

AUGUST 2019

CITY OF CHICAGO OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

ADVISORY CONCERNING CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT PREFERENTIAL PARKING





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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

AUGUST 9, 2019

Eddie Johnson
Superintendent
Chicago Police Department
3510 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60653

Dear Superintendent Johnson:

We write to bring to your attention to concerns regarding Chicago Police Department (CPD) members misusing CPD parking placards to secure illegal parking spots for themselves and their family and friends near City Hall, as well as at CPD district parking lots to attend nearby sporting events. This preferential and illegal parking continued well after CPD's issuance of directive #236336 on February 7, 2018, prohibiting the provision of "courtesy" parking by CPD members.

Specifically, an OIG investigation found that CPD members misused their CPD First District parking placards—which are assigned strictly for members' use at the First District station parking lot—by giving them to friends and family for personal use at 140 West Court Place, near City Hall, to avoid being ticketed, towed, or moved. The placard-enabled parking by both CPD members and their friends and family at 140 West Court Place violated Section 9-64-100 of the Municipal Code of Chicago, which prohibits the parking of any vehicle in a fire lane, under the lowest portion of fire escapes, and on the same side of any exit of a theatre building, causing a potential safety hazard.

During the investigation, OIG learned that at the First and Nineteenth Districts, CPD members and their family and friends are conferred additional preferential treatment by being allowed to park personal vehicles at the district stations to attend nearby sporting events.

I. OIG'S INVESTIGATION INTO CPD'S CONTINUED PRACTICE OF PROVIDING PREFERENTIAL PARKING

On multiple occasions from April 2016 through October 2018, OIG observed vehicles displaying CPD First District parking placards illegally parked in the alleyway designated as the 140 block of West Court Place, located between the 120 North LaSalle Building at 120 North LaSalle Street, and the Metropolitan Building at 134 North LaSalle Street.¹ These vehicles were parked on the north side of West Court Place under fire escapes, beside emergency exit doors,² and in zones marked with signs delineating "Fire Lane No Parking Tow-Away Zone."³ These vehicles were also parked on the west side of LaSalle Street in zones marked with signs delineating "Fire Lane No Parking Tow-Away Zone." OIG observed parking placards issued to CPD First District police officers on the dashboards of these vehicles. OIG determined that many of the vehicles illegally parked on West Court Place and on North LaSalle Street in "No Parking Tow Zones" with CPD parking placards belonged to CPD officers and friends of CPD officers.

On May 21, 2018, OIG also received a complaint that CPD provided preferential parking to off-duty police officers and non-CPD personnel, including a former alderman, to park for free at the Nineteenth District station during Cubs games. OIG obtained "Daily Parking Pass" sign-in sheets created by CPD personnel for May 11, 2018, through May 13, 2018, for "parking passes" issued to drivers on a "first come first serve" basis. The sign-in sheets state "for CPD ONLY," and list the date, start time for the Cubs game, CPD and non-CPD member's name, vehicle make, and license plate number for each vehicle that parked in the Nineteenth District parking lot. The Nineteenth District parking lot is two blocks from Wrigley Field.

In addition, on December 16, 2018, before a Bears home game, OIG observed non-CPD vehicles drive into and park in the CPD parking lot at the First District station. Men, women, children, and senior citizens wearing Chicago Bears attire exited these vehicles and walked out of the parking lot in the direction of Soldier Field. The parking lot displayed signs at the entrances stating, "Police Vehicles and Police Permit Parking Only," "NO TRESPASSING," and "Restricted Area No Admittance Authorized Personnel Only." OIG further observed CPD placards displayed in the windshield of these vehicles, which were registered to CPD personnel and non-CPD individuals. The First District station is approximately three blocks from Soldier Field.

¹ The 140 block of West Court Place is located across from the west entrance of City Hall at 121 N. LaSalle Street.

² The emergency exit doors service the rear of Cadillac Palace Theatre located at 151 W. Randolph Street.

³ Chicago Municipal Code 9-64-100 provides that "it shall be unlawful to park in any vehicle in . . . a firelane [sic], under the lowest portion of any fire escape, [or] on the same side of the public way in front of any entrance or exit of any theater building"

A. COMPLAINTS TO CPD REGARDING CARS BLOCKING THEATRE EMERGENCY EXITS AND FIRE LANES

OIG's investigation found that in 2016 and 2017, a CPD district commander and CPD sergeants received email complaints regarding parked vehicles on Court Place, including vehicles belonging to CPD officers with placards in the windshield, blocking emergency exit doors and under fire escapes behind the Palace Theatre. Theatre personnel expressed concern that an emergency requiring evacuation of the venue would be hindered by these vehicles continuing to park on Court Place. The complaints reported that officers parked their personal vehicles in these areas on a daily basis and were never ticketed or moved, even after numerous emails and calls to 911 and the City Hall help desk. Furthermore, theatre safety records from March 2016 to December 2017 reporting on any obstructions of theatre exits, show that on more than 100 occasions, vehicles, including personal vehicles belonging to police officers, parked on Court Place and at times under fire escapes, in fire lanes, or while blocking emergency exits. Some reports further note dates and times when theatre staff called City Hall or 911 for the vehicles to be moved, towed, or ticketed. The reports show that CPD frequently failed to respond to these calls, and the vehicles, particularly vehicles belonging to CPD officers assigned to City Hall, remained parked on Court Place.

B. PREFERENTIAL PARKING AND MISUSE OF CPD PARKING PLACARDS BY NON-CPD MEMBERS

According to the First District commander, CPD officers assigned to the First District are issued a parking placard each year. The placard is solely to be used to park personal vehicles in the First District parking lot or on streets adjacent to the First District station, located at 1718 South State Street.

The placards bear the CPD insignia, the year, and "Parking, Police Personnel Only, 1718 South State Street." The placards list the assigned CPD officer's name and sometimes include the officer's star number, employee number, and assignment. The placards also state they are issued by the First District commander. These placards were observed on the dashboard of vehicles parked on Court Place and in the First District parking lot during a Bears game.

Between April 2016 to October 2018, OIG observed employees from a private consulting firm park their personal vehicles on Court Place and use a CPD First District parking placard, or observed their vehicles already parked on Court Place and LaSalle Street while displaying a CPD First District parking placard. The consulting firm expedites and processes business licenses at the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) and has its office in a building across the street from City Hall. The employees parking on Court Place and LaSalle Street include the

consulting firm's owner and an expeditor, as well as a private attorney who represents the consulting firm on legal matters and shares office space with the firm.

The owner of the consulting firm acknowledged he personally knows the CPD sergeant and CPD officers assigned to City Hall. The owner is friends with the sergeant and has had the sergeant over to his house for holiday parties. The owner admitted to having received the parking placard from the sergeant and making a copy for his employee. Similarly, the attorney's wife acknowledged that she first received a placard in 2016 from a CPD officer and has used a parking placard since then until 2018. She was given permission by a CPD officer to park on Court Place or LaSalle Street with the placard and used the placard to park under fire escapes.

C. CPD MISUSE OF PARKING PLACARDS AND PREFERENTIAL PARKING FOR THEMSELVES AND FRIENDS

OIG also observed personal vehicles belonging to CPD officers illegally parked on Court Place both with and without CPD parking placards in the windshield. The personal vehicles were parked on the north side of Court Place under fire escapes, blocking fire exits, or along the alleyway next to signs designating "Fire Lane No Parking Tow-Away Zone."

Before the start of their shift at City Hall, these officers, including a CPD sergeant, park their personal vehicles on the north side of Court Place marked with no-parking signs. In interviews with OIG, officers explained they are aware of the no-parking signs along Court Place but park along the alleyway, often blocking emergency exits and under fire escapes belonging to the theatre, when working at City Hall. Officers customarily store the parking placard in their car and use it when they are parking near City Hall or at the First District.

A CPD sergeant reported to OIG that CPD officers assigned to City Hall have been parking on Court Place since at least 2000 when the sergeant was first assigned to City Hall, and that it is "pretty much standard operating procedures" to park on Court Place. The sergeant further stated that lieutenants, commanders, and deputy chiefs know that the officers park on Court Place. The First District commander denied personal knowledge of officers' use of placards to illegally park near City Hall and did not condone or authorize the practice. However, the First District commander brazenly attempted to diminish the issue of preferential parking by stating that he did not think "it would be a big deal if someone was going to a Bears game and if I gave them my pass and said, 'park in the First District.'" The First District commander further stated that "hundreds of people" park in the First District parking lot to attend Bears games.

Furthermore, CPD officers assigned to City Hall admitted to OIG that they have provided courtesy parking to their friends and family by giving them copies of their parking placards in order to park for free on Court Place or LaSalle Street. Without authorization, the officers made copies of the placards and distributed them to drivers to place in their windshield to designate they were given permission to park in these areas. The officers stated that, when they received a complaint from the theatre that a car must be moved because it was blocking emergency exits, they attempted to locate the vehicle's owner and have them move the car. However, officers do not keep a log of whom they provide placards to, which vehicles are receiving "courtesy parking," or contact information for owners if the vehicle needs to be moved.

D. FEBRUARY 2018 CPD DIRECTIVE PROHIBITING COURTESY PARKING

On February 7, 2018, as a result of a separate OIG investigation regarding similar courtesy parking in no-parking zones surrounding the United Center, in which CPD employees provided illegal, free parking to off-duty law enforcement officers and their friends and family to attend Blackhawks games, CPD released directive #236336 prohibiting courtesy parking:

[CPD] [m]embers are reminded that arranging, providing, or utilizing 'courtesy' parking on the public way, whether for themselves or others (such as City employees, family members, or friends), is prohibited in the absence of exigent circumstances. Moreover, the use of official authority or resources to extend such 'courtesies' may result in disciplinary action. This directive does not apply to designated parking areas indicated in Special Events memoranda. TO BE POSTED IN C.O. (Commanding Officer's) BOOKS AND READ AT ALL ROLL CALLS FOR SEVEN (7) CONSECUTIVE DAYS (emphasis in original).

After the release of this directive, OIG continued to observe personal vehicles belonging to CPD officers and non-CPD personal vehicles with parking placards parked on Court Place.

The CPD sergeant assigned to City Hall claimed to have never seen the directive, prior to his OIG interview. The sergeant never read the directive at his roll call at City Hall. The First District commander was also unsure of whether the directive was placed in the C.O. book or how it was disseminated to officers, other than being found on CPD's intranet. The commander further stated that the requirement that the directive be read at all roll calls was "something they've been putting on the bottom of these for the last 40 years, to be read at roll call . . . it's like a disclaimer on the bottom of an email . . . it's not done."

II. OIG RECOMMENDATIONS

OIG's investigation found that, on a daily basis, CPD officers provided preferential treatment to themselves and their friends by providing free street parking on Court Place and LaSalle Street around City Hall, in areas clearly marked as no-parking. Officers assigned to City Hall disregarded directive #236336, reminding CPD officers that providing courtesy parking is prohibited. First District leadership failed to read the directive at roll call and failed to ensure it was enforced.

In addition, subsequent to the release of directive #236336, CPD officers continued to condone the privilege of free parking for themselves and friends and family at other desirable parking locations across the City. In May of 2018, CPD officers in the Nineteenth District provided preferential parking in their parking lot for Cubs games, and in December of 2018, CPD and non-CPD personnel parked and used placards to park for free in the First District parking lot to attend Bears games. The blatant disregard of the directive perpetuates the appearance that CPD members are exempt from the law and provide special treatment to friends and family.

Furthermore, CPD's disregard of the directive against courtesy parking and use of Court Place as its own private parking lot posed a serious safety risk to patrons of the theatre and to the City. In the event of a fire or emergency at the theatre or around City Hall, personal vehicles belonging to CPD officers and their friends would have prevented the evacuation of the theatre or buildings around City Hall and access for Chicago Fire Department personnel to the area. Even after multiple complaints from the theatre, rather than enforce no-parking on Court Place, CPD officers continued to park and allow their friends to park on Court Place. This avoidable and unnecessary risk existed for years because CPD officers sought to avoid paying for parking downtown or taking alternative means of transportation to City Hall.

OIG recommends that CPD issue a departmental policy requiring that CPD-issued parking placards for any CPD location be used strictly at the location designated on the placard and used only by authorized CPD members for official CPD business. OIG further recommends that CPD ensure that directive #236336 is strictly adhered to, including ensuring it is read at every roll call to emphasize that the practice of extending or using courtesy parking at any City location, including its own District parking lots, is prohibited and that the misuse of parking placards or other CPD resources is not tolerated and will result in disciplinary action. Furthermore, OIG recommends that CPD enforce the no-parking designation on Court Place and adjacent streets and alleys around City Hall in order to protect and ensure the safety of the theatre and the City in case of emergency.

Please contact Assistant Inspector General Patrick Tran at (773) 478-5229 or ptran@igchicago.org should you have any questions about this matter. We ask that

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you inform us of any actions the Department takes in response to these recommendations by September 9, 2019. Your response will be included in the summary of this notification to be published in the next OIG quarterly report.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Ferguson', is positioned above the printed name.

Joseph M. Ferguson
Inspector General
City of Chicago

cc: Dana O'Malley, General Counsel, Chicago Police Department

MISSION

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- inspections, evaluations and reviews of City police and police accountability programs, operations, and policies by its Public Safety Section; and
- compliance audit and monitoring of City hiring and employment activities by its Hiring Oversight Unit.

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AUTHORITY

OIG's authority to produce reports of its findings and recommendations is established in the City of Chicago Municipal Code §§ 2-56-030(d), -035(c), -110, -230, and 240.

Cover image provided by OIG.

PUBLIC INQUIRIES:

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