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Police Department’s Civilian Hiring Lags Behind Stated Plans

The de Blasio Administration has made it a priority to increase overall staffing within the police department (NYPD) and in particular the number of uniformed personnel (police officers) available for patrol. The two-pronged strategy has called for hiring additional police officers as well as civilian employees, with many of the latter expected to fill administrative positions that had been staffed by uniformed personnel. There are also other NYPD civilian positions that have not regularly been filled by uniformed police officers. These include school safety personnel, traffic enforcement agents, and 911 operators.

At the end of December 2016, the NYPD’s actual uniformed personnel headcount was 36,242, an increase of about 1,400, or 4.1 percent, from three years earlier. Meanwhile, the increase in actual civilian headcount was more modest despite the de Blasio Administration’s announcements of multiple initiatives to hire more civilians.

As of December 2016, the NYPD’s actual full-time civilian headcount totaled 14,497, an increase of only 284, or 2.0 percent from the December 2013 level, although budgeted civilian positions grew by over 1,600 (11.6 percent) in that period. In other words, the hiring of civilian employees has

not kept pace with the increase in the department’s budget for civilian staff. While in December 2013 only slightly more than 1 percent of budgeted civilian positions in the NYPD were vacant, by December 2016 the civilian position vacancy rate had increased to nearly 10 percent.

The Mayor’s January 2017 financial plan includes a \$5.1 million reduction in annual funding for the NYPD through the elimination of 150 currently vacant civilian positions. The actual savings accrued in the current year from vacant civilian positions within the NYPD is likely to be much greater. In the first eight months of the current fiscal year the department averaged \$53.4 million per month in spending on base salaries for full-time civilian personnel, a figure exclusive of overtime pay. At this rate IBO estimates that the department would spend \$641 million—\$97 million less than the amount currently budgeted for the entire fiscal year.

There have been wide differences in the staffing trends among the NYPD’s civilian positions.¹ In May 2016 the de Blasio Administration announced that the budgeted number of school safety agents was to increase by 175. As of December 2016, however, there were 66 fewer school safety agents employed by the NYPD than had been the case in December 2013. The number of NYPD civilians working within police administrative aide/associate titles also fell, declining by 66 from December 2013 through December 2016. The drop in actual staffing occurred despite a June 2014 agreement between the de Blasio Administration and the City Council that an additional 200 police administrative aides would be hired for the purpose of allowing for the reassignment of police officers to direct enforcement functions.

NYPD Full-Time Civilian Staffing, Budgeted versus Actual				
	December 2013	December 2016	Change	Percent Change
Budgeted Civilian Positions	14,406	16,074	1,668	11.6%
Actual (Filled) Civilian Positions	14,213	14,497	284	2.0%

SOURCES: Mayor’s Office of Management and Budget; Financial Management System (FMS)
NOTE: Actual staffing figures are as of December 31st of each year.
New York City Independent Budget Office



Actual Full-Time New York City Police Department Civilian Staffing by Position, 2013-2016					
	December 2013	December 2014	December 2015	December 2016	Change
School Safety Agents	4,992	5,071	4,996	4,926	(66)
Traffic Enforcement Agents	2,873	2,959	2,942	2,993	120
Police Administrative Associates/Aides	2,615	2,586	2,584	2,549	(66)
Police Communication Technicians (911 Operators)	1,319	1,431	1,400	1,394	75
Trades and Custodial Personnel	884	945	951	979	95
Legal Staff	69	91	104	90	21
Information Technology Personnel	208	216	216	226	18
All Other Civilian Titles (Various Categories)	1,253	1,250	1,293	1,340	87
TOTAL	14,213	14,549	14,486	14,497	284

SOURCE: Financial Management System
NOTES: Actual staffing figures are as of December 31st of each year. Staffing within each category includes any supervisory personnel.
New York City Independent Budget Office

The number of filled traffic enforcement agent (TEA) positions increased by 120 over the three-year period, although a series of announcements made by the Mayor’s office during the same period included commitments to add a total of 526 positions. In May 2014 it was announced that the NYPD would receive city funds to hire an additional 147 traffic enforcement agents to aid enforcement associated with the Vision Zero initiative. Subsequently, the January 2016 financial plan called for an additional increase of 327 in TEA staffing and the April 2016 financial plan increased budgeted TEA staffing by 52 more positions for “Block the Box” enforcement in Manhattan. The number of filled police communication technician (911 operator) positions within the NYPD increased by 75 over the three-year period, less than one-third of the 282 position increase in budgeted headcount over the same period.

Civilianization and Overtime. It is a long-standing practice of the NYPD to assign full-duty police officers to some positions that are “civilianizable,” meaning the work does not require a trained police officer but could instead be performed by a civilian. (Administrative and support positions occupied by officers on restricted, limited, or modified duty are not included in the count of civilianizable positions.) Over the last three years the NYPD has reported progress in reducing the number of full-duty officers in slots that could be filled by civilians.

The latest NYPD statistics show that the number jobs that could be done by civilians decreased from 731 in December 2013 to 381 by December 2016. The NYPD is required to report quarterly on civilianizable positions under legislation enacted in 2001.

The policy of using full-duty uniformed officers for positions that do not require their specialized training is often criticized, especially in light of the department’s regular use of overtime to meet law enforcement demands throughout the city. Critics of the policy contend that hiring additional civilian personnel would enable the department to redeploy police officers performing administrative or support functions to direct law enforcement activities, thereby reducing some of the need for uniformed overtime expenditures. In 2017, the NYPD’s uniformed overtime expenditures are on pace to be about \$547 million—\$44 million more than currently budgeted.

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Endnote

¹Using the city’s Financial Management System, IBO can track the actual number of individuals working within any specific job title. The system does not, however, provide a breakdown of all budgeted positions by specific title. The Mayor’s budget office has not responded to IBO’s requests for the breakdown by title of budgeted positions.

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