



JOSEPH M. FERGUSON
INSPECTOR GENERAL

CITY OF CHICAGO
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
740 NORTH SEDGWICK STREET, SUITE 200
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60654
TELEPHONE: (773) 478-7799
FAX: (773) 478-3949

JUNE 3, 2020

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIRMAN TALIAFERRO, VICE-CHAIRMAN OSTERMAN, AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE:

I am honored and pleased to submit for your consideration the nomination of Deborah Witzburg for the position of Deputy Inspector General of the Public Safety Section of the Chicago Office of Inspector General.

To set the stage for your discussion and at the request of the Chair, I will do three things: (1) explain the process used to choose the nominee; (2) briefly outline her background and qualifications, which, in the assessment of the external Advisory Committee and my office, make her well-qualified to take on the leadership of the OIG Public Safety section; and (3) bring the committee up to date on the responsibilities and accomplishments of the Public Safety section.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

Pursuant to the enabling ordinance creating the dedicated Public Safety section, the selection of the Deputy IG begins with a national search conducted by an external committee with executive recruitment experience and expertise in the public safety realm. In this instance, Walter Katz took charge of that national search. Mr. Katz is a nationally respected policing and civilian police oversight expert, with specialized knowledge of Chicago and its government, including the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and its oversight agencies.

We posted the Deputy IG position on numerous job sites and listservs, including sites specific to government executive recruitment, law enforcement, government oversight, and civilian police oversight. An Advisory Committee comprising leadership representatives from local and national legal, policy, oversight, law enforcement, and community organizations reviewed and scored the applications. In terms of local participation, the Committee included past and present leaders of agencies directly involved in our criminal justice system, including the Office of the Cook County Public Defender, Illinois Office of Attorney General, and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. Leaders of numerous Chicago-based community and advocacy organizations also participated. Finally, in addition to Mr. Katz as the chair, the Committee included individuals with direct executive, legal, and policy experience in civilian oversight, both nationally and internationally.

The Advisory Committee identified candidates worthy of further consideration and asked candidates to submit written answers to a detailed questionnaire. The Committee scored the responses, ranked the candidates, and provided a list to OIG. The list contained ten candidates, indicating which the Committee most favored for final consideration. The finalists, who hailed from across the country, offered executive leadership and advocacy experience relating to police oversight or management, as well as direct leadership experience in law enforcement. It was gratifying to OIG that this national search yielded two finalists currently working in our Public Safety section; I take this as confirmation of the Section's evolution and development. OIG senior management conducted the final round interviews of two candidates.

THE NOMINEE, DEBORAH WITZBURG

Deborah Witzburg has been with OIG for four years in a number of capacities, and has worked on projects and assignments directly related to police oversight and reform. She came to us after more than six years as an Assistant Cook County State's Attorney prosecuting a wide array of felony and misdemeanor matters, many of them originating with the Chicago Police Department. This gave her extensive knowledge of the criminal justice system and its stakeholders, and great insight into opportunities for CPD to advance its mission more effectively, ensure more optimal criminal justice outcomes, and build legitimacy in the communities it serves. A notable aspect of her time with the State's Attorney was her frontline participation on the West Side as a member of the innovative Community Justice Program, which developed and deployed criminal justice strategies with active input from community members.

Ms. Witzburg first joined OIG as a member of our Legal section, which provides counsel and legal support to all the office's operations, but foremost to the Investigations section. She served as counsel on a wide variety of misconduct investigations, including a number of complex, high-profile police misconduct matters. From there, she shifted to a supervisory role for the then-fledgling Inspections Unit of the Public Safety section, where she has designed and managed the oversight of the police disciplinary investigation system required under the City Code and federal Consent Decree. Since August 2019, she has been Associate General Counsel for the Public Safety section. In this capacity, she provides legal counsel and guidance on the entire range of work performed by the section, and has forged direct working relationships with leadership at CPD, Law Department attorneys assigned to manage the City's legal obligations under the Consent Decree, and the executive leadership of the Police Board and Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA). Equally importantly, she has worked closely with the Independent Monitoring team, serving as a lead for OIG and Public Safety in an expanding and collaborative relationship.

Ms. Witzburg's broad and direct experience with local policing, criminal justice, and community outreach position her to make a seamless transition to the role of Deputy Inspector General in a manner that will further amplify the work of the Public Safety section. Her pre-OIG experience gives her a deep appreciation of the importance of building legitimacy and trust through community input and engagement. Her experience at OIG uniquely positions her to draw on her institutional knowledge, subject matter expertise, and familiarity with our technical and analytical capacities, thereby enabling her to produce impactful reform-oriented analytical findings and recommendations.

THE PUBLIC SAFETY SECTION

When fully staffed, OIG's Public Safety section comprises 17 professionals whose work is focused on oversight of CPD, COPA, and the Police Board. Nearly all the section's staff have graduate degrees in disciplines directly relevant to the evaluation and review of governmental bodies and police departments. Public Safety section personnel have received extensive training in conducting performance analyses and reviews of government programs and organizations, including law enforcement bodies. Twenty members of OIG—including PSIG staff, as well as supporting personnel from the office's legal and investigative sections—are certified as Lead Homicide Investigators by Northeast Multi-Regional Training. Public Safety members have also observed and participated in numerous trainings at the Chicago Police Academy, and collectively have observed the full curricular sequence of COPA Academy.

Recent Public Safety work has been positively received by both relevant components of City government and the communities we serve. Notable examples include the section's reports on CPD's "Gang Database" and management of the School Resource Officer program, as well as our advisory on the data analysis and data quality of the now-defunct Strategic Subject List. This Committee and the public can expect near-term publication of written products addressing, among other topics, a comprehensive evaluation of CPD's records management system, the City's compliance with legal requirements governing the Department's U Visa program and its use of Force Video Release Policy, as well as an assessment of CPD's Post-Firearm Discharge Policy and program.

In summary, OIG's Public Safety section plays the vital role of overseeing CPD and the police accountability systems—COPA, BIA, and the Police Board—and making public findings and recommendations for improvements in policies, practices, and procedures. The section exists to help these entities better serve the public with transparency and accountability, and to assure that law enforcement receives the requisite resources, assistance, training, and supervision.

Put another way, CPD exists to protect and serve the public; COPA and BIA exist primarily to investigate CPD misconduct; and OIG's Public Safety section makes public recommendations on how the three agencies might do these crucial jobs more effectively, in a way that provides the public accountability and transparency needed to build legitimacy and trust, to combat crime through partnership with the community and in compliance with the law. This work has never been more important than in these immensely challenging times.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sincerely,
Joe Ferguson
Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General