



OPEC

OFFICE OF THE POLICE

COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER



**2025
ANNUAL REPORT**

**OFFICE OF THE POLICE COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER
AND POLICE REVIEW BOARD**

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Commissioner's Message

As one of my last acts as Nova Scotia's Police Complaints Commissioner, it is my honour to present the 2025 Annual Report of the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner and Police Review Board.

I am truly grateful for having had the opportunity to serve as the province's fourth Police Complaints Commissioner and contribute to the important work of civilian oversight of municipal police in Nova Scotia. After almost three decades of public service focused on civilian oversight of the police, I know for a certainty that effective oversight is forever a work in progress. Regardless of the legislative regime or jurisdiction, oversight should strengthen public trust, ensure accountability, and encourage transparency - while maintaining professional relationships and frank dialogue with police agencies. It has also been my honour to have worked alongside the dedicated staff at the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner - elevating the profile of the OPCC and developing policies to ensure efficient and effective oversight of the Police Act complaint process in Nova Scotia.

2025 saw opportunities for staff professional development, outreach, and the building of relationships - including invitations to present at the annual conferences of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association (NSCPA). 2025 also saw increases in both public and internal complaints from the previous year - with upgrades in technology on the office wish list to improve efficiencies in managing the corresponding increased demand on staff resources. Policing reform and strengthening civilian oversight were major themes for the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner in 2025 - with ministerial support for the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner's relocation to new stand-alone premises acknowledged and appreciated.

Respectfully,

Bill MacDonald

Police Complaints Commissioner

Province of Nova Scotia

March 31, 2026

Executive Summary

The Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner (OPCC) is a civilian, independent office which monitors complaints and investigations involving municipal police in Nova Scotia. The OPCC provides support to the Police Review Board which has the responsibility for deciding appeals from complainants or police officers dissatisfied with decisions of police agencies.

A member of the public may start a complaint against a municipal police officer or municipal police force by signing and filing a prescribed form within one year¹ after the incident giving rise to the complaint. Subject to certain exceptions, complaints are investigated by the police agency from which they arose. Unless a complaint is resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant and the officer or an extension has been granted by the Police Complaints Commissioner, the investigation must be completed within 60 days from the date a complaint is filed.

Once an investigation has been completed the Chief / Delegated Disciplinary Authority, or, in the case of a complaint against a chief of police, the municipality's Board of Police Commissioners, has 30 days to decide if the subject officer may have committed a disciplinary default. The decision maker must then either file a Form 11 decision or schedule a private meeting with the subject officer. There is no fixed timeline for when a meeting is to be scheduled.

Where the complainant or subject officer is not satisfied with the decision, they may file a Notice of Review. Upon receiving a Notice of Review from a public complainant, the Police Complaints Commissioner is required to attempt to resolve the complaint and, in attempting to do so, may conduct an independent investigation. If resolution is not successful, the Commissioner must send the file to the Review Board for a hearing, unless satisfied the complaint is frivolous, vexatious, without merit or an abuse of process.

In 2025, the OPCC received 202 public complaints. In addition, there were 31 internal complaints, in which officers alleged misconduct by other officers in the same police force.

¹ If the incident occurred on or after January 15, 2020, the Complaints Commissioner may extend the time for filing a complaint if satisfied that there are good reasons for doing so and that doing so would not be contrary to the public interest: Section 29 of the Police Regulations.

As of January 30, 2026, 25 public complaints filed in 2025 had been withdrawn, 42 had been set aside because they did not meet the statutory requirements for filing a complaint [See ** in complaint details], 13 had been informally resolved, 1 complaint had been substantiated, 92 complaints were unsubstantiated, and 30 were still under investigation.

The OPCC received a total of 31 requests for review of public complaints in 2025. Twelve complaints were referred to the Police Review Board during the 2025 calendar year.



Role of the Police Complaints Commissioner

Nova Scotia's Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner was established under the *Police Act* effective January 1, 2006.

Section 12(1)(b) of the *Police Act* states that the Police Complaints Commissioner shall "perform the duties assigned to the Complaints Commissioner by this Act, the regulations, the Minister, or the Governor in Council."

If a member of the public files a complaint alleging that a municipal police officer has committed misconduct described in Section 24 of the *Police Regulations* – within the time limit or extended time limit set out in the Regulations – the Commissioner sends the complaint to the chief of the officer's police force for investigation. The Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner (OPCC) monitors the investigation to ensure timeliness.

A complainant who is not satisfied with the decision made by the police agency following an investigation may request that the Commissioner refer their complaint to the Police Review Board. If the Commissioner cannot satisfactorily resolve the complaint, they shall forward the matter for a hearing before the Police Review Board – unless they determine that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious, without merit or an abuse of process.

A decision by the Commissioner not to refer a complaint to the Review Board is final – although subject to possible judicial review in the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.

Staff of the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner

As of December 31, 2025

Jeff Garber, *Director*, Investigations and Operations

Breanna Gale, *Coordinator*, Adjudicative Branch

Claire Doucette, *Complaint Intake Clerk*

The Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner is located in the Maritime Centre, 8th Floor South, 1505 Barrington Street.

Mailing Address: PO Box 1573 Maritime Centre 8th Floor South, 1505 Barrington Street, Halifax NS B3J 2A4 Canada

Telephone: (902) 424-3246

Facsimile: (902) 424-1777

Email: polcom@novascotia.ca

Online: www.novascotia.ca/opcc

Role of the Police Review Board

The primary role of the Police Review Board is to conduct reviews of public complaints and police officers' appeals against disciplinary penalties or dismissals.

The responsibilities of the Police Review Board are outlined in Section 18 of the *Police Act* which states:

The Review Board shall perform the functions and duties assigned to it by this Act, the regulations, the Minister or the Governor in Council and . . . shall

- a. conduct investigations and inquiries in accordance with the Act; and
- b. conduct hearings into complaints referred to it by the Complaints Commissioner in accordance with the Act or the regulations.

Section 19(1) of the *Police Act* empowers the Minister to direct the Review Board to investigate, inquire into and report to the Minister with respect to:

1. the extent, investigation or control of crime;
2. the enforcement of law; and
3. the operation and administration of a police department.

Police Review Board hearings about public complaints are open to the public unless the Review Board orders otherwise. Review Board hearings regarding internal disciplinary appeals are not open to the public.

A decision of the Police Review Board is final, although subject to possible judicial review in the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.

Review Board Members

Under the provisions of Section 13(1) of the *Police Act*, the Nova Scotia Police Review Board is composed of not fewer than three members appointed by the Governor-in-Council.



Members of the Police Review Board as of December 31, 2025

Jean McKenna, *Chair*

Hon. Simon J. MacDonald,
Vice Chair

Kimberly Ross

Don McMillan

Lisa Emery

Siobhan Doyle

Bruce Gillis

Ibrahim Elayyat

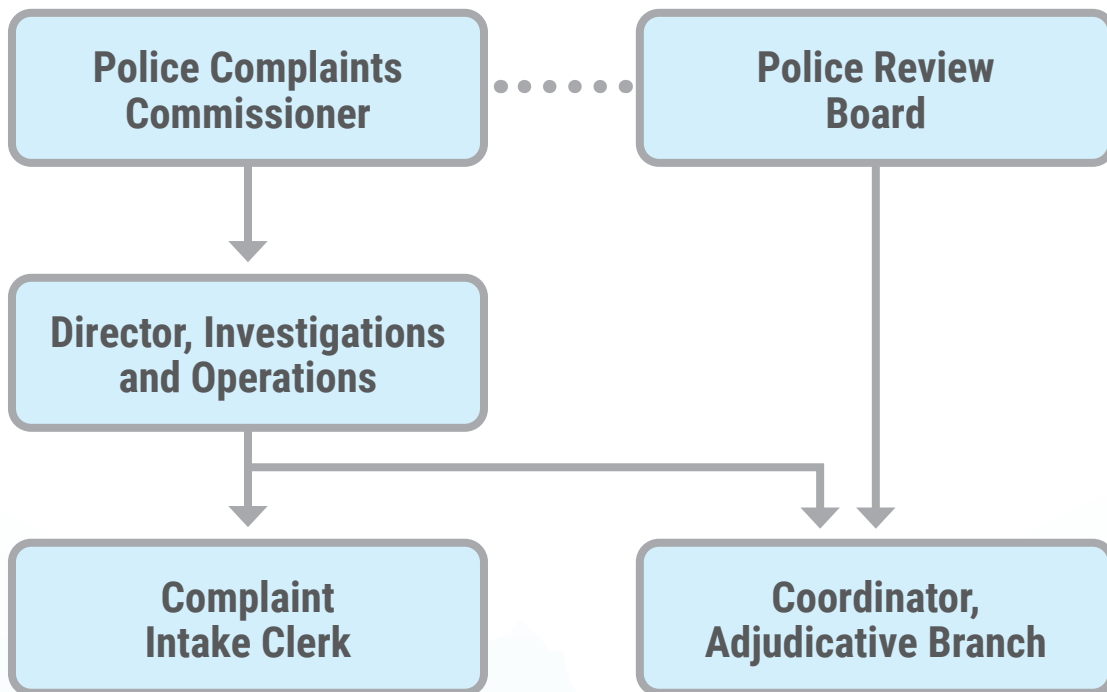
Brian MacDougall

Mathew Hack

Rachel Parsons

Bill MacDonald,
*Police Complaints
Commissioner*

Organizational Chart



Requests for Review

A total of 31 requests for review of public complaints were received in 2025.
12 public complaints were referred to the Police Review Board during the 2025 calendar year.

Number of Complaints

A total of 233 complaints were filed with the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner in 2025. 202 of the complaints were public allegations, while the other 31 arose internally, with one officer alleging misconduct by another officer in the same police agency.

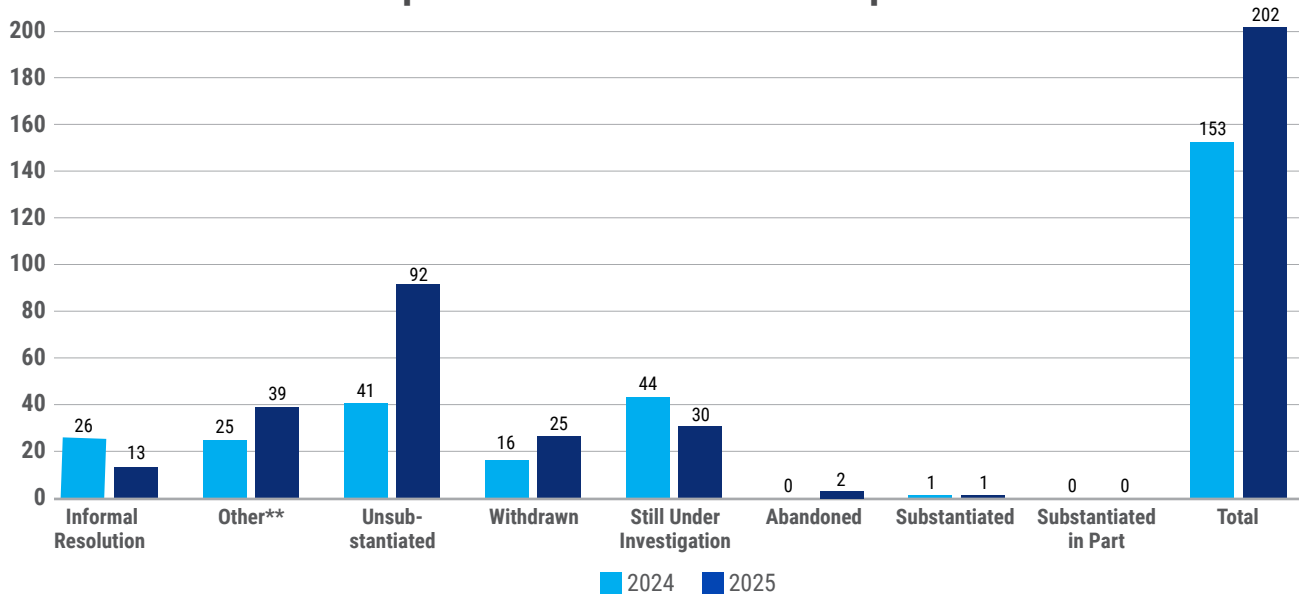
Complaints by municipal agency

Department	2024		2025	
	Public Complaints	Internal Complaints	Public Complaints	Internal Complaints
Amherst	21	2	16	2
Annapolis Royal	0	0	2	0
Bridgewater	4	0	3	0
Cape Breton Regional Police Service	22	6	28	8
Halifax Regional Police	85	8	112	17
Kentville	2	0	3	0
New Glasgow	6	2	5	1
Stellarton	1	0	0	0
Truro	7	2	29	2
Westville	0	0	0	1
RCMP/No agency indicated	5	0	4	0
Total	153	20	202	31

Disposition of Complaints

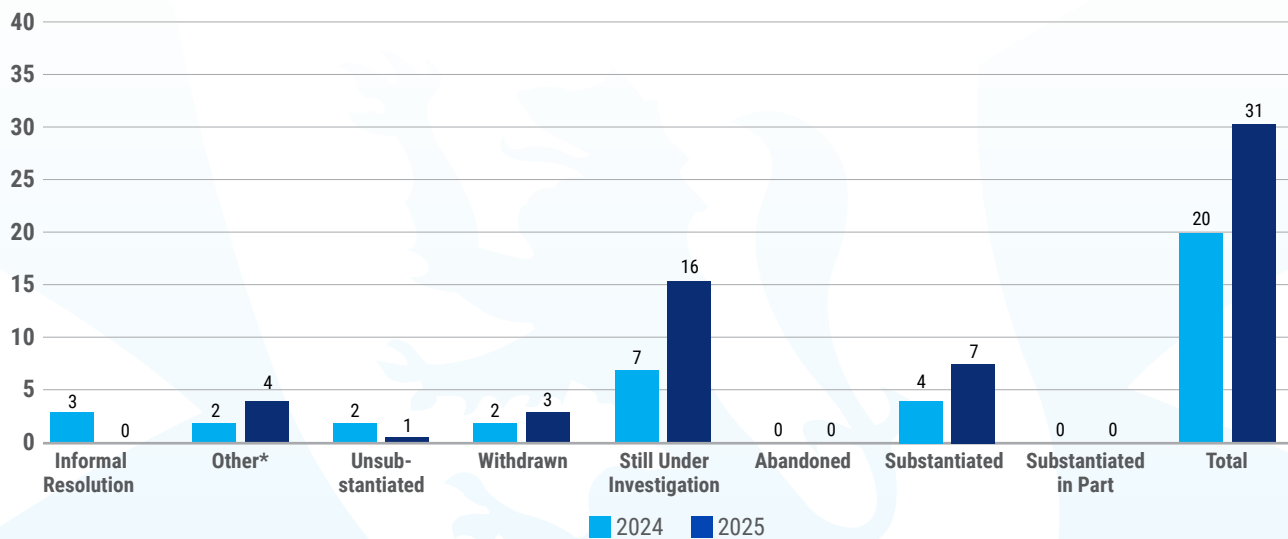
This is a snapshot of the progress of complaint files, as of January 17, 2025.

Disposition of Public Complaints



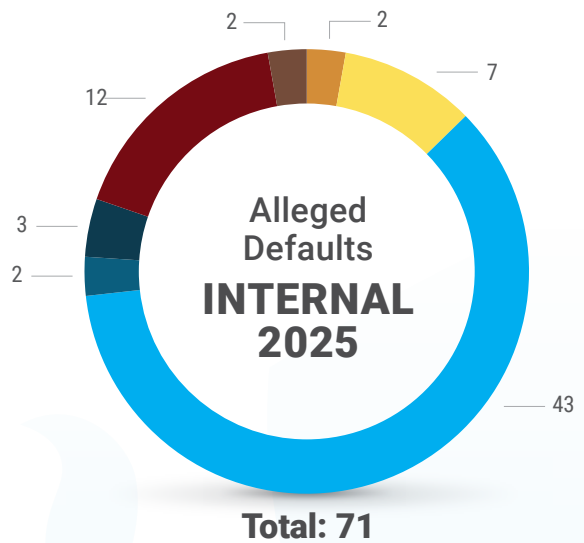
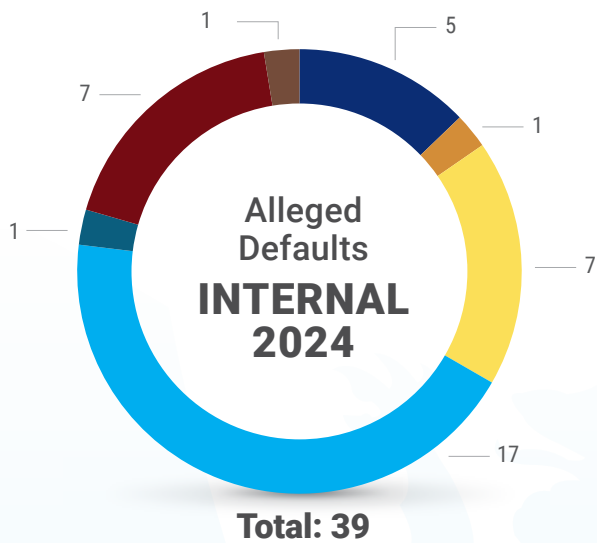
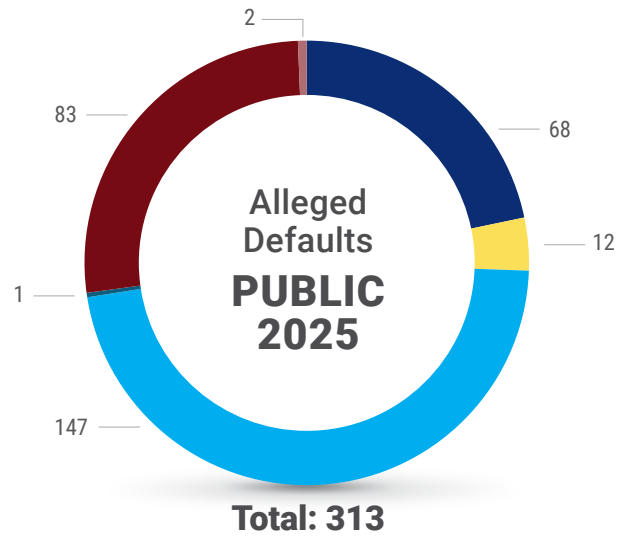
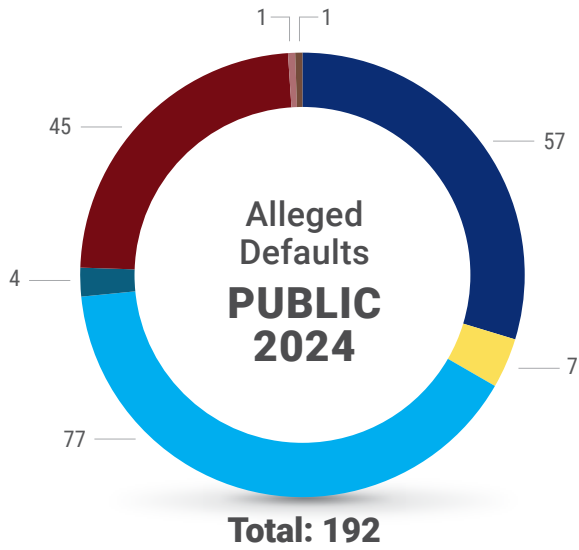
**Includes complaints received beyond the time limitation for filing, where no breach of the code of conduct alleged, against officers retired or resigned, or against an RCMP officer or a Sheriff. More information may be requested by the Commissioner before a decision is made whether to proceed with a complaint. In situations where the complaint is against a member of the RCMP or a Sheriff, the complainant is directed to the appropriate body to pursue their complaint.

Disposition of Internal Complaints



Code of Conduct Allegations

NOTE: A Complaint may contain several allegations of misconduct



- Abuse of Authority
- Discreditable Conduct
- Insubordination
- Liquor or Drug Infraction
- Corrupt Practice
- Improper Disclosure
- Neglect of Duty
- Complaint Against Department
- Engages in Deceit
- Improper use of Firearm
- Damages Property

Budget and Staffing

Departmental Expenses by Object	2025-26 Estimate	2025-26 Forecast
Salary and Employee Benefits	260,000	293,000
Operating Costs	193,000	355,000
Gross Expense		
L/C to other Departments		(67,000)
Total – Nova Scotia Police Complaints Commissioner	453,000	581,000
Funded Staff (FTEs)	3.0	3.0
Less: Staff Funded by External Agencies	--	--
Total – Funded Staff	3.0	3.0

Appendix 1:

The Public Complaint Process

How long do I have to file a public complaint?

Since January 15, 2021, a public complaint has had to be filed within one year after the date of the incident giving rise to it, unless the Complaints Commissioner has extended the time for filing upon being satisfied there was good reason for the extension and that it would not be contrary to the public interest.

Where do I file a complaint?

You may file your complaint against a police officer or a police department with any of the following:

- Any municipal police department;
- The Board of Police Commissioners for the area which the police force is responsible for policing;
- The Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner.

If a complaint is filed with a police department or a board of police commissioners, the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner will receive a copy of it.

How do I file a complaint?

A Complaint Form (Form 5) must be submitted in writing, dated and signed by the complainant. You can obtain a Form 5 from any municipal police department, local board of police commissioners, or OPCC's office. The Form 5 can also be found on OPCC's web site: www.novascotia.ca/opcc/publications/Form_5_and_Form_5A.pdf

You must include the date, time, place and details of the incident that you are complaining about.

What happens next?

What happens after I make my complaint?

Unless the Commissioner concludes that a Form 5 complaint does not meet the conditions for filing a complaint, OPCC directs the Chief of the police department where the police officer works to complete an investigation within 60 days after the complaint was filed. The police chief or the investigator the chief selects will try to resolve the complaint informally if you and the officer agree. If the complaint is not resolved, the police department will proceed with the investigation. The investigation must be completed within 60 days after the day the complaint is received by the OPCC, unless the Commissioner grants an extension of time for completion. You will receive notice of any extension and of the completion of the investigation.

Who decides the outcome of the investigation?

The Chief of Police or the Delegated Disciplinary Authority chosen by the Chief or (if the complaint is against the Chief of Police) the Municipal Board of Police Commissioners will review the investigation and decide what further action, if any, will be taken.

This process may take several months.

The complainant, the named (subject) officer and the Police Complaints Commissioner will be notified of the decision (Form 11).

Common Questions and Answers

— **Question** —

What is the role of the Police Complaints Commissioner in the Police Department's Investigation?

— **Answer** —

The Commissioner ensures that timelines provided in the **Police Act** Regulations are adhered to.

— **Question** —

What can I do if I am not satisfied with the decision of the Chief, the Delegated Disciplinary Authority or the Municipal Board of Police Commissioners?

— **Answer** —

If you are not satisfied with the decision, you may file a Notice of Review (Form 13) with the OPCC within 30 days of receipt of the police department's decision (Form 11).

The Police Complaints Commissioner will review the file and attempt to resolve the matter. If unable to resolve the matter, the Commissioner will refer the complaint to the Police Review Board for a hearing unless satisfied it is frivolous, vexatious, without merit or an abuse of process.

If the complaint is not referred to the Police Review Board, you will be notified that no further action will be taken with respect to your complaint.

— **Question** —

What can I do if my complaint is not referred to the Review Board?

— **Answer** —

No further action can be taken under the **Police Act**, but the decision not to refer could be the subject of a judicial review in the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.

— **Question** —

What happens when my complaint is referred to the Review Board?

— **Answer** —

A panel of three members will conduct a hearing into your complaint. You will be contacted by the Clerk of the Board and a hearing date will be scheduled. You may be represented by a lawyer if you wish.

The Police Review Board does not provide legal representation for you. If you are not represented by a lawyer, the Clerk of the Police Review Board will, upon request, assist you with the preparation of subpoenas for witnesses.

— **Question** —

Is my complaint kept confidential?

— **Answer** —

Complaints are considered confidential; however, if your complaint is referred to the Police Review Board, the hearing is open to the public (including news media) unless the Review Board orders otherwise, and Review Board decisions may be published online.

— **Question** —

Who sits on the Police Review Board?

— **Answer** —

The Police Review Board is made up of members of the public appointed by the government.

— **Question** —

What can the Review Board do?

— **Answer** —

The Review Board may:

- Substitute a finding that in its opinion should have been reached
- Affirm or change any penalty which has been imposed
- Dismiss the matter

The Review Board cannot award compensation.

— **Question** —

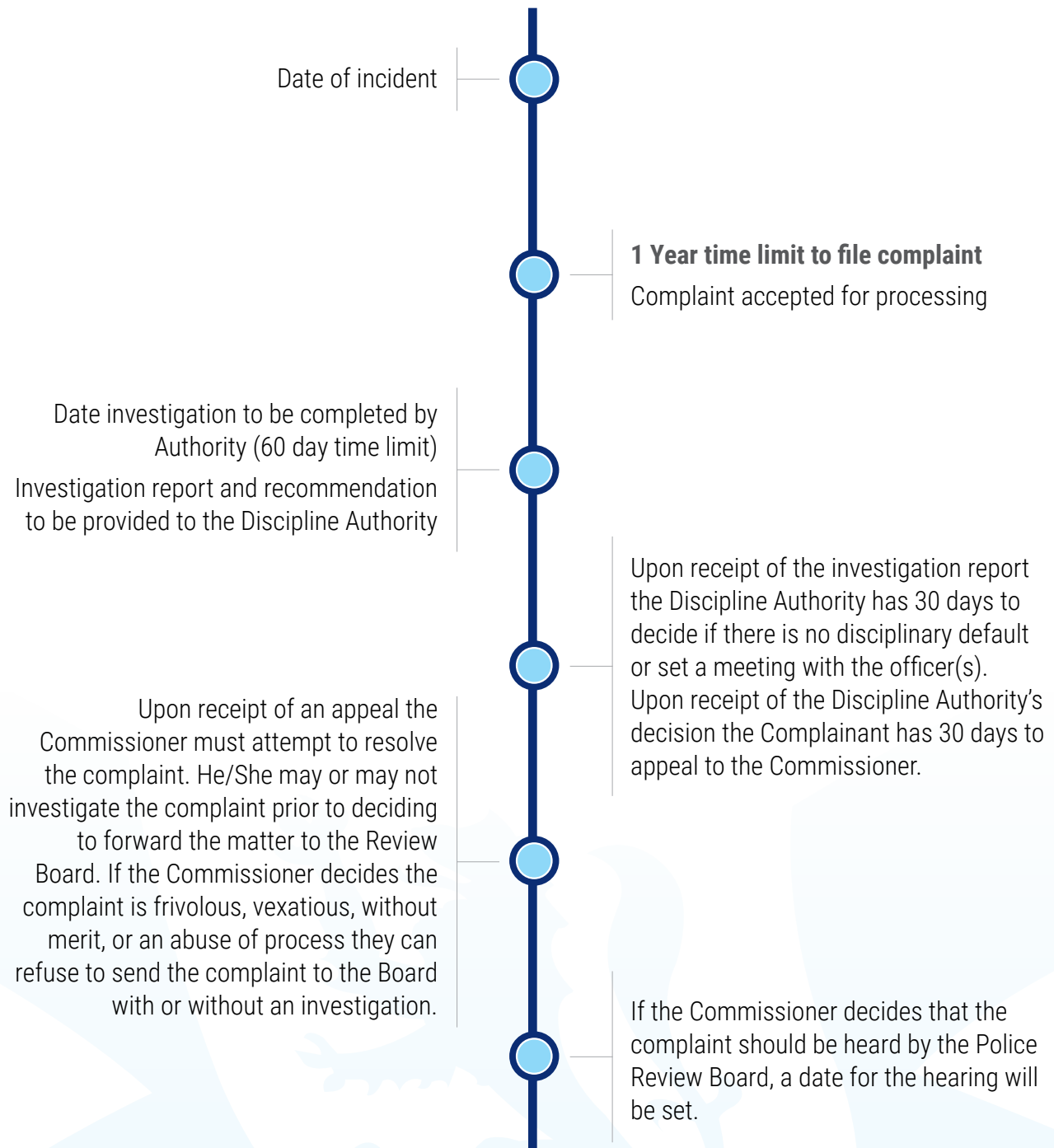
What if I am dissatisfied with the Review Board's decision?

— **Answer** —

The Review Board's decision is final, but the decision could be the subject of a judicial review in the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia.

Filing a Public Complaint:

Timeline Example





Appendix 2:

Professional Association

The Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner is a member of the Canadian Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (CACOLE). CACOLE is a national non-profit organization of individuals and agencies involved in the oversight of police officers in Canada. CACOLE is dedicated to advancing the concept, principles and application of civilian oversight of law enforcement throughout Canada and abroad.

The first meeting of heads of oversight agencies happened in the fall of 1995. The first conference was held in Halifax in September of 1996. CACOLE was ultimately established in 1997 and is an incorporated non-profit organization under the Canada Incorporations Act. The national organization is governed by a set of By Laws and is managed by an elected, volunteer Board of Directors representing oversight agencies in each province.

For more information, please visit CACOLE's website at: www.cacole.ca

CACOLE Board of Directors

Matthew Block, *Executive Director, Alberta Serious Incident Response Team (AB)*

Prabhu Rajan, *Police Complaint Commissioner, Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner (BC)*

Jennifer Smith, *Executive Director, New Brunswick Police Commission (NB)*

Bill MacDonald, *Commissioner, Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner, (NS)*

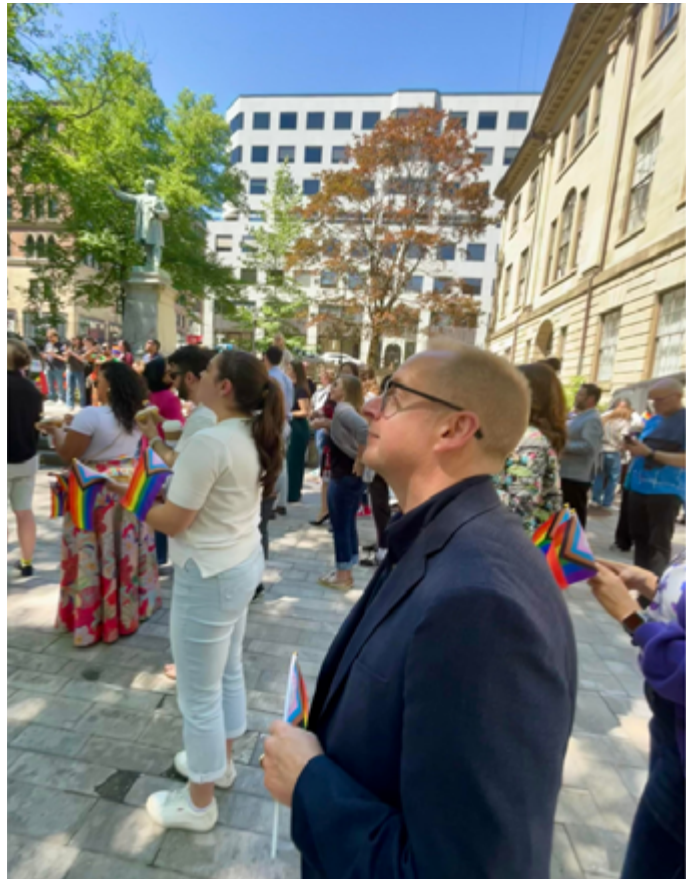
Erin Nauss, *Director, Serious Incident Response Team, (NS)*

Stephen Leach, *Director, Law Enforcement Complaints Agency, (ON)*

Stephanie Mulcaster, *Senior Counsel and Director, National Security and Intelligence Review (ON)*

Ryan Teschner, *Inspector General of Policing, Office of the Inspector General (ON)*

Greg Gudelot, *Executive Director, Public Complaints Commission and Serious Incident Response Team (SK)*



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