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Impact for Equity Releases First Issue Brief on the Implementation of the SAFE-T Act's Reforms: Assessing the Promise of Body-Worn Cameras through the Chicago Police Department

Chicago, IL –Impact for Equity has published the [first issue brief](#) within a three-part series evaluating the impact of the Safety, Accountability, Fairness and Equity-Today Act (SAFE-T Act) on policing behavior and public safety. The brief focuses on the effectiveness of body-worn cameras using data from the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and other police oversight agencies.

The SAFE-T Act, enacted in 2021, made it mandatory for all law enforcement agencies in Illinois, including CPD, to implement body-worn cameras for all law enforcement officers. The goal of requiring body-worn camera use was to increase accountability, transparency, and community trust in policing. However, the Impact for Equity brief reveals significant challenges in implementation of body-worn camera requirements.

Chicagoans have had to rely on a police force marked by a pattern of violence and transparency issues for decades. In 2014, the longstanding distrust between Chicagoans and CPD came to a head after the tragic killing of Laquan McDonald. As a result of mounting public pressure, by 2017, all CPD patrol officers were equipped with body-worn cameras. However, investigations from the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) and the Tactical Review and Evaluation Division (TRED) revealed CPD's failure to consistently comply with body-worn camera requirements, including requirements to activate the cameras and supervisor obligations to review the footage. The failure to regularly capture interactions between police and civilians undermines the public's ability to hold individuals accountable for their conduct during escalating encounters and exacerbates the already delicate relationship between the police and the community.

Despite concerns raised by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), COPA, TRED, and Chicago's Independent Monitoring Team for the federal consent decree, there is a lack of consequences for officers violating body-worn camera requirements. The brief criticizes the state reporting system established by the Law Enforcement Officer-Worn Body Camera Act, a state law that preceded the SAFE-T Act. It highlights that the minimal self-reporting requirement from law enforcement departments preempts the state from identifying camera usage deficiencies that

violate state law. The absence of auditing mechanisms and the lack of consequences for non-compliance raise questions about the effectiveness of the state reporting requirement.

“While the SAFE-T Act took a necessary step in requiring law enforcement officers to wear body-worn cameras, meaningful investment in implementation is essential to increase accountability and trust,” said Andrea Dantus, Staff Counsel at Impact for Equity. “The struggles within CPD serve as an example that accountability and transparency require not only action but also a sustained commitment to execution.”

Over the course of the next two briefs, Impact for Equity will explore additional public safety issues, shedding light on the strides made and obstacles encountered during the implementation of the SAFE-T Act.

About Impact for Equity:

Impact for Equity, formerly known as BPI, is a public interest law and policy center that has worked at the front lines of racial, economic, and social justice in the Chicago region and Illinois for over 50 years. Learn more about us as <https://www.impactforequity.org/>.

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