November 8, 2021

Deborah Witzburg
Deputy Inspector General for Public Safety
Office of Inspector General
740 North Sedgwick Street, Suite 200
Chicago, Illinois 60654

Re: Police Board Background Checks

Dear Deputy Inspector General Witzburg:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your letter dated September 22, 2021 addressing the Chicago Police Department’s (CPD) prior practice of performing background checks on individuals signed up to speak at the Police Board Meetings. As you set forth in your letter this was a practice that ceased over two years ago in July 2019. At no point was this in practice during my administration. According to your letter this practice began in 2006 and during the course of your investigation there was no one in the Department that had knowledge of how this practice began, the purpose of this practice or who began this practice. The Department has since acknowledged that this practice was not appropriate and publicly apologized.

In the September 22, 2021 letter PSIG makes three recommendations:

1. Update its directives to comport with the Empowering Public Participation Act by explicitly prohibiting its members from performing background checks on members of the public solely based upon their request to speak at a public meeting.
2. State clearly in its policies the consequences—administrative and criminal—that members may face for misusing CPD databases to conduct backgrounds checks in violation of existing laws and disseminating such information to third parties/non CPD personnel.
3. Incorporate permissible and impermissible uses of CPD databases and prohibitions on improper background checks—including potential administrative and criminal consequences for misuse—into training academy and in-service curricula.

Considering this practice stopped over two years ago and there is no indication that any member of the public who has signed up to speak at the Police Board was subjected to a background check the recommendations appear at first blush to be moot; however, because they reflect new changes to the law, recommendation 1 and 2 have been forwarded to Research and Development and will be incorporated into directives where deemed appropriate. Moreover, recommendation 3 has been assigned to and will be implemented accordingly by the training division. Further, given CPD’s commitment to continue to build the trust between it and the community it serves CPD agrees to implement these recommendations were deemed appropriate as it continues to review its policy and training to come into compliance with the Consent Decree.
Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to the PSIG’s recommendations.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

David O. Brown
Superintendent of Police