

COPA Opening Statement

2023 Budget Meeting

It has been six years since COPA became part of the civilian oversight system of the Chicago Police Department for the City of Chicago. Our mandate, given to us by City Council and the residents of Chicago, is to investigate allegations of police misconduct within our jurisdiction, determine whether those allegations are well founded, identify and address patterns of police misconduct and make policy recommendations to improve the Chicago Police Department, thereby reducing incidents of police misconduct.

The mandate that we gave ourselves is embodied by our vision statement, which is to be the leader in police accountability by conducting thorough investigations to advance the culture of policing and build trust in civilian oversight. This year we also selected a theme for the agency that serves as a guide for our collective efforts of making our vision a reality and forces us to look at ourselves and who we are as an agency. Our theme for 2023 is *Advancing Our Culture*, because it is important that we not only look externally, but internally. Being an accountability agency means we must also be willing to hold ourselves accountable. As I sit before you today, COPA has made significant strides towards upholding these mandates set forth for us and by us.

Over the past two years I have had the privilege of leading one of the City's best agencies staffed with some of the most talented, dedicated and committed staff. Together, we have remained focused on our mission regardless of public pressure or changing sentiment regarding civilian oversight and police accountability. What is often lost in the very polarizing nature of our work is the impact that we continue to have locally and nationally.

During my tenure as chief administrator, COPA has benefitted from consistency in leadership. Consistency in leadership has led to increased consistency in our operations, progress towards addressing our investigative caseload, improving our recruitment and retention of staff, creating a shared vision for the future of the agency, and better outcomes for the community we serve.

However, the better outcomes we desire, which span beyond our core responsibility as an investigative agency, cannot be accomplished by COPA alone and require effective, transparent and collaborative relationships with the Chicago Police Department, the

Civilian Commission on Public Safety and Accountability, Independent Monitoring Team, Office of Inspector General, and many other city, state and local agencies, as well as the public itself. We have spent considerable effort and resources in developing these relationships this year and look to continuing this work, which is so critical to our success.

One of the keys to enriching these relationships has been through the work of COPA's Communications and External Affairs unit. So far in 2023, this unit has had numerous meaningful engagement and partnership opportunities touching over 20,000 residents in nearly every neighborhood in Chicago, including the launch of our first COPA People's Academy for the public; civilian and sworn and has resulted in national participation of over 50 staff members from civilian oversight, and law enforcement agencies.

This year COPA has also focused on the issue of wellness as it impacts law enforcement, our communities, and our own staff. Understanding that wellness is an essential component of public safety, we have been intentional in creating sustainable wellness practices in every aspect of our work, including with officers, complainants and impacted families, and COPA employees. These practices include trauma informed interview techniques, partnering with NAMI Chicago to provide mental health education and services to COPA staff and importantly families that have experienced loss or trauma involving police officers. We have also raised awareness of the need for the City to provide a more wholistic approach to supporting families who have lost a loved one in a police shooting or other fatal police encounter. We look forward to partnering in these efforts in 2024.

Historically, one of the most challenging areas for COPA has been the length of our investigations and our overall caseload. I assured this body last year that we would make a significant reduction in our caseload in 2023 and I am pleased to announce that we have achieved that goal. COPA currently has fewer than 1,000 open cases, which is the lowest number since the agency launched in 2017 and an over 40% reduction from our budget hearing in 2022. This progress is the result of improved investigative operations, collaboration with stakeholder agencies, and direct engagement with the public we serve. But beyond closing cases, we have made numerous internal operational adjustments to ensure that our caseload remains manageable that we are able to close all investigations within our goal of 6 to 18 months.

Appearing before City Council over the past two years, it has been clear to me that the resources we are afforded through our annual budget must be utilized to address areas of improvement within our agency and I remain committed to making those improvements. Two years ago, City Council approved a budget that enabled COPA to create our first dedicated video release and transparency unit whose sole focus is to get

information to the public quickly and responsibly, because transparency is foundational to public trust. The work of this unit has benefitted the public time and again as well as improved internal operations.

Last year, Council approved a budget that enhanced our ability to conduct meaningful policy research and analysis unit, taking the lessons we have learned through our investigative outcomes to better inform CPD. This unit is being staffed with a research associate, data scientists, a performance analyst and program manager, whose focus is to identify pattern and practices with the goal of advancing the culture of policing. This work is truly where principled, data driven reform can begin to take root and lay a foundation for transformational change within the police department. Our policy efforts are publicly available on our website and we look forward to expanding this work as we continue to grow this unit.

This year, if approved, COPA's budget will be largely focused on building and resourcing an expanded complainant/officer mediation program through two new positions, as well as furthering our internal efforts to build an equitable and inclusive workplace and work product. As in years past, I am confident in our ability to be good stewards of these requested resources and to utilize them effectively as we continue to build a stronger, more efficient COPA.

Our vision is to be the leader in police accountability and time again over the last two years, we have demonstrated that leadership. As we continue to lead the City in the investigation of police misconduct allegations, we will also continue to listen to the communities we serve, and continue to aspire to live up to the mission and mandate we have been given as an agency. I look forward to your feedback and collaboration in those efforts and am prepared to answer any questions.