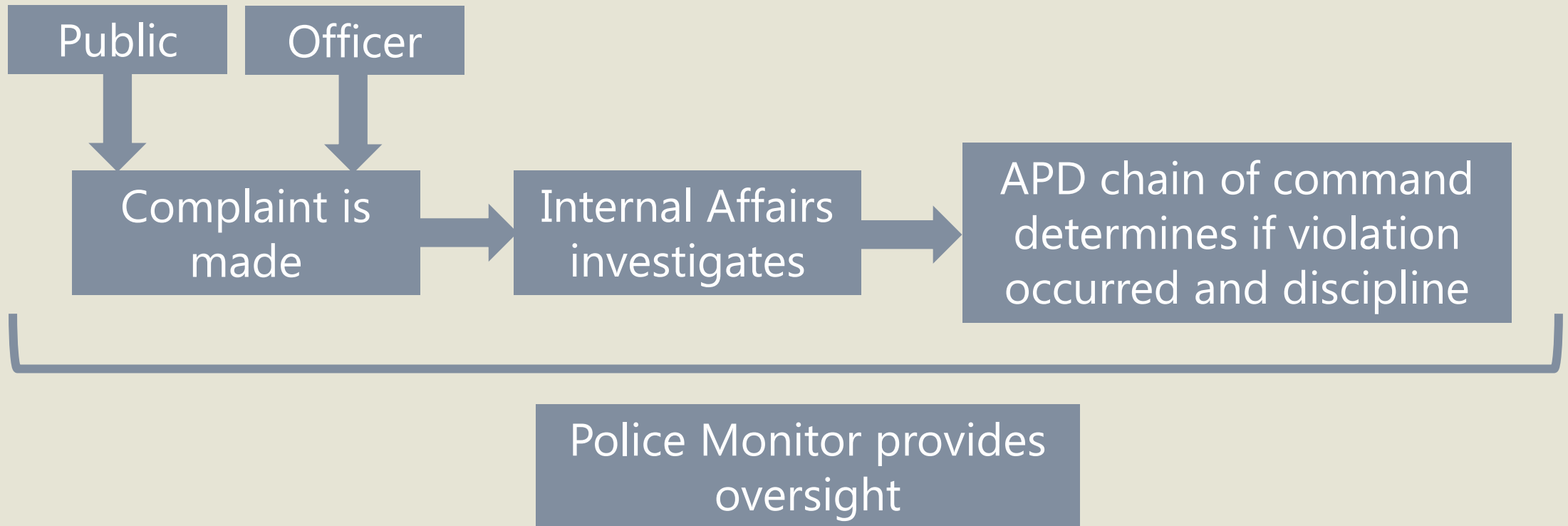
Office of the City Auditor

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City Council Audit and
Finance Committee

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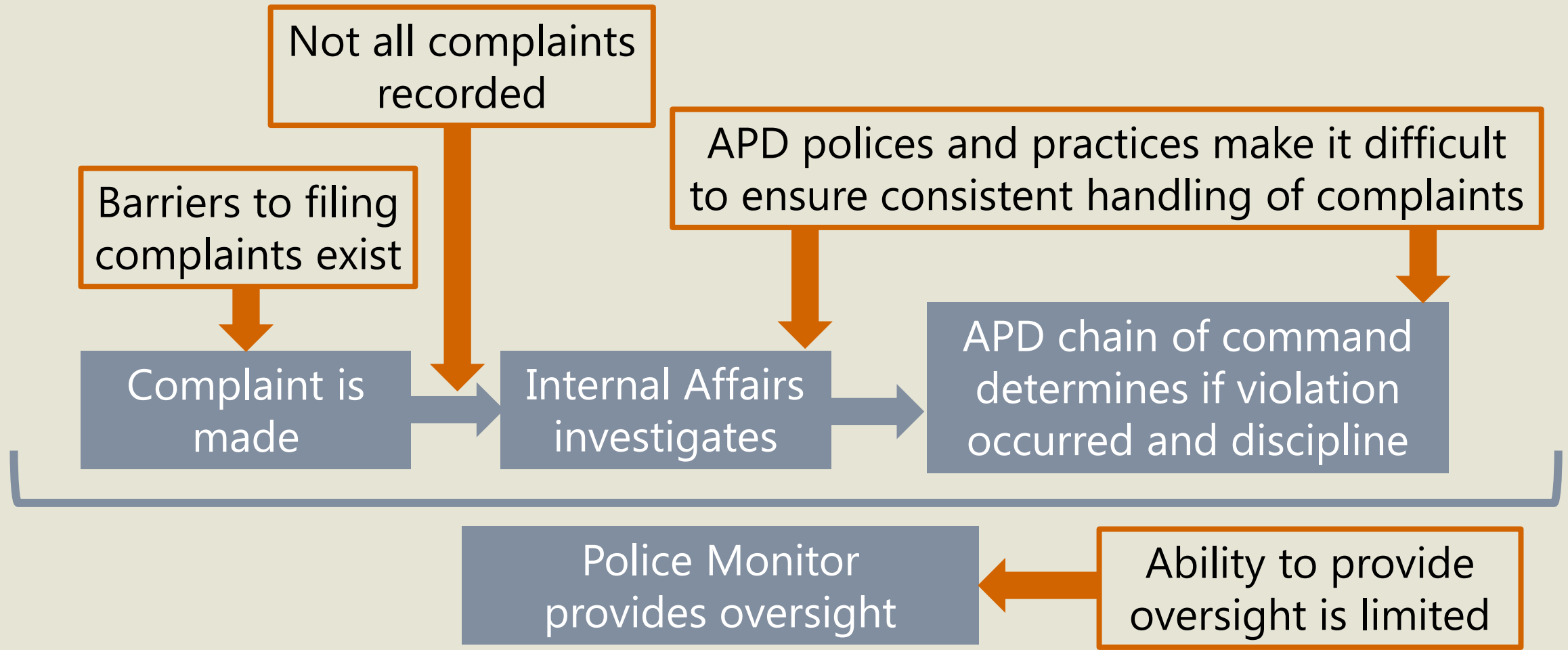
APD's Process for Handling Complaints



Background

- **1,200** complaints between October 2013 and December 2015
 - **60%** from members of the public
- Less than half of complaints resulted in officer discipline
 - Reprimands (oral or written) were the most frequent type of discipline

What We Found



The complaint process is not accessible and may discourage people from filing complaints

- Staff at many City facilities unfamiliar with the role of Police Monitor
- Local community groups report little interaction with the Police Monitor
- Barriers exist for people to file complaints



The complaint process is not accessible and may discourage people from filing complaints

City's culture has undermined outreach about the complaint process



Not all complaints or investigations are recorded

- Several high-profile incidents involving officer conduct were not in complaint database
 - APD made public statements that incident was being reviewed
- APD supervisors reported not always forwarding complaints to Internal Affairs

APD policies and practices make it difficult to ensure consistent handling of complaints

- Recordings of interactions with the public may be deleted before complaint investigation
- Different understandings about what was a serious violation of policy
- Not all potential policy violations identified
- Classification system is “needlessly complex”

APD policies and practices make it difficult to ensure consistent handling of complaints (*cont'd*)

Officers who violated the same policy received different discipline

- Discipline was within guidelines
- No documented reason for the difference

| Officer | Written Reprimand | 3-Day Suspension | Additional Policy Violations During Incident |
|---------|-------------------|------------------|--|
| 1 | ☑ | | YES |
| 2 | ☑ | | YES |
| 3 | ☑ | | YES |
| 4 | | ☑ | NO |
| 5 | | ☑ | NO |

The Police Monitor's ability to provide oversight is limited

- Access to investigative records was restricted
- Disagreements about discipline appeared to have no impact
- Required meetings between stakeholders did not occur

Comparison to Peer Cities

- Austin is only large Texas city with independent oversight structure
 - Limits include inability to solicit complaints and gather evidence
- Practices in other cities that could have positive impact include:
 - Oversight agency determines complaint classifications
 - Publishing anonymized summaries of investigations/outcomes
 - Widely communicate complaint process/expectations

Recommendations to the Police Monitor:

Expand efforts to increase awareness about the complaint process and identify and reduce barriers

Recommendations to the Police Chief:

Ensure all complaints are recorded, revise the complaint investigation process, better document discipline decisions, and grant the Police Monitor unrestricted access to complaint investigations

Recommendations to the City Manager:

Work to expand oversight of the complaint process