

City establishes oversight office to monitor its policing practices

BY JOHN AGUILAR

JAGUILAR@DENVERPOST.COM

Aurora will stand up an oversight office to monitor critical operations within its police department and other public safety agencies after years of controversial and heavily criticized policing practices in Colorado's third-largest city.

The City Council voted to establish the Office of Public Safety Accountability at Monday night's meeting. It could be up and running by the fall, City Attorney Pete Schulte told The Denver Post.

"We will start the recruitment process this summer and hope to have the manager hired soon thereafter," he said.

The creation of the office comes after a series of high-profile fatal encounters between police and unarmed Black men. It also builds on a consent decree the city entered with the Colorado Attorney General's Office in 2021, following a yearlong investigation that found a pattern of racially biased policing and use of excessive force by Aurora officers that routinely violated state and federal law.

The impetus for the state's investigation of police practices was the death of 23-year-old Elijah McClain. In 2019, he was stopped by police while walking home and injected by paramedics with a lethal dose of the sedative ketamine.

Police officers have killed other unarmed Black men in Aurora since then.

The new office will perform oversight of Aurora's police and fire departments, along with its 911 dispatch center and detention facilities. Any critical incident involving those agencies, defined as an incident "resulting in death or serious bodily injury," must be reported to the accountability office within 30 minutes.

Aurora's accountability manager, who will be chosen by the city manager, will have access to all personnel and information involved in the incident and will be responsible for issuing a report, according to the ordinance passed Monday night. The measure passed unanimously as part of a block vote. The office will assign a liaison to the family of the person killed or injured in a critical incident within 48 hours, with the duty to keep the family updated on the progress of any investigation that ensues. The accountability manager will hold at least two community listening sessions per year on critical incidents that occur in the city, the ordinance states.

MiDian Shofner, a regular attendee at Aurora council meetings since police shot and killed Kilyn Lewis in May 2024, told The Post that the new office's effectiveness "will ultimately be determined by its independence, transparency and willingness to engage directly with impacted families and communities."

"An accountability office cannot be measured by the number of reports it produces," she said. "It should be measured by whether families receive timely information, whether community concerns influence decision-making and whether recommendations lead to tangible changes in policy and practice."

Aurora's move this week puts the city in the company of just a handful of Front Range cities with independent oversight boards or monitors, including Denver and Boulder. Earlier this year, Lakewood's City Council voted to

“work toward the establishment” of an independent civilian oversight board for that city’s police department.

Aurora set aside \$329,000 in its 2026 budget to pay for the new office.

In a statement, Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, said he called on Aurora to establish an independent police monitor to take over once the consent decree with his office ends.

“A permanent structure for independent review of the police department will help ensure that reform, accountability and transparency continue, and that the city is responsive to community concerns,” he said.

In the 10th report of the independent consent decree monitor, released in April, Aurora was reported to be in “substantial compliance” with 63 of the 78 mandates — or 81% — laid out in the consent decree.]

The report says the consent decree is scheduled to expire in February. But Weiser’s office says the city must be in compliance with the consent decree’s requirements for three years before it can be terminated.

“So there is no end date at this time,” the attorney general’s spokesman, Lawrence Pacheco, said Monday. Note

Shofner, who heads up the nonprofit group Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership, said the establishment of the accountability office was an important step in a city where policing practices had “deeply affected public trust.”

“The most encouraging aspect is that the city is formally recognizing that public safety accountability deserves dedicated resources, staffing and attention,” she said. “That is a significant step forward from relying solely on existing structures that many residents felt were inaccessible or ineffective.”

In other action Monday, the council voted to place three issues on the November ballot that aim to raise \$264.5 million through bond sales to pay for 65 projects across the city.

Dubbed “Build Up Aurora,” the bond issue is split into three buckets: transportation infrastructure, public safety and community facilities. It’s been 33 years since Aurora voters last agreed to raise the city’s sales tax to pay for city services or projects.