



November 8, 2024

City of Chicago City Council
City Hall
121 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, IL 60602

Submitted via email: CommitteeontheBudgetandGovernmentOperations@cityofchicago.gov

RE: Written public comment for the FY2025 Chicago Police Department budget hearing

Dear Chicago City Council Members,

We jointly submit this written public comment for the FY2025 Chicago Police Department budget hearing on November 13, 2024.

In 2019, we sat on opposite sides of the negotiating table as we finalized the federal consent decree that would govern the Chicago Police Department (CPD). Cara is the former Chief of the Public Interest Division in the Illinois Attorney General's Office, and Walter is the former Deputy Chief of Staff for Public Safety for the Mayor's Office. We were both deeply familiar with the U.S. Department of Justice report, that found serious, systemic problems at CPD, validating decades of calls for reform by community members throughout Chicago. Following hundreds of hours of negotiations, we were both hopeful that, in time, the deep need for reform would be met by the commitments made in the consent decree.

We no longer have that same sense of optimism, and all of Chicago's residents are right to be frustrated with the pace of reform.

CPD demonstrated its early commitment by forming the Office of Constitutional Policing and Reform and staffing it with both uniformed and civilian experts and project planners. Since the agreement was approved by the federal court in 2019, CPD has had three permanent and two interim superintendents. Despite these frequent leadership changes, the Office has continued to be the fulcrum for reform within CPD.

Inexplicably, the mayor's recently released 2025 budget proposal targets cuts to this already-small portion of CPD critical to successful reform.

Last year, Mayor Johnson called implementing the consent decree one of his "top priorities," but earlier this year, the Independent Monitor appointed by the federal court to oversee the city's

progress towards compliance signaled a lack of urgency and [called on](#) the mayor and the incoming superintendent “to address unfulfilled reforms and achieve the outcomes intended by the Consent Decree.”

Rather than meeting the moment, however, we fear that the city is undermining the important work needed to implement the reforms to which it agreed. A nearly sixty percent staff cut in the office which is supposed to lead to needed reform efforts is simply inconsistent with a commitment to reform. The message this sends to officers and the public is that the consent decree does not need to be taken seriously.

This year, of all years, the city cannot afford to continue this mistake. It not only delays reform but costs taxpayers as the city faces an extraordinary budget deficit.

These cuts are reportedly made to save \$50 million in salary and other costs. But this amount is *less* than the amount the city budgets every year for its failure to address persistent problems with police misconduct. As you know, the city’s annual budget includes \$82 million dedicated to cover the cost of police misconduct lawsuits every year.

And the city routinely exceeds what is set aside. In 2022, the city’s Inspector General estimated that the city spent over \$250 million on CPD-involved judgements and settlements from 2017 to 2020. At a single City Council meeting [in March of this year](#), for example, this Council approved \$57.2 million to settle just three police misconduct cases. If fully implemented, the consent decree would reduce instances of police misconduct and save the public money in lawsuit payouts.

To make progress towards this goal, CPD created the Risk Management Unit. The consent decree requires the City to annually analyze litigation data and trends and make recommendations for improvement. Considering the ongoing challenges, it is inexplicable that the mayor proposes to cut the Risk Management to just two staffers.

CPD frequently cites staffing shortages as the reason for the slow rate of progress with the consent decree. But experts describe the shortage issue as one of staffing allocation choices as opposed to a need for more staffing resources. [Chicago ranks](#) 5th nationally in police-to-resident ratio with 4.7 officers per 1,000 residents, more than double the national average. The Independent Monitor has reported that despite having already inadequate staff in divisions specifically tasked with police reform, CPD regularly deploys staff members to other tasks. CPD’s decision to make [hundreds of thousands of pretextual traffic stops](#) that do not result in traffic or public safety is one example of a practice, if addressed, that could provide additional resources for community-focused policing.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time we have seen units dedicated to reform gutted, but Chicagoans have made it clear that they value police accountability and want to continue to move forward.

While we were on opposite sides of the table while the consent decree was negotiated, we stand together in calling on the City Council to demand that the needed reform be fully funded.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cara Hendrickson', with a stylized, flowing script.

Cara Hendrickson
Executive Director
Impact for Equity

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Walter Katz', with a stylized, flowing script.

Walter Katz
Former Deputy Chief of Staff for Public Safety
(2017-2019)