

Fiscal Year  
2020



# Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL COMPLIANCE (OPC)  
ANNUAL REPORT

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## The Mission and Vision of the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office

### Mission:

The mission of the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office is to serve our community through intentional engagement, access and transparency. To perform the constitutional and statutory mandates of the Office of Sheriff with the highest degree of competence, skill and professionalism. To actively enforce the laws of our state and to safely operate our detention facilities through progressive, innovative and humane practices aimed towards rehabilitating those in custody through non-conventional methods and returning citizens back into our community with hope and a chance for a successful future.

### Vision:

To be a nationally recognized public safety organization dedicated to deliberate service to our community. To have a highly skilled, well trained, and educated Sheriff's Office that is progressive, service oriented and purpose driven to influence change by being "The Difference."

## The Mission and Vision of the Office of Professional Compliance

The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) strives to maintain the trust of the citizens it serves and ensure ethical conduct of all its employees. The Office of Professional Compliance (OPC) was established to address the employee misconduct investigative process in a uniform manner, provide citizens with a fair and effective avenue for redress of legitimate complaints against employees, protect all employees from false charges, and assure that accused employees are treated fairly and consistently. While the responsibility for conforming to the Sheriff's Office rules and regulations rests upon all employees, it is most effectively discharged when agency supervisors set a positive example. The OPC reports all investigative findings to the Sheriff of Mecklenburg County.



## North Carolina Internal Affairs Investigators Association



## The Office of Professional Compliance Staff

### Major

*Daniel Johnson*

### Captains

*Karen L. Jones*

*Douglas Smith*

### Sergeants

*Rodney Freeman*

*Thomas Shields*

*Tameka Talford*

### Administrative Support

*Patricia Wills*

*Lisa Kerner*

## Introduction

The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office, Office of Professional Compliance operates in accordance with the established General Order #4, "Discipline, Internal Investigations, & Employee Rights." The OPC facilitates the process of filing a complaint or an allegation for employee misconduct; the allegations and complaints can be submitted by an internal<sup>1</sup> and or an external<sup>2</sup> source.

Allegations and complaints against an MCSO employee can be made in person, by mail, over the telephone, electronic mail, or via the online portal located on the MCSO website. For instances where the complainant cannot file the report in person, the OPC personnel may visit the person at his or her home, place of business, or other location to complete the report.

Upon receiving an allegation or a complaint of employee misconduct, the OPC has the primary responsibility for review and investigation of the submission. Based on the violation category that the complaint alleges, the OPC will forward the case file to the appropriate unit for further review and investigation. A completed case file will be adjudicated at the appropriate level, depending on the violation category.

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<sup>1</sup> An internal source for an allegation or a complaint is an employee of the MCSO; submission can be made by a supervisor, a co-worker, or any other member of the agency.

<sup>2</sup> An external source for an allegation or a complaint is any source that is outside of the MCSO; submission can be made by members of the general public or customers served by the MCSO (including arrestees and detention center residents).

## Categories of Misconduct

There are four categories of misconduct that are utilized by OPC and are used as a tool to determine the level of severity for each allegation and to assign proper corrective action.

### Category A

Category A violations are the most serious type of violations; upon their receipt and investigation by the OPC, completed case files are reviewed by the employee's Chain of Command. A sustained Category A violation can result in any appropriate corrective action, including termination.

### Category B

Category B violations are of moderate severity; each violation of this category is investigated and reviewed at the Major or the Director level Chain of Command Review Board Hearing. The Major or the Director over the employee's area of assignment will be responsible for the final disposition of the hearing for violations in this category. The first sustained Category B violation is subject to suspension for one day without pay. Except in aggravated cases, this suspension shall be suspended for one year under such conditions as the Sheriff or his designee may impose. A second sustained Category B violation within 12 months of the first sustained Category B violation is subject to suspension for one day without pay. In addition, any suspended disposition applicable to the previous violation shall be activated. Subsequent alleged Category B violations sustained within a 12-month period are treated as a Category A violation.

### Category C

Category C violations are of minor severity; each violation of this category is investigated and disposed of by the Captain or the Manager supervising the employee's area of assignment. Each disposition made in Category C violation hearings must be reviewed by the Major or the Director over the area of assignment. First and second Category C violations sustained within a 12-month period are subject to specific corrective action(s) outlined in a written reprimand. Subsequent alleged Category C violations within a 12-month period are investigated as Category B violations.

### Category D

Category D violations are the least severe; each violation of this category is investigated and disposed of by the Sergeant or the Supervisor over the employee's area of assignment. The first and second sustained violations in this category within a 12-month period are subject to documented corrective counseling and documented verbal reprimand, respectively. Subsequent alleged Category D violations within a 12-month period are investigated as Category C violations.

## Complaint Adjudication

OPC personnel serve to advise the Chain of Command on the investigation and disciplinary process, but do not participate in the determination of the final disposition. The following adjudication statuses are used for final disposition: sustained, not sustained, exonerated, unfounded, and information file.

### Adjudication Status Definitions:

**Sustained**: The investigation disclosed sufficient evidence to prove the allegation made in the complaint.

**Not Sustained**: The investigation failed to disclose sufficient evidence to prove or disprove the allegation made in the complaint.

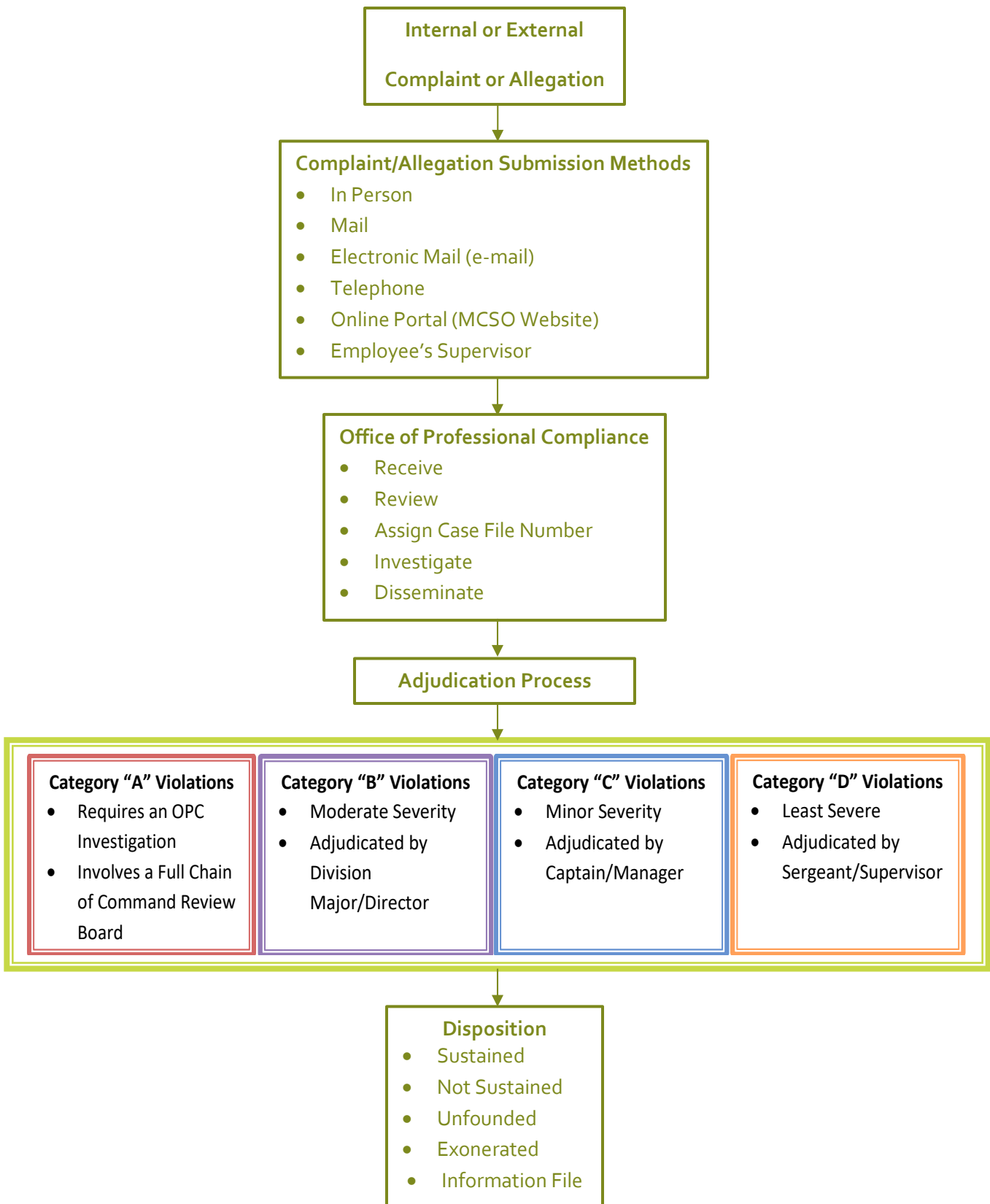
**Exonerated**: The acts that provided the basis for the complaint or allegation occurred, but the investigation revealed that they were justified, lawful, and proper.

**Unfounded**: The allegation is false. The incident never occurred, or the employee was not involved in the incident, or the investigation conclusively proved that the employee's alleged act or actions never took place.

**Information File**: The allegation of employee misconduct investigated by the OPC is lacking in merit and substance; therefore, preparation of formal charges and review by a Chain of Command Review Board would serve no useful purpose. Allegations within this category of disposition are set aside pending receipt of additional information relevant to the investigation.

**Figure 1** on the next page provides a high-level overview of the process, from initially receiving the complaint or allegation of misconduct, to assigning a disposition to the incident.

**Figure 1: Procedure for Receiving, Processing, and Investigating Allegations of Employee Misconduct**





## OPC Year-End Statistics

Effective January 1, 2017, the OPC implemented a new case management system, Internal Affairs-Professional Version (IA Pro). This system is specifically designed to assist law enforcement with the process of receiving complaints and allegations, data entry, case management, complaint disposition, and file management; in addition, the system allows for effective data management. By incorporating data management with several statistical reports, IA Pro facilitates the process of reviewing various trends, as well as looking at data with a greater level of detail.

As mentioned above, the implementation of IA Pro has allowed OPC to maintain a greater level of detail in reference to all reviewed incidents. The statistical reports available in IA Pro allow designated staff to easily generate reports that include useful variables such as categories of administrative incidents, incident types, work assignments where incidents have occurred, specific complaint or allegation, incident disposition, incident classification by violation level, and action taken for sustained incidents.

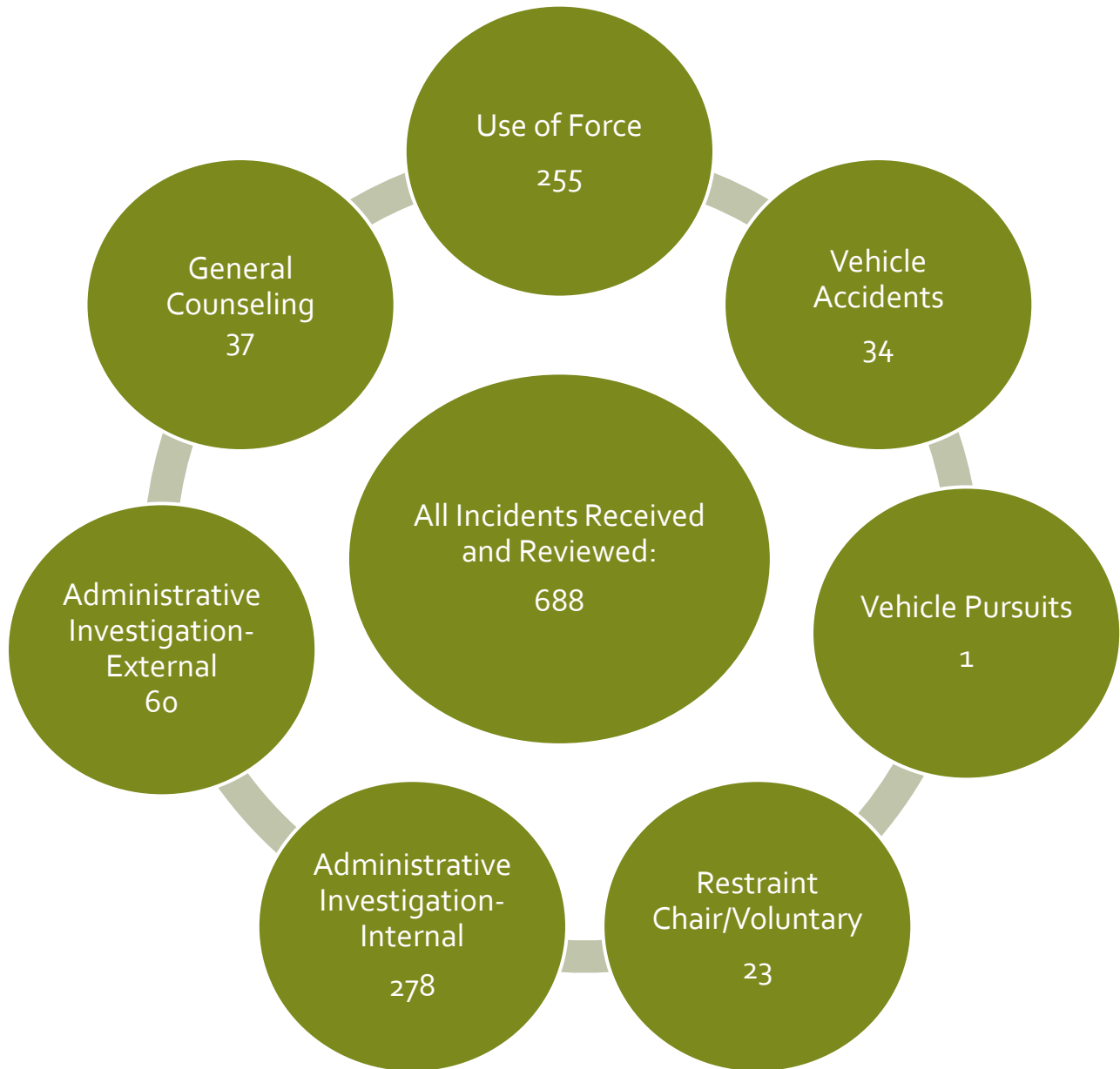
Another helpful feature utilized by IA Pro is the ability to distinguish between complaints and specific allegations that are outcomes of investigative incidents and other types of incidents where an allegation or a complaint of misconduct was not necessarily submitted via an external or an internal source; rather, it became evident after a review of the incident details.

The current annual report is based on the data that is recorded and maintained in IA Pro.

## Incident Types

During FY20, the OPC reviewed approximately 688<sup>3</sup> different incidents that occurred throughout the agency.

**Figure 2: Incident Types Captured in IA Pro during FY20**



<sup>3</sup> The nature of these incidents varies from investigating complaints and allegations of misconduct, to reviewing incidents that are deemed for informational purposes only. A single staff member can be involved in multiple incidents of varying nature.

## Incident Occurrence by Area of Assignment

Of the 688 incidents that were reviewed by the OPC during FY20, 578 incidents had area of occurrence data available.

**Table 1: Incident Occurrence by Area of Assignment**

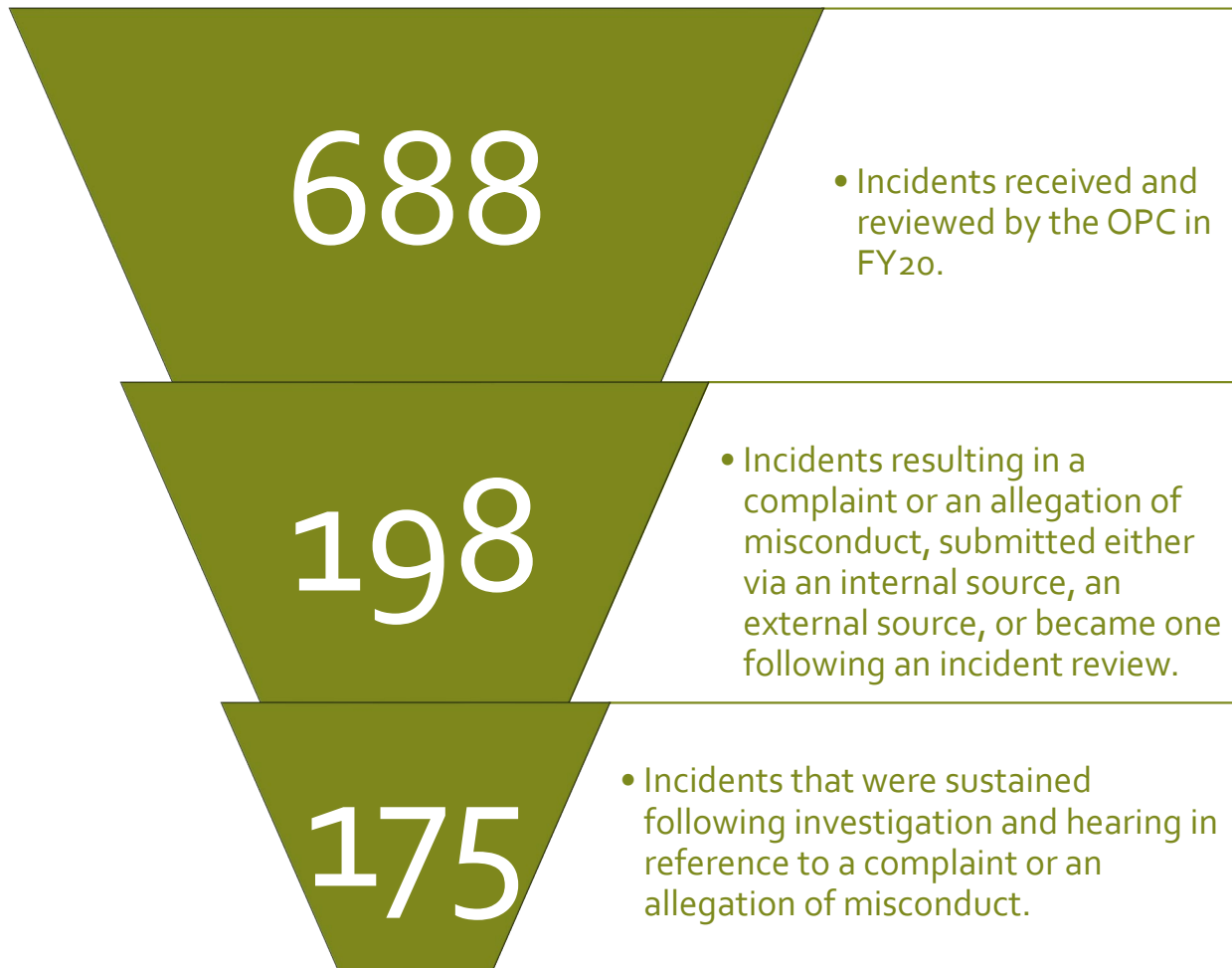
Incident Occurrence Area	Number of Incidents
Arrest Processing	102
Business Management	4
MCDC-Central	272
Child Support Enforcement	3
Classification	19
Civil Judgement Unit	12
Communications	4
Community Engagement	2
Courts	24
Domestic Violence	6
Facility Development	1
Field Operations	27
Gun permits/Registration	7
Inmate Finance/Property	9
Inmate Programs	7
K9 Operations	6
MCJDC	45
Personnel/Recruiting	4
Public Information	1
Reserves	6
Training	11
Transportation	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>578</b>

**Note:** Of the 688 incidents reviewed by the OPC, area of assignment did not apply to 110 incidents due to the informational nature of those incidents.

## Incidents Resulting in a Complaint or an Allegation of Misconduct

Of the 688 incidents reviewed by the OPC during FY20, 198 incidents were related to complaints or allegations of misconduct, submitted either via an internal source, an external source, or became one following an incident review.

**Figure 3: Incidents Subsequently Sustained Following Investigation and Hearing**

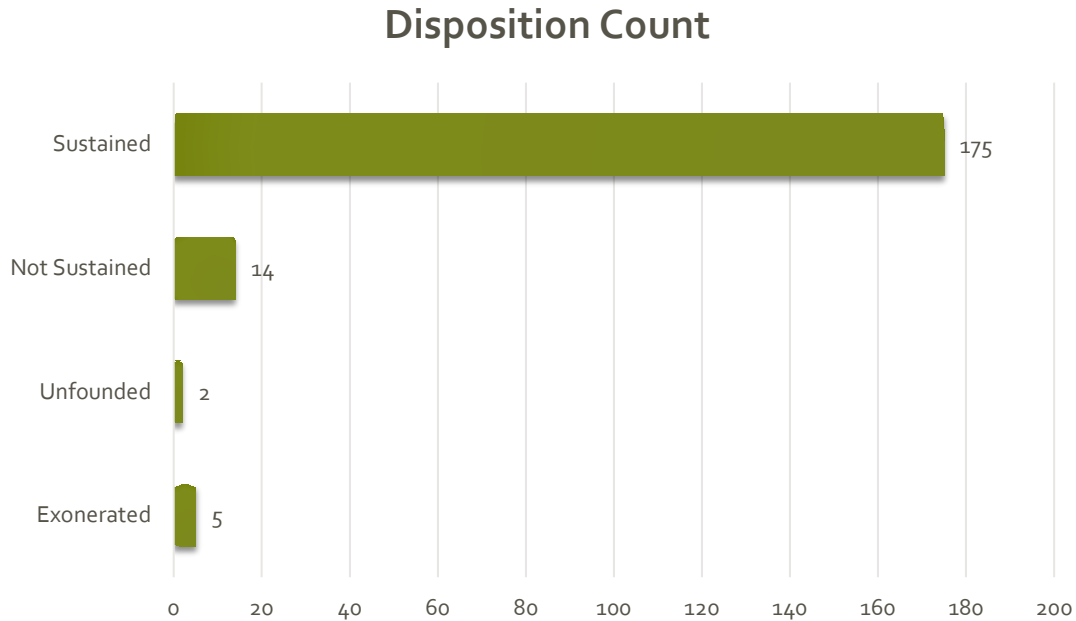


**Note:** Of the 198 incidents that resulted in a complaint or an allegation of misconduct, 175 or 88% were adjudicated with a final status of sustained.

## Complaint and Allegation Adjudication Status Breakdown

The incidents that were reviewed and investigated for complaint or allegation of misconduct, were subsequently adjudicated with one of the statutes assigned:

**Graph 1: Complaints and Allegations Adjudicated**



**Note:** Of the 198 incidents that were reviewed and investigated, 175 complaints or allegations of misconduct were sustained, 14 were not sustained upon completion of the investigation. Additionally, 7 incidents were determined to be unfounded or the individual was exonerated; 2 individuals involved in incidents resigned under investigation.

## Rules of Conduct Violations, Violation Levels, and Action Taken for Sustained Complaints and Allegations

Each complaint or allegation of misconduct that was sustained is assigned to a category based on the alleged misconduct and the appropriate disciplinary action is taken to address the sustained misconduct as specified by the category.

### Rules of Conduct Violations

For the 175 complaints and allegations that were sustained, the specific rules of conduct violations are shown in the table below:

**Table 2: Rules of Conduct Violations**

Conduct Violation Categories	Number Sustained
Absence from Duty	24
Chain of Command	1
Conformance to Laws	3
Courtesy	8
Harassment	1
Insubordination	2
Knowledge of Regulations	9
Neglect of Duty	26
Reporting for Duty	36
Rules of Conduct	2
Sheriffs' Office Reports	3
Supervision	2
Truthfulness	3
Unbecoming Conduct	4
Unsatisfactory Performance	1
Use of Force	6
Use of Sheriffs Ofc Equipment	12
Violation of Rules	34
<b>Total:</b>	<b>175</b>

## Categories of Misconduct

For all incidents where a complaint or an allegation of misconduct was sustained, one of the four violation categories was assigned. The table below provides a breakdown for violation levels assigned to sustained incidents for FY20 with annual comparisons for FY19 and FY18.

**Table 3: Categories of Misconduct for Sustained Incidents**

Level of Violation	FY20	FY19	FY18
Category A Violations	35	34	34
Category B Violations	47	49	70
Category C Violations	24	27	41
Category D Violations	69	85	125
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>270</b>

**Note:** Compared to FY19, there was an 11% decline in the number of allegations of misconduct that were sustained in FY20.

## Action Taken

For all incidents where complaints and allegations of misconduct were sustained during the FY20, the following types of disciplinary action was taken.

**Table 4: Disciplinary Action Taken**

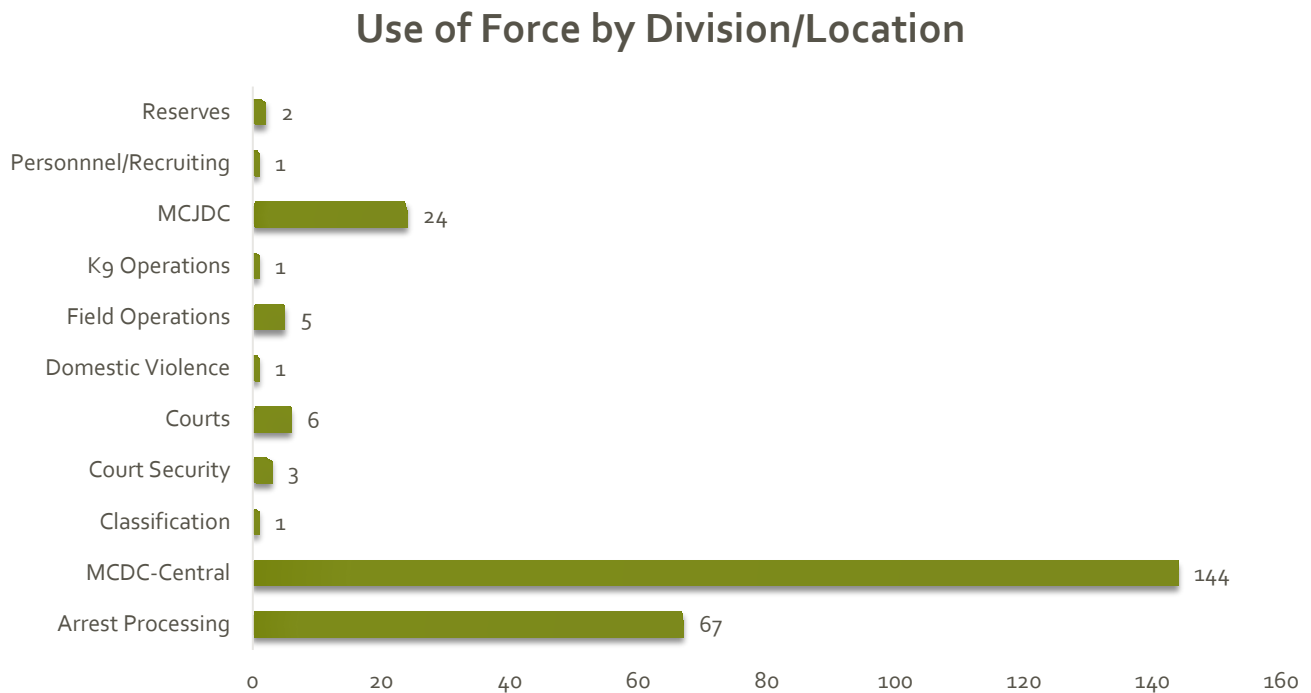
Disciplinary Action Taken	Frequency
Corrective Counseling	58
Demotion	3
Suspension	23
Termination	12
Verbal Reprimand	12
Written Reprimand	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>

**Note:** Of the 175 incidents resulting in disciplinary actions taken in FY20, 67 resulted in a written reprimand.

# Use of Force Incidents

Due to the nature of the job within the fields of detention and law enforcement, compliance may not always be gained from individuals with whom MCSO sworn and certified staff interact. At times, in order to ensure safety and security of all, proper application of force may be required. All uses of force conducted by the MCSO staff are documented and are included in a packet that is reviewed by the employee’s chain of command and the OPC. A review of each use of force incident concludes whether the application was justified or not justified.

**Graph 2: FY20 Use of Force Incidents by Area of Assignment**



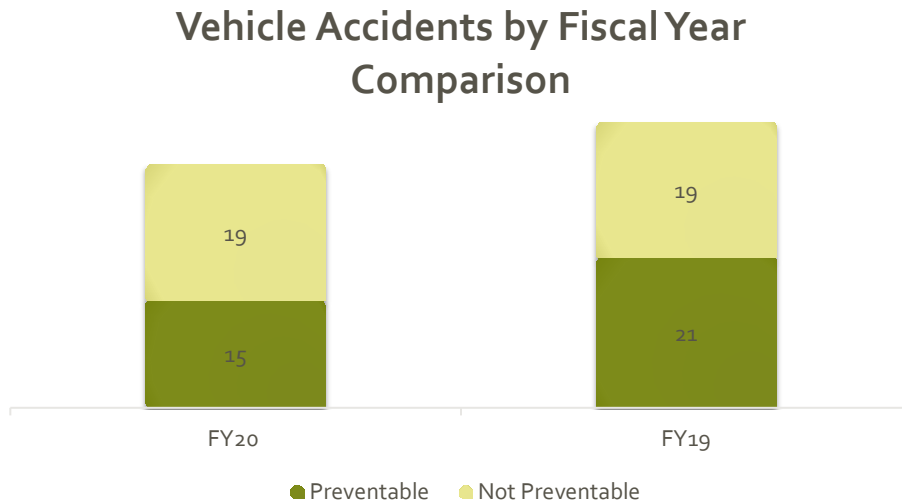
During FY20, there were a total of 255 use of force incidents across different work assignments within the MCSO; of all use of force incidents, 249 uses of force or 97.6% were justified.



## Vehicle Accidents

All MCSO staff who possess a valid North Carolina driver’s license can apply for a County driver’s permit in order to be able to operate a Sheriff’s Office vehicle for approved work-related business. Designated vehicles can be operated by authorized staff who are sworn, certified, or civilian. The graph below provides a summary of all vehicle accidents involving MCSO employees.

**Graph 3: MCSO Vehicle Accidents**



**Note:** Of the 34 vehicle accidents that occurred during the FY20, 15 accidents or 44.1% were classified as Preventable, while 19 or 55.8% were classified as Not Preventable. Additionally, of the 34 vehicle accidents, an MCSO employee was at fault in 9 of these accidents.

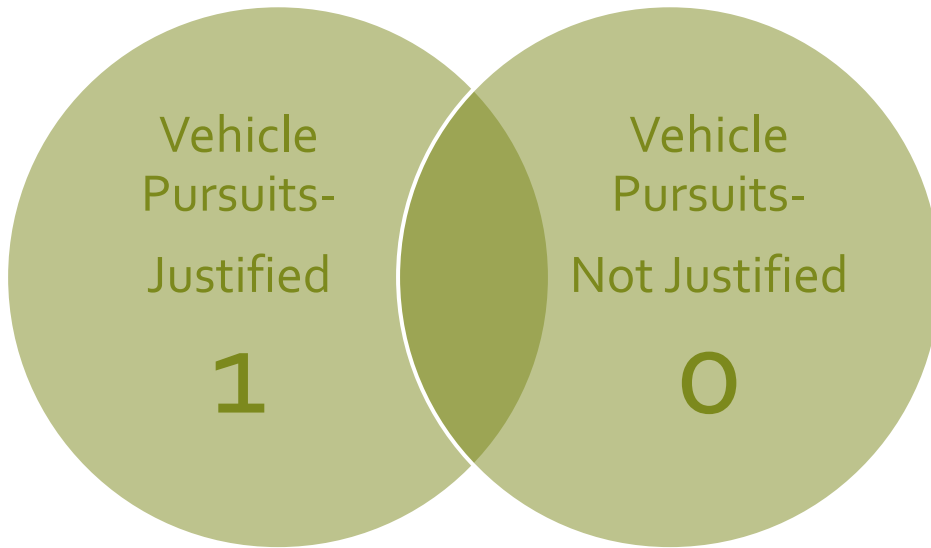
Causes of Accidents	
• Failure to Maintain Safe Distance	6
• Failure to Yield	2
• Improper Turn	2
• Negligence	6
• Unsafe Backing	3
• Cause not Recorded	15

**Note:** Of the 34 vehicle accidents that occurred in FY20, the cause of the accident was recorded for 19 incidents, with negligence and failure to maintain safe distance being the primary reasons.

## Vehicle Pursuits

The MCSO has county-wide law enforcement jurisdiction; however, the MCSO does not answer 911 calls for service. The MCSO deputies enforce laws across the entire county. With regards to vehicle pursuits, the MCSO deputies assigned to Field Operations can and will engage in vehicle pursuits when situations arise and in accordance to applicable laws and Sheriff's Office policy.

**Figure 4: FY20 Vehicle Pursuits**



**Note:** During the FY20, there was only one vehicle pursuit involving MCSO Field Operations deputies.

All vehicle pursuits that the MCSO initiated or was engaged in are reviewed by the OPC to determine whether the pursuit was justified or unjustified based on the agency's policies and procedures.

## Conclusion

As mentioned above in the Categories of Misconduct section, all Category A violations are investigated and disposed of by the OPC. The OPC has a goal to dispose all Category A violations within 60 days of receipt. During FY20, the OPC investigated and disposed of 44 allegations of employee misconduct that were classified as Category A violations, with an average number of days to dispose at 43 days. Table below provides a summary of disposition frequency by day grouping.

**Table 5: Disposition frequency by day grouping**

Day Grouping	Number Disposed
0-29	10
30-60	26
>60	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>44<sup>4</sup></b>

**Note:** Of the 44 Category A level allegations of misconduct received in FY20 (both sustained and not sustained), 36 or approximately 82% were disposed of in 60 days or less.

**End of Report**

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<sup>4</sup> OPC investigated 44 Category A level violations in FY20. Of those, 34 were sustained and 1 was not sustained after investigation.