

Dear Chief Ta:

Our office has completed its review of the materials related to Section 2, Part A, Paragraph 11 of the Settlement Agreement that were submitted by the Vallejo Police Department (VPD). After reviewing the package and information provided by VPD, the California Department of Justice finds as follows:

Section 2, Part A, Paragraph 11: VPD will work with the Evaluator to include, as part of its commendation policy, an award or commendation that recognizes employees who demonstrate exceptional skill in employing de-escalation and bias-free community policing practices in the field.

Response to Section 2, Part A, Paragraph 11: VPD has created a “Preservation of Life Award” that will recognize officers who demonstrate exceptional skill in employing de-escalation and bias-free community policing practices in the field. This award will be based on the following criteria:

1. **Use of Restraint**: The officer uses communication or tactics to resolve a potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life, showing restraint and professionalism.
2. **Skillful and Effective De-escalation**: The officer must have employed exceptional tactics, communication, or judgment that contributed to resolving the potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life.
3. **Commitment to Bias-Free Policing**: The officer demonstrates a commitment to equitable and nondiscriminatory policing practices, adhering to the department's policy of unbiased service delivery. The officer's actions should reflect respect for individual rights and impartiality regardless of any personal characteristics of the individuals involved.
4. **Critical Incident**: The event typically involves a high-risk situation such as an armed suspect or a violent confrontation, where the officer's actions directly led to the preservation of life.
5. **Compliance with Department Policies**: The officer's actions must align with the VPD's policies regarding the use of force and show an adherence to the department's mission to protect life.
6. **Peer and Supervisor Recommendations**: Nominations for this award often come from fellow officers or supervisors.

Recipients of this award will be announced at the Annual Awards Ceremony.

VPD has provided a draft of an updated version of Policy 1015.5 Awards and Eligibility Criteria Descriptions that includes the Preservation of Life Award and the criteria identified above, and a Memorandum to the Deputy Chief and Captain proposing that this award be added to the current policy. VPD must implement this new policy language and ensure that the Preservation of Life Award is given to an appropriate officer every year. Accordingly, our designation of substantial compliance is contingent on VPD's ongoing commitment to implement this new policy and ensure that this new award is given on an annual basis.

Based upon all of the above, the Department of Justice finds that VPD is in substantial compliance with Section 2, Part A, Paragraph 11 of the Settlement Agreement. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further. Thank you.

Joshua Piovia-Scott  
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he/him

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## CITY OF VALLEJO

POLICE DEPARTMENT

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### **SUBSTANTIAL COMPLIANCE SUBMISSION**

The goal of the Vallejo Police Department (VPD) – Settlement Agreement is to increase public trust and support effective, contemporary, and innovative policing practices with improvements to training, policy, transparency, professionalism, and accountability, in alignment with national standards, best practices, current and emerging research, and community expectations. To achieve this, VPD committed to implementing the agreed-upon recommendations and any additional recommendations arising out of the work with the California Department of Justice (CalDOJ).

#### **Section 2 – Use of Force**

##### **A. Use of Force Policies, Practices, Reporting, and Review**

##### **Paragraph #11:**

**VPD will work with the Evaluator to include, as part of its commendation policy, an award or commendation that recognizes employees who demonstrate exceptional skill in employing de-escalation and bias-free community policing practices in the field.**

The Vallejo Police Department has partnered with CalDOJ in addressing and implementing this paragraph. Based on our collaborative work, the VPD believes this recommendation is complete and demonstrated through policy or practice, training, and organizational commitment.

Pursuant to my direction, this Paragraph is being submitted for substantial compliance review.

Date: 11/12/2024

Jason Ta, Interim Chief of Police  
Vallejo Police Department



## SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT MEMORANDUM

### Section 2(A)(11) – Use of Force

#### Use of Force Policies, Practices, Reporting, and Review

*VPD will work with the Evaluator to include, as part of its commendation policy, an award or commendation that recognizes employees who demonstrate exceptional skill in employing de-escalation and bias-free community policing practices in the field.*

#### **Executive Summary:**

The Vallejo Police Department (VPD) hosts an annual Awards Ceremony to acknowledge the hard work, dedication, and accomplishments of members of VPD throughout the year. On a regular basis, officers are faced with rapidly evolving and potentially dangerous situations that require split second decisions. Officers are not always recognized for their exceptional skills in employing de-escalation and bias free community policing practices. VPD has created the “Preservation of Life Award” (Attachment #1 – Memo) to recognize these actions.

When considering an officer for this award, supervisors will take into consideration, including but not limited to the following criteria:

1. **Use of Restraint:** The officer uses communication or tactics to resolve a potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life, showing restraint and professionalism.
2. **Skillful and Effective De-escalation:** The officer must have employed exceptional tactics, communication, or judgment that contributed to resolving the potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life.
3. **Commitment to Bias-Free Policing:** The officer demonstrates a commitment to equitable and nondiscriminatory policing practices, adhering to the department's policy of unbiased service delivery. The officer's actions should reflect respect for individual rights and impartiality regardless of any personal characteristics of the individuals involved.
4. **Critical Incident:** The event typically involves a high-risk situation such as an armed suspect or a violent confrontation, where the officer's actions directly led to the preservation of life.
5. **Compliance with Department Policies:** The officer's actions must align with the VPD's policies regarding the use of force and show an adherence to the department's mission to protect life.
6. **Peer and Supervisor Recommendations:** Nominations for this award often come from fellow officers or supervisors who witnessed the officer's actions or reviewed the incident after it occurred.

All nominations will be forwarded on an annual basis to the Awards Committee as outlined in Policy 1015 (Attachment #2 – Policy1015). Recipients of this award will be announced at each Annual Awards Ceremony.



## SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT MEMORANDUM

### **Attachment List**

**Attachment #1 – Memorandum**

**Attachment #2 – Policy 1015**

# Attachment # 1



# VALLEJO POLICE DEPARTMENT

## Memorandum

**To:** Captain Sanjay Ramrakha #581  
**From:** Lieutenant Jeff Tai #599  
**CC:** Deputy Chief Bobby Knight #550  
**Date:** October 1, 2024  
**Subject:** De-escalation and Bias-free award or commendation

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The Compliance, Integrity, and Accountability Division would like to submit a formal request to add an award to VPD Policy 1015 Commendations and Awards.

One of the current VPD projects in collaboration with CalDOJ is to create an award or commendation as described below,

*"VPD will work with the Evaluator to include, as part of its commendation policy, an award or commendation that recognizes employees who demonstrate exceptional skill in employing de-escalation and bias-free community policing practices in the field."*

We researched other agencies to get an idea what some of the criteria should be and liked LAPD's "Preservation of Life Medal." This award is described as follows,

*"The Preservation of Life Medal may be awarded to an officer who has distinguished himself or herself by employing exceptional tactics and exercising sound judgment, beyond the normal demands of duty, to preserve the life of another during a volatile or dangerous encounter while protecting the safety and security of the public and his or her fellow officers."*

We believe that when nominating a member for this award the following actions should be taken into consideration, including but not limited to the following,

1. **Use of Restraint:** The officer uses communication or tactics to resolve a potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life, showing restraint and professionalism.

2. **Skillful and Effective De-escalation:** The officer must have employed exceptional tactics, communication, or judgment that contributed to resolving the potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life.
3. **Commitment to Bias-Free Policing:** The officer demonstrates a commitment to equitable and nondiscriminatory policing practices, adhering to the department's policy of unbiased service delivery. The officer's actions should reflect respect for individual rights and impartiality regardless of any personal characteristics of the individuals involved.
4. **Critical Incident:** The event typically involves a high-risk situation such as an armed suspect or a violent confrontation, where the officer's actions directly led to the preservation of life.
5. **Compliance with Department Policies:** The officer's actions must align with the VPD's policies regarding the use of force and show an adherence to the department's mission to protect life.
6. **Peer and Supervisor Recommendations:** Nominations for this award often come from fellow officers or supervisors who witnessed the officer's actions or reviewed the incident after it occurred.

We would like to propose this award be added to our current policy (medal or certificate to be determined by the Chief of Police). If approved, we would like to vet this through the Awards Committee with final approval from the Chief of Police.



# **Attachment # 2**

## Commendations and Awards

### 1015.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides general guidelines for recognizing commendable or meritorious acts of members of the Vallejo Police Department and individuals from the community.

### 1015.2 WHO MAY MAKE COMMENDATIONS

A written commendation may be made by any supervisor regarding any other employee of the Department, provided the reporting person is superior in rank or is the person-in-charge of the individual being commended. Additionally, investigating officers may commend uniformed officers for exceptional assistance in investigative functions, with approval from the investigator's supervisor. Any employee may recommend a commendation to the supervisor of the employee subject to commendation.

Completed commendations shall be forwarded to the appropriate Division Commander for review. The Division Commander shall sign and forward the commendation to the Chief of Police for review. The Chief of Police will sign and return the commendation to the employee for his/her signature. The commendation will then be returned to the Chief's Executive Assistant for entry into the employee's personnel file.

If the Chief of Police determines that the commendable action is such that either in addition to, or instead of issuing a commendation, he/she may forward the commendation to the Commendations Board for review and consideration of awarding of the appropriate Distinguished Service Medal as outlined in the following sections.

### 1015.3 COMMENDATIONS

Commendations for members of the Vallejo Police Department or for individuals from the community may be initiated by any Department member or by any person from the community.

### 1015.4 CRITERIA

A meritorious or commendable act may include, but is not limited to:

- Superior handling of a difficult situation or investigation
- Conspicuous bravery or outstanding performance
- Any action or performance that is above and beyond typical duties

#### 1015.4.1 DEPARTMENT MEMBER DOCUMENTATION

Members of the Department should document meritorious or commendable acts on an Awards Nomination form. The form should contain:

(a) Identifying information:

1. For members of the Department - name, division, and assignment at the date and time of the meritorious or commendable act

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- (b) For individuals from the community - name, address, and telephone number
  - 1. A brief account of the meritorious or commendable act with the report number, as appropriate
- (c) Documentation should be routed to the Bureau Commander through either the member's chain of command or via email to Awards@cityofvallejo.net

#### 1015.4.2 COMMUNITY MEMBER DOCUMENTATION

Documentation of a meritorious or commendable act submitted by a person from the community should be accepted in any form. However, written documentation is preferred. Department members accepting the documentation should attempt to obtain detailed information regarding the matter, including:

- (a) Identifying information sufficient to identify the member - name, assignment, date, time, and location of the meritorious or commendable act
- (b) A brief account of the meritorious or commendable act
- (c) Identifying information of the person submitting the commendation

Documentation should be routed to the Bureau Commander through either the member's chain of command or via email to Awards@cityofvallejo.net

#### 1015.4.3 NOMINATION AND APPROVAL PROCESS

The Operations Bureau Commander shall manage the nominations for commendation and awards process. No limit shall be placed on the number of medals, certificates, or letters that an individual may be awarded.

##### PROCESS:

- (a) Upon receipt of a nomination the Operations Bureau Commander (Captain) will evaluate the nomination for content and completeness.
- (b) If necessary the Captain may gather or request additional information through written documentation, digital evidence, or interviews.
- (c) The Captain will determine the level of the nomination requested.
- (d) Nominations for letters of commendation will be handled by the appropriate Bureau Commander.
- (e) Letters and Commendations will be routed through the Office of the Chief of Police for approval.
- (f) The Bureau Commander may raise the nomination to a Commander's Certificate of Commendation.
- (g) The Chief of Police or Deputy Chief of Police may raise the nomination to a Chief's Certificate of Commendation.
- (h) Commendations should be presented to the employee contemporaneously with the date of the event.

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- (i) Nominations for awards or exemplary employees will be routed to the Commendations Review Board for consideration.
- (j) These nominations may also be considered for immediate recognition through a Commander's or Chief's Certificate of Commendation.
- (k) The Captain will have a copy of the Letter or Certificate Commendation placed in the employee's personnel file.
- (l) The Captain will notify the person who made the nomination if the commendation is denied.
- (m) Any commendations that are denied can be appealed to the Chief of Police, who has the final determination.

#### COMMENDATIONS REVIEW BOARD:

- (a) The Operation Bureau Commander will chair the Commendations Review Board
- (b) The Commendations Review Board shall meet as necessary and no less than annually.
- (c) The Board will consist of the Operations Captain, a Lieutenant, and a Sergeant appointed by the Chief of Police, two VPOA appointed members, and two employees agreed upon by both the Captain and VPOA Board.
- (d) One of the board members shall be a civilian employee.
- (e) The board will consider all nominations for awards.
- (f) Generally only one award per employee should be given for an incident.
- (g) Exception should be granted for those also meeting the criteria for a Purple Heart Medal
- (h) Any other exception will need a unanimous vote by the board and approval by the Chief of Police.
- (i) Board members may not vote on any nomination they made.
- (j) Decisions will be made through a simple vote of the board members.
- (k) The Chair shall only vote in the event of a tie.
- (l) Nominations for exemplary employees and volunteers shall be reviewed by the board for the following:
  - (m) Sufficient and factual documentation for the nomination.
  - (n) Other factual considerations that may negate the nomination.
  - (o) All discussions and decisions by the Commendations Review Board shall be kept private
  - (p) The Chair shall notify the person making a notification if the nomination was denied or granted a lower award/commendation who may appeal the decision to the Chief of Police.

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- (q) The Chair of the Board will present the outcome for all awards and exemplary employees/ volunteers to the Chief of Police for final approval.
- (r) Once approved, The Chair will forward the nominations for exemplary employees/ volunteers to the VPOA President to be routed to the Department for voting.

#### AWARD AND EXEMPLARY EMPLOYEE PRESENTATION:

Historically, awards and exemplary employee awards are presented at the Vallejo Police Department's Annual Awards Banquet. The Chief of Police can decide to present awards in any manner and at any time after the incident but generally no later than June 1<sup>st</sup> of the following year.

#### 1015.5 AWARDS AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA DESCRIPTIONS

The following are titles and descriptions of awards. Awards shall be worn in accordance to the VPD Policy 1024 Uniform Regulations.

##### AWARDS FOR BRAVERY:

- Medal of Valor (blue/white) - Awarded to employees who, while serving in an official capacity, distinguish themselves conspicuously by heroic action above and beyond the call duty. Including actions that placed the officer in the immediate and strong possibility of serious injury or death. The member was aware of the risk. The objective was of sufficient importance to justify the risk and the member did not use poor judgment or procedures which created the necessity for his/her acts.
- Medal of Courage (green/white) - Awarded to employees for meritorious conduct which reflects outstanding bravery at great personal risk.

##### AWARDS FOR SERVICE:

- Life-Saving Medal (yellow/white/yellow) - Awarded to employees who save the life of another in immediate risk of death.
- Officers Azuar & Capoot, Community Engagement Medal (white/red/blue/red/white) - Awarded to employees who continually distinguish themselves through community engagement above and beyond what is expected. This award should keep with the high standards and memory of the Ofc. Azuar and Ofc. Capoot's continual commitment to our community and far beyond those considered satisfactory for a Medal of Merit.
- Medal of Merit (red/white) - Awarded to employees for meritorious achievement or contribution to the community, the Department or law enforcement.
- Purple Heart Medal (purple) - Awarded to employees who sustain serious injury in the performance of their duties. For the purposes of this order, serious injury is defined as an injury which requires hospitalization, not resulting from negligence or misconduct.
- Good Conduct Medal (gold) - Awarded to employees who have received three consecutive annual evaluations with overall ratings of "exceeds expectations" and no rating of "below expectations" in any category.
- 25400 PC Commendation (varying) - In a 12 month Period: make three proactive arrests for gun offenses; or recover guns from six (6) calls for service with arrests;

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or Identify a gun trafficker/manufacturer which results in two (2) or more arrests and seizure of ten (10) or more firearms.

- *Preservation of Life Award* - The Preservation of Life Award may be awarded to an officer who has distinguished themselves by employing exceptional tactics and exercising sound judgment, beyond the normal demands of duty, to preserve the life of another during a volatile or dangerous encounter while protecting the safety and security of the public or fellow officers.
  - *Use of Restraint*: The officer uses communication or tactics to resolve a potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life, showing restraint and professionalism.
  - *Skillful and Effective De-escalation*: The officer must have employed exceptional tactics, communication, or judgment that contributed to resolving the potentially lethal encounter without the loss of life.
  - *Commitment to Bias-Free Policing*: The officer demonstrates a commitment to equitable and nondiscriminatory policing practices, adhering to the department's policy of unbiased service delivery. The officer's actions should reflect respect for individual rights and impartiality regardless of any personal characteristics of the individuals involved.
  - *Critical Incident*: The event typically involves a high-risk situation such as an armed suspect or a violent confrontation, where the officer's actions directly led to the preservation of life.
  - *Compliance with Department Policies*: The officer's actions must align with the VPD's policies regarding the use of force and show an adherence to the department's mission to protect life.
  - *Peer and Supervisor Recommendations*: Nominations for this award often come from fellow officers or supervisors who witnessed the officer's actions or reviewed the incident after it occurred.

#### UNIT CITATIONS:

- *Distinguished Unit Citation* (green/white/blue/white/green) - Awarded to employees who as a part of a group, or organizational unit distinguished themselves together with heroic actions as compared to other similar working groups. Definitions of Medal of Valor and Medal of Courage should be used when determining.
- *Meritorious Unit Citation* (red/white/red/white/red) - Awarded to employees who as part of a group or organization unit distinguished themselves as a team for either sustained, long-term, noteworthy or a single significant noteworthy achievement of contribution to the community, the Department or law enforcement community.

#### CIVILIAN AWARDS:

- *Certificate of Valor* (civilian award) - Awarded to citizens for acts of heroism, performed at great personal risk, which contribute to public safety, the Department or law enforcement.

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- Certificate of Merit (civilian award) - Awarded to citizens for a major accomplishment, or an exceptional act under emergency conditions, which substantially contributes to public safety, the Department or law enforcement.
- Certificate of Commendation (civilian award) - Awarded to citizens for the accomplishment of outstanding service on behalf of the Department.

#### COMMENDATIONS:

- Letter of Commendation - Standard commendation made by any employee throughout the year to recognize exemplary individual or group actions for service or courageous actions.
- Captain's Commendation Certificate - Determined by the Bureau Commander to raise requests for letters of commendation to a higher level to recognize actions or service that are above the standard Letter of Commendation
- Chief's Commendation Certificate - Determined by the Chief of Police or Deputy Chief of Police for actions of service or courage far above the standard Letter of Commendation level.

#### 1015.6 SPECIAL COMMENDATIONS

The Chief of Police may direct the production and presentation of commendation ribbons for significant events that members of the department perform significant duties. The following are examples of the types of events: natural disasters; significant long-lasting enforcement events (civil unrest), political events (Presidential or dignitary visits); or any other event that shows significant service by the Department for the community.

#### 1015.7 OUTSIDE AGENCY AWARDS

The Department values the recognition of its current employees by outside agencies or organizations. The below list is not all-inclusive and other awards can be pursued or considered by the Chief of Police.

Employees who received awards from other law enforcement agencies may petition to receive a matching commendation bar or request to wear their original award. Requests should be made to the Operations Bureau Commander.

#### OTHER OUTSIDE AGENCY AWARDS:

- 10851 CVC Award (CHP) - Criteria- Awarded to officers who, in a 12-month period, achieve any of the following criteria: Make six (6) separate auto theft recoveries cleared by arrest; or recover twelve (12) stolen vehicles, of which three (3) must be cleared by arrest; or Develop information resulting in the identification of a vehicle theft ring, the subsequent arrest of two or more suspects, and recovery of at least ten (10) vehicles.
- 23152 CVC Award (CHP) - Any officer who makes more than 25 DUI arrests

## *Commendations and Awards*

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### **1015.8 ANNUAL EXEMPLARY EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

With the exception of the Lifetime Achievement Award, all candidates below may only be nominated for conduct, performance and/or any other noteworthy attribute(s) that occurred within the calendar year for the year of nomination. The nomination must indicate superior performance above that which is considered normal or routine in his/her job classification. Awardees are provided a commendation bar for these achievements

- Officer of the Year (blue/gold/blue) - Any Police Officer or Corporal may be nominated for this award.
- Reserve Officer of the Year (blue/white/blue) - Any Reserve Officer may be nominated for this award
- Supervisor of the Year (blue/white/gold/white/blue) - Sworn and non-sworn supervisors who oversee any working group, section, team, unit, division, or bureau may be nominated. This award is open to sworn ranks of Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain as well as non-sworn supervisors or managers.
- Dispatcher of the Year (blue/red) - Any Communications Operator 1/2 or Communications Supervisor may be nominated for this award.
- Civilian of the Year (gold/blue/gold) - Any non-sworn employee of the Department may be nominated for this award.
- Cadet of the Year (blue) - Any police cadet or police trainee who was a prior cadet in this Department in the year of nomination may be nominated for this award.
- Volunteer of the Year (gold/blue) - Any unpaid volunteers who donate their time and services to assist the Department may be nominated for this award.
- Lifetime Achievement Award (blue/gold/blue/gold/blue/gold/blue/gold/blue) - All employees who have served the Department for over 25 years and have demonstrated a continual dedication to duty, the Department, and the City and have for the duration of their tenure provided exceptional service may be nominated for this award. An employee can only receive this award one time in their tenure.