

COVERING THE POLICE

# SFPD backs its car-chase policy. So why is Mayor Breed fighting it?



by **ELENI BALAKRISHNAN**  
JANUARY 11, 2024, 6:01 AM



Police Chief Bill Scott. Photo by Eleni Balakrishnan

San Francisco police officials stood by the city's car-chase policy on Wednesday, saying that it follows national best practices and state law — and raising questions about why the mayor is dead set against it.

Mayor London Breed views the policy as restricting police chases, and has made loosening any perceived restrictions a goal in the March election.

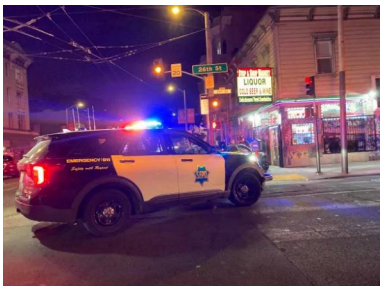
During Wednesday's presentation about the car-chase policy at the Police Commission, Commissioner Kevin Benedicto asked presenters outright whether the current policy, last updated in 2013, is consistent with best practices.

"That's my impression, yes," said Lt. Bassey Obot, who was, until recently, the director of the police academy. "I think ours is definitely consistent with state law."

"I think our policy is consistent with the trends of national law enforcement," echoed Chief Bill Scott.

The admission appeared to counter the narrative presented by Breed and her supporters in recent months, that the policy is too restrictive for officers to effectively fight crime. In October, Breed proposed a measure for the March ballot, now known as Prop. E, that would shift some oversight powers away from the Police Commission and allow officers to initiate car chases more easily, including in cases of violent misdemeanors.

## HOW THE POLICE COMMISSION WORKS



### SF Police Commission critics fail to understand how it works, promoting misinformation



by [ELENI BALAKRISHNAN](#)

SEPTEMBER 19, 2023, 6:00 AM

The current policy allows officers to pursue a vehicle if a person is a suspect in a violent felony, or if they reasonably believe a person poses a risk to public safety and must be immediately apprehended. Officers are generally prohibited from chasing a vehicle in cases of a non-violent felony, misdemeanor, property crime or vehicle code violation — but may do so if they believe a public-safety risk exists.

Prop. E would purportedly expand an officers' ability to chase drivers in cases when a "violent misdemeanor crime has occurred, is occurring, or is about to occur." However, the current policy already allows such pursuits if officers believe there is a public safety risk.

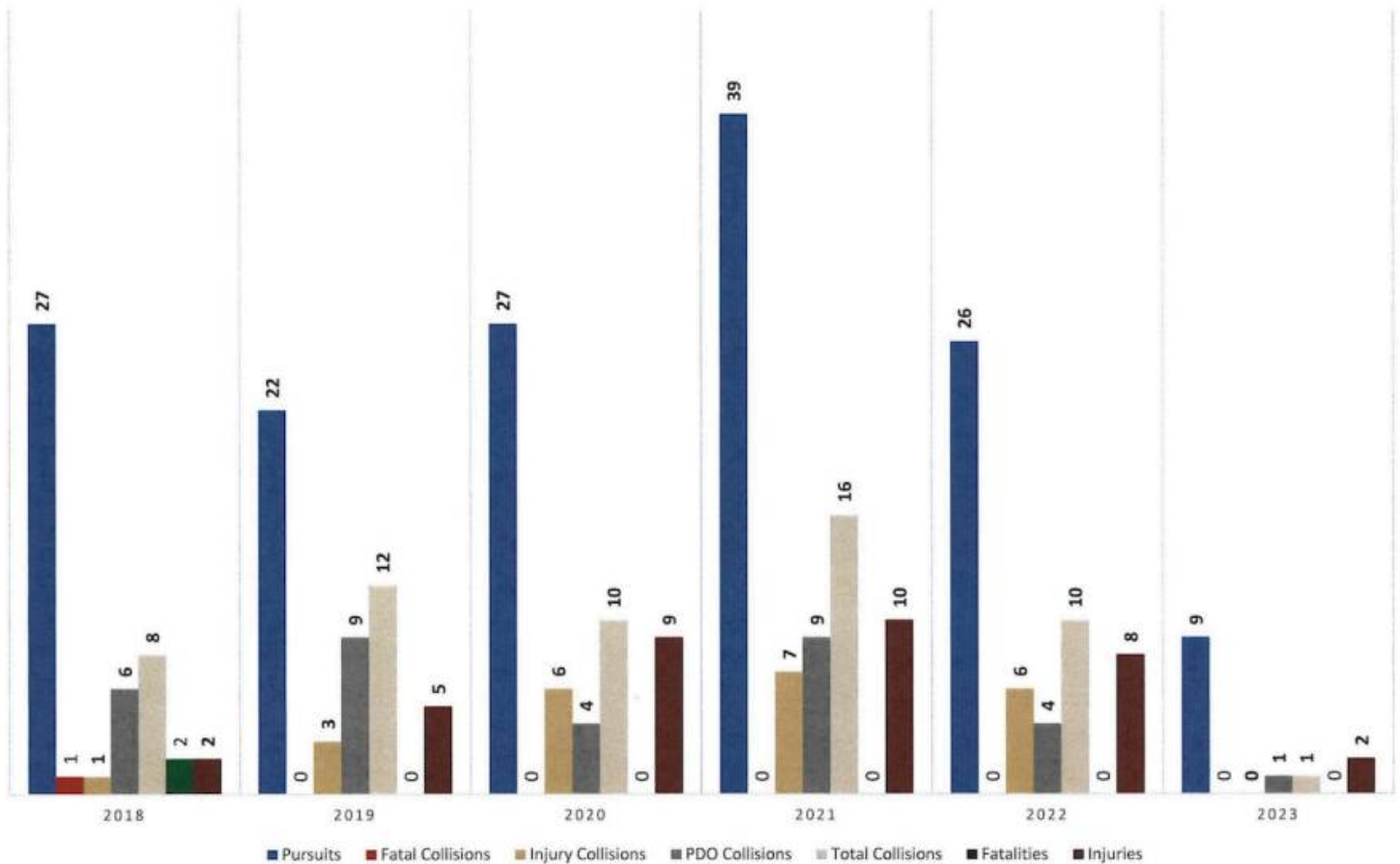
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The department reported between 20 to 40 chases per year between 2018 and 2022, resulting in nine to 10 injuries annually in recent years, and no deaths since 2018.

The data from 2023 was incomplete, but multiple police chases resulted in a death and several injuries last year: A pursuit **killed one and injured four** in May, another **injured two** and resulted a cruiser crashing into a storefront in June. A chase in December resulted in **five injuries**.

2018 to 2023 (YTD as of 8/29/2023)



\*There is a 30-to-60-day delay for CHP data entry.

A chart showing the frequency of car chases, collisions and injuries. Lt. Obot, who presented the data, said the 2023 section only includes data through April or May. Image from SFPD presentation

The policy director at the Department of Police Accountability, Janelle Caywood, presented various car-chase policies from police departments around the country, and said that San Francisco is not an outlier in terms of restrictiveness. She called it “about average.”

“There’s been some misinformation that it’s crazy restrictive. And that just wasn’t what I found in my research,” said Caywood.

The Department of Police Accountability was advised by the City Attorney's Office not to comment on the ballot measure during a government meeting, so Cayood kept her comments focused on the current policy. Police commissioners, for their part, have criticized the measure as ill-informed, and four have officially opposed Prop E.

Caywood said that many policies in densely populated cities — Boston, Massachusetts; Las Vegas, Nevada; New Orleans, Louisiana; Baltimore, Maryland; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — follow a similar standard: Officers can chase a suspect in cases of a violent felony. Mission Local could not immediately verify the policies of each city.

“It's undisputed that vehicle pursuits are dangerous for pursuing officers, bystanders and the person fleeing,” Caywood said. “In recent years, major cities with dense populations shifted towards more restrictive policies, limiting pursuits to violent felonies, or when there's some other imminent threat to life.”

Some of these policies, unlike San Francisco's, are more restrictive, requiring probable cause before officers can pursue a vehicle.

Another premise of Breed's ballot measure was also disputed by the police department. Prop. E calls for officers to use drones “to minimize the dangers from vehicle pursuits,” but Chief Scott implied drones are not as helpful in high-speed chases.

“Drones are the most effective either in a low-speed pursuit, or post pursuit,” Scott said, referring to foot chases that often follow a vehicle chase. Though he said drones would be a helpful tool, he said “they have limitations to speed.”

The policy is up for a scheduled revision this year.



MORE ON CAR CHASES



### SF police commissioners walk out in protest, solidarity with Mayor Breed



by [ELENI BALAKRISHNAN](#) OCTOBER 18, 2023, 7:31 PM



### SF to review vehicle-pursuit policy after police chases kill one, injure others



by [ELENI BALAKRISHNAN](#) JUNE 26, 2023, 3:09 PM



### One killed, four injured in crash after SFPD chase carjacking suspect



by [WILL JARRETT](#) MAY 23, 2023, 12:43 PM



**Karl**

January 17, 2024, 5:42 pm at 5:42 pm

“I think our policy is consistent with the trends of national law enforcement,” echoed Chief Bill Scott. That’s an endorsement? I don’t think so, he’s simply stating that it’s consistent with trends. The trends show that police chases are down and crime continues. The soft on crime police commissioners are not helping SFPD or SF citizens. Having spoken with several police officers, they would like to be able to pursue criminals. It’s time to stop coddling folks who break the law.

0 votes. Sign in to vote



**snelson123**

January 17, 2024, 4:54 am at 4:54 am

Pretty simple why she's opposing it. She's running for re-election and wants to be seen as being some big anti-crime candidate.

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**handy andy**

January 16, 2024, 6:46 am at 6:46 am

Once more its democracy in action. The inmates are running the asylum and making all the rules as they go along. If you are a victim of crime in san francisco you will be complaining about the police doing nothing. Well as an example, it was proposed to place in the castro area. The well heard of gay community was so opposed to this. I cannot imagine why. Is there some sort of shame being in the castro and ending up on camera? Its the same with these police chases after criminals. Let them go, they have a difficult time so they should get a free ride less they be caught and punished.

Maybe times will change as Mr. Trump head towards the White House

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**steve.gifford**

January 11, 2024, 2:06 pm at 2:06 pm

Love how the police are throwing Mayor Breed under the bus here.... er, I guess it's a speeding police car.

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**Terrence James Mcmillin**

January 12, 2024, 10:34 am at 10:34 am

This is when de-fund the police back fires and now politicians are now upset with the outcome especially crim in San Francisco, and only law abiding citizens pay for the bus , everyone else doesn't pay a dime. I challenge the media to ride the bus all the way down and back on mission and see who pays and who doesn't and it s been going on since Cruz was in the transportation . administration . Let people commit crimes the more people commit crime. Look at any old film of San Francisco and see how clean the city was back when people came to this country and cared about it. Most with less then 50.00 usd. In there pocket yet the city was impeccably clean , the cost of administration and raises for the powers that be Is astronomical . And the city is in very poor shape. Alot if not most of people getting welfare in San Francisco are from other counties because s.f. pays more the the other 9 bay are counties, and that has also been going on for years. And politicians just keep playing the game . And never do they walk the streets of San Francisco to see first hand what really is going on in the city especially the sidewalk sales in the mission where they petal all the stolen merchandise from local businesses, ( if you look you can planely see all of this yet ignored . The increase in undocumented people in this country sell food from carts most with out permits , work for cash and claim they have no benefits, many small restaurants have signs in the window that says cash only always full

of patrons yet when you look at the second set of books they report a loss , that's if they report anything . At the same time law abiding citizen s have to jump thru many hoops and pay many fees , don't the wish they could do as the others . Drug sales all over San Francisco it's so obvious but when ever politicians go to these areas they have a camera crew and security. Try it with out all that and dress down and open your eyes

0 -1 votes. Sign in to vote



**h. brown**

January 11, 2024, 10:36 pm at 10:36 pm

1 of 14,912

Y'all watching Max Carter-Obertone at Police Commission ?

Inbox

h brown

10:32 PM (2 minutes ago)

to Bulldog, h, Rich, Joe, Lydia, Tim

Media,

He reminds me of a young Julian Davis (who looks good now too and was at the 20th Anniversary of the 2003 Gonzo campaign lat month) ...

So, ML's reporter didn't even comment on the lengthy exchange that left the same radar signature of a youthful Mohammed Ali standing over a collapsed Sonny Liston.

Back in the day.

In Vegas ...

My offering to ML ...

Campers,

This Commission is under fire from the Mayor at the Ballot box because it is the ONLY commission/authority where she has lost control by the Sgl Vote Majority the Class of 2000 left for Willie and his Offspring.

That leaves a vibrant and open and free conversation w/out preordained outcome of win for Room 200.

At the meeting last night Breed's gone Rogue brilliant and handsome and informed younger than Bambi Commissioner Max Carter-Obertone backed the heavily armed and multi-striped and starred Chief Scott into a confession that he didn't really care much about studies from Stanford and other reputable universities saying that if you pursue a tactic of arresting customers as well as dealers then you can expect a Spike in deaths ...

And, that happened and is happening as Max roled out the stats showing London and Bill's strategy has produced a Record Spike in Overdose deaths.

“At what point” ... Carter-Obertone repeated three times to the cornered SFPD’s titular head ... “At what point will you admit you were wrong and reassign those 12 officers whose efforts are for an unwise campaign and put them to something more useful.”

I paraphrase but not by much.

I’d vote for this Max, kid for Mayor tomorrow.

He and the prez who’s back and I forget her name but they come to these meetings fully prepared as does the other Board appointee. The 2 Breed Loyalists at the meeting were unprepared and faked it and London appointee, Debra Walker who led a walkout of 3 to deny a quorum and spite Carter-Obertone was absent last night and missing an Awards Ceremony for Hero Cops (hey, I was a firefighter and these cops were into a burning 6 story building before SFFD arrived and stayed there evacuating tenants w/no breathing apparatus) ...

See it Wednesday Nights at 5:30pm

On SFGTV

‘The Runaway Commission !’

Starring Max Carter-Obertone (as himself)

0 -2 votes. Sign in to vote