

Oversight vs Public Safety

When elected to the position of district councilman I promised that I would look at both sides of things objectively and fairly. Since May of 2023 I've heard residents of all age's issues with policing and officers. Some things can be addressed, and some issues are beyond our duties as a district council. Today, I had the privilege of seeing things through the perspective of a Chicago Police Officer as I kept a promise of doing a ride along with an officer to gain that insight. 3 things stuck out that I will address while out patrolling. Those three things are liability/oversight, deescalate, and manpower. At the end of the day, I was left wondering if we as oversight bodies and elected officials have become too concerned about keeping an eye on policing and officers that public safety has suffered, and my conclusion is yes.

I had the ability to work with a 9-year FTO while on my tour of duty. This officer did a terrific job of explaining things and sharing insight as an officer that affects the ability of officers to do the job. One of the reoccurring words or themes that kept coming up was liability/oversight. While we responded to a half a dozen of calls, at the end of each call for service this officer explained why to me it was handled the way it was and most often it was to limit liability. Often this meant to me not fully solving the problem. This officer indicated that even though previous ways of policing may have worked in a few of the calls we responded to, now people can make random complaints against officers. Worrying about complaints to COPA and other oversight agencies and having to answer a slew of questions when questioned about a situation brings a lot of unnecessary liability. It appears to me that no matter how well an officer responds to a complaint or if he or she as officer believes they acted within the job guidelines, that if COPA or another agency finds them to be acting outside the rules that they will be subjected to punishment ranging from suspension to termination. This was truly an eye opener as I seen firsthand how it affected this officer from doing the job better. Liability should be the last thing officers worry about while in the field and it appeared to me that it was front in center on all the calls being responded to and how the call was answered and handled. This is something that is unacceptable.

De-escalation was another phrase that was noticeable today. While all calls and decisions on whether to use force, no force, arrest or no arrest come from officers on the scene it was evident that while the simple solution to a couple of the calls would have been to arrest the person de-escalation was often used and no arrest was made.

This was disturbing to see. On one call as the person who was apparently under the influence of drugs and/or liquor was harassing a woman minding her own business waiting for a bus. Instead of detaining and bringing the person under the influence in to get sober and get help the young lady was given a ride to where she needed to go by a fellow officer. After asking the person if he wanted medical services which were denied my FTO said okay and we left. This was another example of limiting liability, de-escalation but still leaving the problem out on the street to further cause issues later... was this an effect of too much oversight...maybe!

Lastly, manpower was the last theme that was often noticed during my tour from 8-2p. We all know CPD and the 8th District are battling an uphill battle to attract and retain officers. While going to one of the calls there was a call dispatched of a 4 yr. old walking around with no shoes or clothes. Unfortunately, there were no cars available to handle that call. No Cars to take a call and it was only mid-morning on a Friday. Furthermore, there was a backlog of calls on a rainy Friday Morning because there was NO CARS available. This should be alarming not only to residents but also to us as elected officials. At that time of day and weather being crummy we still had officers racing from call to call. NO CARS AVIVABLE should not become the norm that we get used to. Are these backlogs and no cars available an effect of too much oversight...after today tour of duty I firmly believe so.

In ending, I unlike many elected officials did go experience what officers go through on a daily basis by attending this ride along. I want to thank the Chicago Police Department for allowing me to do this. I truly believe that we as leaders need to take a step back and ask if we are doing too much oversight and hindering officers from effectively doing their job. Review policies and make common sense changes that will help officers while keeping residents safe. From what I have seen, listened to, and talked about it is apparent that there is too much oversight, and it is severely hurting public safety here in the City of Chicago and hurting the residents. For our officers we need to do better to make sure that liability is not front and center when responding to calls and how to handle them. I believe everything has a cause and effect and if we minimize the liability part for officers, we will see improved job performance and morale. Thank you for reading my report on behalf of the 8th District Police Council.

Thank you,

Jason Huff

Chairman