



Sentinel Event Review

January 6, 2025

What is a Sentinel Event?

“In a complex system, negative outcomes are rarely caused by a single act or mistake and instead are often the result of a multitude of factors. This negative outcome is known as a sentinel event....”

Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice,. (2020). North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice Report 2020. https://ncdoj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TRECReportFinal_forprinting.pdf



“The process of examining and learning from the [sentinel] event to minimize or eliminate its reoccurrence is known as a sentinel event review (SER or Review).”

Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice,. (2020). North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice Report 2020. https://ncdoj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TRECREportFinal_forprinting.pdf



- The medical field first began Sentinel Event Reviews when there was a rise of unexpected infections and when wrong patient surgeries occurred.
- The aviation field uses Sentinel Event Reviews each time there is or almost is an airplane crash.
- Reentry organizations review unsuccessful cases of reentry and provide recommendations to improve program outcomes.

States

Westchester County, NY

Wrongful Conviction - Jeffrey Deskovic

Two Judges, Former Prosecutor, and Defense Attorney

Will County, IL

Wrongful Murder Prosecution

Private Law Enforcement Experts

Cambridge, MA

Policing Practices after Arrest of Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates

Cambridge Police Department

North Carolina Cities

Fayetteville, NC



Possible Events Eligible for Review

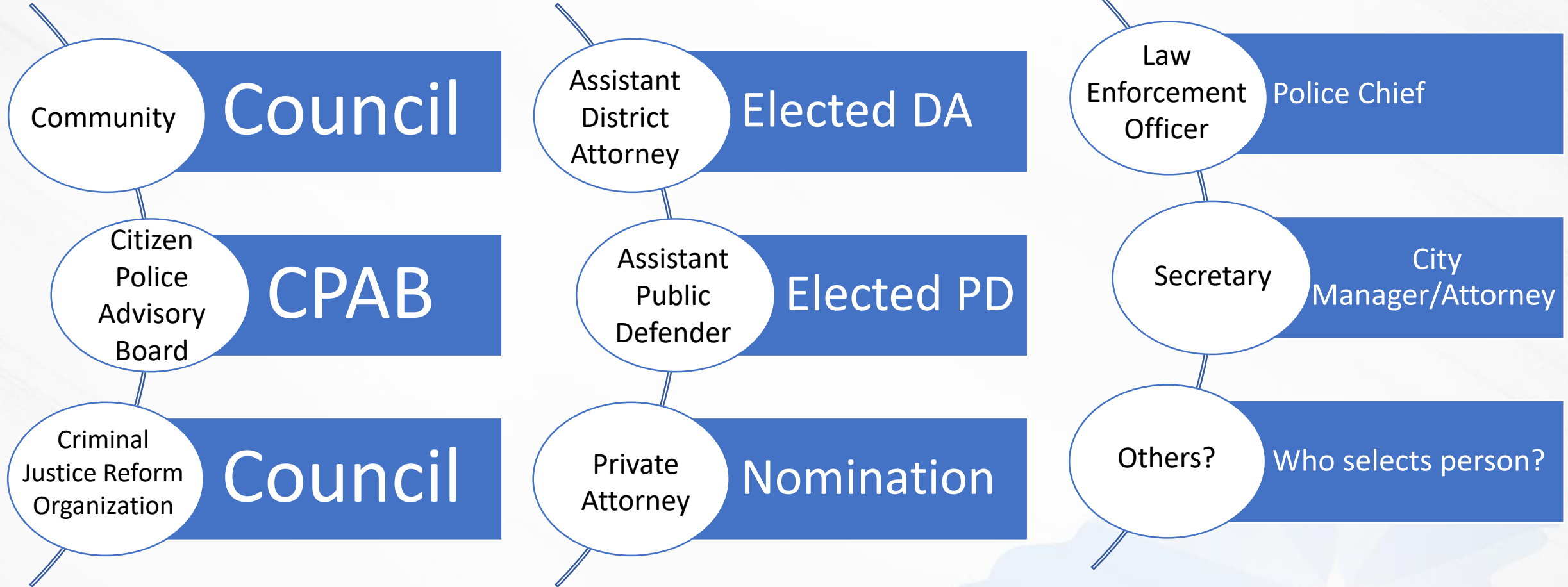
- Officer involved fatalities
- Requested by City Council
- Requested by City Manager/City Attorney
- Requested by Chief of Police

Possible Requirements

- Beyond the statute of limitations for lawsuits
- Not the subject of any active or pending criminal action or investigations
- Maximum of four events per year
- 90-day review period

Who Should Conduct the SER?

Possible SER Committee Members



- Confidentiality agreement
- Two-year term with option for extension
- Monthly time commitment
- Disclose any potential conflicts of interest
- Morality clause



Written Investigatory File

- Private Attorney notifies Police Department of intent to request criminal investigation records.
- If no objection, Private Attorney presents consent agreement to court.
- If Chief of Police objects, Private Attorney moves to set the matter for hearing.

Agency Recordings

- Private Attorney notifies Police Department of Committee's request to view custodial agency recordings.
- Private Attorney will file and argue the petition for disclosure on behalf of committee. Department's interest
- Police Attorney will represent Police

- Summary of the Facts
 - Why were the police called?
 - What happened upon arrival?
 - What triggered undesirable outcome?
- Policies at Issue
- Problem Statement
- Community Feedback/Perception Summary
 - Interviews or social media posts
- Recommendations
 - Policy revision
 - Additional training
 - Any other action that would prevent sentinel event from reoccurring

What Implementation Challenges are Anticipated?

Legal

- Public Records Limitations
- Discoverable in Litigation

Staffing

- Volunteer Service Likely Outside Normal Business Hours
- No Monetary Compensation

Social

- Findings/Recommendations not Provided Immediately
- Discourse Regarding Event Selection
- Not a Punishment System



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