

CITY OF CHICAGO – Civilian Office of Police Accountability

2024 Budget Hearing – November 9, 2024

Andrea Kersten, Commissioner

The complex and challenging issues of police reform and accountability remain among the most important and often polarizing issues impacting our city. Effective oversight of law enforcement requires a robust accountability system, transparent and consistent communication with the public and an open and collaborative relationship across the community safety infrastructure. For the last seven years, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) has played an integral role in Chicago's accountability system. COPA and Chicago have become national leaders in transparency and independent civilian-led investigations of police misconduct. I lead a dedicated staff of individuals who strongly believe in COPA's mission to provide a just and efficient means to fairly and timely investigate allegations of police misconduct within our jurisdiction, identify and address patterns of misconduct, and make policy recommendations to improve the Chicago Police Department and reduce incidents of police misconduct. While this work has not come without its challenges, COPA has continued its commitment to this mandate and our body of work speaks to the clear progress we have made as an agency.

While there have been many milestones and accomplishments for our agency, this last year COPA saw tremendous growth in three key areas: caseload reduction, consent decree compliance, and increased transparency. Historically, COPA and its predecessor agencies have struggled with large caseloads which frequently impeded the timely resolution of investigations. In 2023, after collaboration with the Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability and the Independent Monitoring Team for the Consent Decree, COPA undertook a Timeliness Initiative to address our aging caseload. This initiative involved the identification of aging cases that were suitable for resolution through training recommendations or other non-disciplinary outcomes. The Timeliness Initiative concluded in the first quarter of 2024 and has resulted in COPA achieving and sustaining a historically low caseload, which enables us to complete our investigations in a timely manner and bring resolution to officers, complainants and impacted families.

Throughout this last year, COPA also made tremendous progress on our path to full, operational compliance with our Consent Decree obligations. In fact, we are now fully compliant with 90 percent of the paragraphs we are tasked with fulfilling. COPA's Consent Decree obligations touch virtually every aspect of our investigative operations and seek to ensure that we have consistent, objective processes that govern our work. Our commitment to the principles and requirements set forth in the Consent Decree also chart the course for COPA's future and ensure that the critical work of reform within our agency remains ongoing.

This year also provided an opportunity for COPA to continue increasing our efforts to deliver meaningful transparency around issues of police reform to the public. From our continued fulfillment of and communication surrounding the City's Video Release Policy, to expanded community engagement efforts, updates to the accessibility and content of our website, as well as the continued success of COPA's People's Academy, our agency. COPA engaged thousands of Chicagoans and people across the country this year. Through these engagement efforts, COPA

consistently educated and informed the public about our work within Chicago's broader police accountability system. COPA's commitment to transparency is a foundational element to Chicago's police reform efforts and remains a critical component to building trust in our accountability system and legitimacy in the communities we serve.

These successes were only made possible through the hard work and dedication of COPA's staff, who represent a diversity of thought, background, and lived experience that they bring to this work each day. I am also joined today by a number of COPA's leadership, who bring a vast array of expertise and commitment to each of their roles and the teams they lead. Together, our agency stands ready to continue fulfilling our mission and serving all Chicagoans.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to pause and offer condolences on behalf of myself and every member of the Civilian Office of Police Accountability to Officer Enrique Martinez's family, friends as well as the entire Chicago Police Department. Everyday, officers like Officer Enrique Martiz put their lives on the line for all of us as residents of the City of Chicago; to serve and protect. It is our hope that the pain felt today by Officer Martinez's family, friends and Chicago Police Department is met with love and support during this difficult time. Our sincere thoughts are with them.

I thank you for this time and look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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