OLEO2025-007

Executive Summary

Date of Incident	April 2, 2025
Location of Incident	King County
Date of Complaint	August 5, 2025
Corresponding IIU Case Number	IIU2025-182
Allegation Types	Dishonesty; Conduct Unbecoming

On August 8, 2025, the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO) received a complaint from a member of the King County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office). The complainant claimed that the subject employee was dishonest during a Sheriff's Office internal investigation into alleged misconduct by the complainant. Specifically, the complainant, who is transgender, alleged that the subject employee intentionally exaggerated his reaction to the subject employee publicly referring to him with the wrong pronouns. The complainant believed that the subject employee was dishonest in order to advance the political agenda of the King County Police Officers Guild (KCPOG).[1]

As part of its investigation, OLEO reviewed the subject employee's statements from the prior investigation; interviewed the complainant; reviewed purported screenshots of text messages from the complainant about the incident; reviewed a KCPOG blog post about the complainant; and interviewed the subject employee and witness employees jointly with investigators from the Sheriff's Office Internal Investigations Unit (IIU).

OLEO finds that the allegation of **Dishonesty** against the subject employee is **Non-Sustained** because there is insufficient evidence about the underlying incident to disprove his prior statements.

Similarly, OLEO finds that the allegation of **Conduct Unbecoming** is **Non-Sustained** because there is insufficient evidence that the subject employee was dishonest in the past investigation in order to advance a political agenda.

Allegations and Findings

Sheriff's Office Personnel	Allegation	Finding
Deputy Clark Matthews	Dishonesty	Non-Sustained
	Conduct Unbecoming	Non-Sustained

Applicable Laws and GOM Policies[2]

1. General Orders Manual (GOM) 3.00.015(1)(a) – Dishonesty
2. GOM 3.00.015(2)(h) – Conduct Unbecoming

[1] KCPOG is the union that represents deputies and sergeants at the King County Sheriff's Office.
[2] The General Orders Manual (GOM) contains policies of the King County Sheriff's Office. Policies applied are those that were in effect when the underlying incident giving rise to the complaint occurred.

Investigative Summary

Interviews

OLEO conducted interviews with:

1. Sergeant Jamie Deer (complainant)
2. Deputy Clark Mattews[3] (subject employee)
3. Sergeant Isaac Arand (witness)
4. Deputy Francisco Zepeda (witness)
5. Sergeant Matthew Paul (witness)

In his statement to OLEO, Sergeant Deer named several other officers as witnesses to how he has generally behaved when misgendered in the workplace. OLEO did not attempt to interview these officers because it determined that they did not witness the events described in the allegedly dishonest statements at issue in this investigation.

Evidence

OLEO reviewed the following additional evidence:

1. Text messages between Sergeant Jamie Deer and [redacted]
2. Email from Deputy Clark Matthews to IIU, February 14, 2025
3. Recorded statement of Deputy Clark Mattews in internal investigation #IIU2025-027, April 2, 2025
4. King County Police Officers Guild blog post, "Addressing Recent Social Media Conduct by Precinct 3 Captain," Detective Jack Hornstein, February 13, 2025

An IIU investigator attempted to recover text messages exchanged by Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews in May 2018, but was told by the Sheriff's Office Archive and Records Manager that they had not been retained due to their age.

Fact Summary

This investigation centered on statements that Deputy Matthews made during a 2025 Sheriff's Office internal investigation, case #IIU2025-027, about an incident where he allegedly misgendered Sergeant Jamie Deer in May of 2018. For context, Sergeant Jamie Deer is a transgender man who has been employed by the King County Sheriff's Office since 1998. In 2016, after beginning his medical transition, Sergeant Deer disclosed his transition and legal name change to Sheriff's Office leadership. Then-Sheriff John Urquhart circulated an email to all staff in July 2016 announcing and expressing support for Sergeant Deer's transition, which included an attached letter from Sergeant Deer to the department. In the letter, Sergeant Deer explained the significance of his transition to his peers and asked that they not disclose his transgender status to others.

The incident described by Deputy Matthews in his allegedly false statements occurred in the summer of 2018, nearly two years after Sergeant Deer's social transition in the workplace. At the time, Sergeant Deer worked as a Master Police Officer on the night shift in Precinct 2, training new officers who had recently graduated from the Criminal Justice Training Academy. Sergeant Matt Paul led the squad, which included at least two other deputies – Francis Zepeda and Isaac Arand. Deputy Clark Matthews

[3] Deputy Matthews goes by the nickname "Trey," and is referred to as such by other witnesses in their interviews

joined the squad sometime in 2017 as a probationary officer after being hired from another police department. By all accounts, his relationship with Sergeant Deer was initially professional and unremarkable.

Both Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews acknowledged that this changed after a squad rollcall meeting that occurred around May 17, 2018. It is undisputed by both officers that during the meeting, Deputy Matthews referred to Sergeant Deer as "she" at least twice. Their accounts of what occurred next differ. Deputy Matthews stated that Sergeant Deer stormed out of the meeting. Per Deputy Matthews, after the meeting ended, he went to his patrol car and received "two or three text messages, a couple of paragraphs long about how dare I misgender them and that there's been an order sent out by the Sheriff ordering people to call them by a he instead of a she and this and that and that I could be fired, and all of this nonsense."

In his statement, Sergeant Deer denied running out of the rollcall meeting in response to being misgendered, but acknowledged that he texted Deputy Matthews after the meeting ended. Investigators were not able to obtain the messages from Deputy Matthews work phone. Sergeant Deer provided OLEO with undated screenshots of text messages to his wife, [redacted], which he claimed were sent immediately after the rollcall meeting. In one screenshot, Sergeant Deer texted [redacted]:

> So the phrase 3 guy that lateraled from Florida and took Clark's place here at Precinct 2. He road with me a day for familiarity. Never called me she. Talked to me as if he only new me as He just called me "she" at roll call. When he did I said "she! Does there look like there is a she around here?" He and Matt Paul completely bipassed that. So it confirms to me someone is telling people. Because he never once slipped until today.

In later messages, Sergeant Deer wrote:

> Here is what I sent him. So I am not sure who is saying what to new people getting assigned here but my pronouns are "he/him" which you didn't seem to he wrong until roll call today. I am relatively sure this is because someone told you of my past. Please respect the proper pronouns. I give patience for those who have served with me for years but I don't see a reason new people get it wrong. Thanks.

Additional screenshots[4] provided by Sergeant Deer included messages to his wife about discussing the rollcall meeting with Sergeant Paul. When interviewed as part of this investigation, Deputy Zepeda, Deputy Arands, and Sergeant Paul did not recall seeing Deputy Matthews misgender Sergeant Deer, or ever seeing Sergeant Deer storm out of a rollcall meeting.

Both Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews described later meeting up in a grocery store parking lot to discuss the misgendering incident on the same night that it happened. Deputy Matthews claimed that Sergeant Deer "cursed me out" and told the deputy that he could be fired for misgendering him. Per Deputy Matthews, Sergeant Deer then demanded to know who had told Deputy Matthews about his transition. Deputy Matthews stated that he told Sergeant Deer that no one was talking about him, and that he saw online news stories about Sergeant Deer being the first trans officer in Washington when he researched the department before being hired.

In his complaint statement, Sergeant Deer stated that he did question Deputy Matthews about how the deputy learned of his transition because, at the time, he was concerned about coworkers revealing he

[4] Sergeant Deer also gave OLEO screenshots of a conversation with [redacted] from 2022, in which they appear to discuss whether another sergeant has been disclosing his transgender status to new deputies. OLEO did not consider those screenshots as part of this investigation because they were not directly relevant to the issue of what transpired in May 2018.

was trans without his consent, in violation of his request in his letter to the department. Sergeant Deer denied ever yelling at Deputy Matthews.

In their statements to investigators in this case, Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews both stated that no one else was present during their conversation in the grocery store parking lot. Deputy Arands and Deputy Zapeta confirmed that they did not see this encounter.

Deputy Matthews stated that his relationship with Sergeant Deer remained professional until he moved to Sound Transit the following fall. He did not discuss the incident with Sergeant Deer with anyone else, and did not make any complaints about what occurred. Sergeant Paul and Deputy Arands stated that they did not notice anything unusual about Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews' relationship for the remainder of Deputy Matthews' time working in Precinct 2.

Eventually, Sergeant Deer was promoted to Captain. In February 2025, he made two posts on his personal Facebook account criticizing President Donald Trump's executive orders reversing legal protections and programs for the transgender community. A conservative talk radio host obtained screenshots of the posts and published an online article criticizing them on February 10, 2025. The same day, the Sheriff's Office initiated a misconduct investigation into Sergeant Deer for making the posts.

On February 13, 2025, KCPOG published a blog post denouncing Sergeant Deer's statements as evidence that he could not act impartially as a supervisor[5] and encouraging its members to file a complaint with IIU "if they feel this situation has impacted them." Deputy Matthews emailed IIU to make a formal complaint against Sergeant Deer on February 14, 2025. In a subsequent interview with an internal investigator taken as part of case #IIU2025-027, Deputy Matthews provided his account of his interaction with Sergeant Deer in May 2018. He stated that, based on this experience and Sergeant Deer's Facebook posts, he would not feel comfortable having Sergeant Deer in his chain of command. Throughout the recorded statement, Deputy Matthews used the pronouns "they" and "them" to refer to Sergeant Deer.

Once investigation #IIU2025-027 into Sergeant Deer's Facebook posts was complete, he raised the instant complaint about Deputy Matthews' statement during the investigation. Sergeant Deer alleged that Deputy Matthews knowingly lied about the fact that he ran out of the rollcall meeting after being misgendered and exaggerated how upset he was in order to advance KCPOG's campaign against him. Sergeant Deer also took issue with the fact that Deputy Matthews used "they" and "them" to refer to him during the statement.

In his compelled interview in this case, Deputy Matthews reiterated his prior account of what happened in May 2018, and denied being dishonest. He stated that he felt threatened being confronted by Sergeant Deer because he was on probationary status at the time and did not want to get fired. Deputy Mathews did not recall if he spoke with anyone from KCPOG before making his complaint against Sergeant Deer in 2025, but stated that he agreed with their stance based on his personal experience with Sergeant Deer.

Analysis

Dishonesty: Non-Sustained

GOM 3.00.015(1)(a) requires that Sheriff's Office employees "shall be truthful in all matters and shall not lie, falsify, conceal, purposely distort, diminish, embellish, or fail to fully disclose facts associated

[5] At the time of the post, Sergeant Deer had recently been promoted to Captain.

with any law enforcement business." Dishonesty is considered a serious allegation that may lead to termination of the subject's employment. Under GOM 3.03.185, an allegation of dishonesty therefore must be established by clear and convincing evidence.

Here, Sergeant Deer alleged that Deputy Matthews exaggerated his reaction to being misgendered at roll call meeting in May 2019 when making his complaint in IIU2025-027. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that Deputy Matthews' description of Sergeant Deer's actions was false. Notably, Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews provide similar accounts of the encounter – both acknowledged that Deputy Matthews referred to Sergeant Deer with the wrong pronouns during the meeting; that Sergeant Deer texted him afterwards; and that they later met up in a parking lot to discuss what happened and how Deputy Matthews knew about Sergeant Deer's transition. The claim of dishonestly hinges on whether or not Sergeant Deer stormed out of the meeting, and the specific words and tone he used when discussing the meeting with Deputy Matthews.

This investigation uncovered little evidence of value regarding these facts. All of the possible witnesses to the roll call meeting – Sergeant Paul, Deputy Arands, and Deputy Zepeda – had no specific recollection of seeing Deputy Matthews misgender Sergeant Deer, or of Sergeant Deer ever running out of a roll call meeting. None of the potential witnesses saw Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews' encounter in the parking lot and did not recall having any specific conversations with either Sergeant Deer or Deputy Matthews about the incident after the fact.

The text messages exchanged by Sergeant Deer and Deputy Matthews after the incident were also not able to be recovered due to the Sheriff Office's records retention practices. OLEO did not give significant weight to the screenshots of text messages provided by Sergeant Deer because they were undated, and because they only contained his account to a third party about what he sent to Deputy Matthews. OLEO therefore recommends a finding of **Non-Sustained** for the allegation of **Dishonesty.**

Conduct Unbecoming: Non-Sustained

GOM 3.00.015(2) defines conduct unbecoming as, among other things, any conduct that tends to adversely affect or impair the efficiency of a department member, or adversely affects the morale or discipline of the Sheriff's Office. An allegation of conduct unbecoming typically must be sustained by a preponderance of the evidence pursuant to 3.03.185(1).

Sergeant Deer alleged that Deputy Matthews exaggerated the events of their May 2018 encounter in his statement in #IIU2025-027 to bolster KCPOG's stance on Sergeant Deer's actions as expressed by KCPOG in their February 13, 2025 blog post. While Deputy Matthews acknowledged agreeing with the post and reaching out to IIU to make his complaint in response to seeing it, there is insufficient evidence to show that the resulting statement in #IIU2025-027 was untrue or made in bad faith. OLEO thus recommends a finding of **Non-Sustained** for the allegation of **Conduct Unbecoming.**

-R.McPhail
Ryan McPhail
Investigations Monitor

2/17/2026
Date