

## How to Read A Contract

Police union contracts are legally binding agreements between the employees of a police department and the municipality that employs them. Like other kinds of unions, police unions bargain with employers to try to get the highest pay and best benefits they can for the employees they represent. Police union contracts guarantee some standard employee benefits like health insurance and paid time off but can also include protections for police officers that make it harder for the public to hold them accountable.

If you'd like to learn more about what rights and protections a police contract provides to police officers, here are some particularly important sections. (Note that not every contract will have each of these sections!)

- **Internal Investigations** - Explains how the police department investigates misconduct accusations against an officer.
- **Discipline** - Explains how the police department disciplines employees when they break rules.
- **Grievances** - Explains how a police officer files a "grievance" with the union if they feel they have been treated unfairly.
- **Critical Incidents** - Explains how the department must act if an officer is involved with a "critical incident" or a "traumatic incident" (i.e. kills or seriously injures another person).
- **Police Bill of Rights** - Outlines special protections for police officers.

If this is your first time reading a contract and you feel a little overwhelmed, you are not alone! These documents are full of words and phrases that many people may not be familiar with and it's totally normal to be confused. Don't let that scare you away though-- Here are some tips for understanding what you are reading:

- **Lots of these contracts are very similar to each other.** Especially in a county full of municipal governments that work together, many contract clauses are the same across bureaus.
- **Compare it to other contract analysis efforts.** Other agencies, like Campaign Zero, have been analyzing contracts for a while so they are good places to look for similar language if you are confused by a certain section.
- **The "definitions" section is your friend.** At the beginning of each contract, there is a section labeled "Definitions" that acts as a glossary for the contract. Words that might be confusing or you haven't heard are likely to be included in this section.

Overall, take it slow and piece by piece! You don't need a law degree to read a police union contract but it is a type of writing that many people are unfamiliar with. The more you interact with it, the more you can get from it. Happy analyzing and thanks for using the ACPD site!