



Log # 2023-0001313

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT¹

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 28, 2023, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) received a web complaint² alleging misconduct by a member of CPD. It is alleged that in September 2022, Officer John Sanders (Officer Sanders³) discharged his firearm and shot himself in the leg, and ██████████, was a witness to the shooting.⁴ It was further alleged by the complainant that Officer Sanders emailed words to the effect of “you the smartest dumbest mufacka I know,” to ██████████⁵ Following its investigation, COPA reached sustained findings regarding the allegations of emailing words to the effect of “you the smartest dumbest mufacka I know,” to ██████████

II. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE⁶

On March 28, 2023, COPA received a web complaint from ██████████ (██████████) the ██████████ of Officer Sanders, alleging that ██████████ was a witness to the discharge of a firearm by Officer Sander.⁷ Upon receipt of this complaint, COPA contacted ██████████ on March 28, 2023, at approximately 3:31 pm.⁸ In this telephone conversation,⁹ ██████████ alleged a history of domestic

¹ Appendix A includes case identifiers such as the date, time, and location of the incident, the involved parties and their demographics, and the applicable rules and policies.

² Att. 1

³ Officer Sanders was promoted to a sergeant in November 2024. In the interest of consistency, this report refers to his title at the time of the incident and investigation.

⁴ This incident was investigated under COPA Log# 2022-0003900.

⁵ One or more of these allegations fall within COPA’s jurisdiction pursuant unto Chicago Municipal Code 2-78-120. Therefore, COPA determined it would be the primary investigative agency in this matter.

⁶ The following is a summary of what COPA finds most likely occurred during this incident. This summary utilized information from several different sources, including civilian statements, officer interviews, e-mails, Cook County court records, etc.

⁷ Log# 2022-0003900

⁸ Att. 11

⁹ The alleged incidents ██████████ related to COPA during the March 28, 2023, telephone conversation were not able to be substantiated due to COPA’s inability to obtain any objective verifiable evidence. For example, in one incident ██████████ described to COPA, she believed Officer Sanders was attempting to set her up to be harmed during the child exchange of their ██████████ informed COPA that she believed this because the location of the pick-up was in a high-crime area of Chicago (Englewood). However, aside from it being a high-crime area, there was no other evidence that indicated harm was to be committed towards ██████████ by Officer Sanders. See Att.12.

violence she experienced from Officer Sanders.¹⁰ On August 24, 2023, ██████ provided a recorded statement to COPA.¹¹

In ██████ interview with COPA,¹² ██████ spoke about Officer Sander's "explosive behavior."¹³ ██████ informed COPA that she does not have the best relationship with Officer Sanders and that they currently are in court for ██████ issues. ██████ related an incident where, upon returning ██████ to Officer Sanders,¹⁴ Officer Sanders became upset with ██████ had taken ██████ to the nail salon to get her nails done. According to ██████ the nails were short with a gel overlay.¹⁵ ██████ believed that getting ██████ nails done would help prevent ██████ from biting her nails. However, weeks after, ██████ nails began to chip, and this is when ██████ received an email¹⁶ from Officer Sanders exhibiting explosive behavior (see Figure 1).

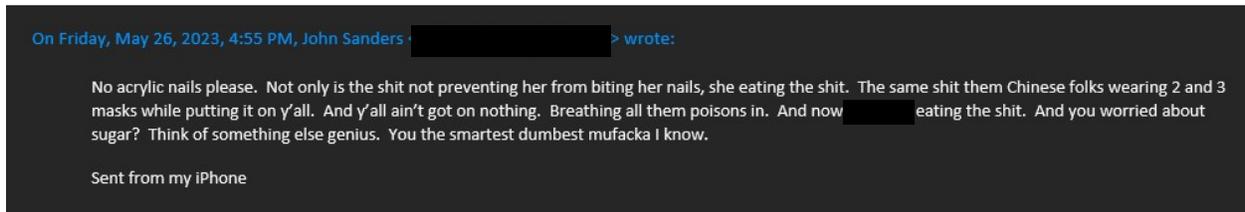


Figure 1. Email sent by Officer Sanders regarding ██████ nails.

In COPA's interview with Officer Sanders,¹⁷ he related to COPA a similar narrative about his relationship with ██████ and that many of their issues are child custody related. Likewise, Officer Sanders related to COPA that he had blocked ██████ phone number years ago and therefore email was a way he and ██████ frequently communicated.¹⁸ When asked about the email he sent to ██████ on May 26, 2023, Officer Sanders prefaced his statement by explaining how he receives over thirty emails daily from ██████ and that he does not respond to them unless it is necessary.¹⁹ Additionally, Officer Sanders informed COPA that the email that he sent (Figure 1), was in response to an email ██████ sent to him.²⁰ Officer Sander acknowledged that he was upset that ██████ had gotten long acrylic nails for ██████²¹

¹⁰ In subsequent phone conversations with ██████ COPA informed ██████ of the outcome of previous logs she had filed. These logs were closed due to a lack of insufficient objective verifiable evidence. COPA was unable to obtain a recorded statement from ██████ in COPA Log# 2021-0003023 and IPRA Log# 1083454.

¹¹ Att.3

¹² Att. 21

¹³ Att. 5, Page 5, Lines 4-5

¹⁴ Officer Sanders has ██████

¹⁵ Att. 5, Page 51, Lines 1-10

¹⁶ Att. 4

¹⁷ Att. 8

¹⁸ Att. 8 @12:10

¹⁹ Att. 8@ 13:15- 13:30. It should be noted that since the onset of this investigation, COPA investigators have been copied on emails ██████ sent to Officer Sanders and his attorney. COPA investigators have been copied to over 15 email threads between the parties as it relates to the ongoing ██████ case. COPA has related to ██████ that the ██████ issues they have are outside of COPA's jurisdiction.

²⁰ Att. 8 @10:50

²¹ Att. 8 @14:15-14:25

COPA learned that there was a pending DCFS investigation involving ██████████ and Officer Sanders. COPA obtained the redacted DCFS report. Officer Sanders was the subject of the DCFS investigations involving ██████████. The allegation of Substantial Risk of Physical Injury/Environment Injurious to Health and Welfare by Neglect, which was related to the unintentional firearm discharge, was *unfounded*.²²

III. ALLEGATIONS

OFFICER JOHN SANDERS:

1. It is alleged that on or about May 26, 2023, at approximately 4:55 pm, P.O. John Sanders emailed words to the effect of “You the smartest dumbest mufacka I know”, to ██████████
██████████
 - **Sustained**, Violation of Rules 2, 3, 8, and 9.

IV. CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT

The credibility of an individual relies primarily on two factors: 1) the individual’s truthfulness and 2) the reliability of the individual’s account. The first factor addresses the honesty of the individual making the statement, while the second factor speaks to the individual’s ability to accurately perceive the event at the time of the incident and then accurately recall the event from memory. This investigation did not reveal any evidence that caused COPA to doubt the credibility of any of the individuals who provided statements.

V. ANALYSIS²³

OFFICER JOHN SANDERS:

COPA finds allegation #1 against Officer Sanders, that he emailed words to the effect of “You the smartest dumbest mufacka I know”, to ██████████ is **sustained**. Officer Sanders confirmed with COPA that he did send the email to ██████████. Additionally, Officer Sanders related that he did so because he was upset that ██████████ had been biting her nails and thought that getting acrylic would prevent her from doing so. Officer Sanders also informed COPA that in hindsight, he would have responded differently to ██████████²⁴ During Officer Sander's interview with COPA, he took accountability for his actions and admitted his wrongdoings. Here it is undisputed that Officer Sanders emailed this to ██████████. Therefore, COPA finds that Officer Sander’s actions violated Department Rules 2, 3, 8, and 9.

VI. DISCIPLINARY RECOMMENDATION

a. Officer John Sanders

²² Att. 6

²³ For a definition of COPA’s findings and standards of proof, *see* Appendix B.

²⁴ Att. 8 @13:15

i. Complimentary and Disciplinary History²⁵

Officer Sanders has been with CPD since December 2, 2022. In that time, he received 123 various awards, including 92 honorable mention certificates and ribbons, eight department commendations, and six complimentary letters. He received a SPAR for failing to have a current Illinois license plate or city sticker in 2025 resulting in a Reprimand, but no other discipline in the last five years.

ii. Recommended Discipline

In this instance, COPA recommends a Reprimand. Officer Sanders took accountability for his actions and acknowledged he could have handled the situation better. Although Officer Sanders and [REDACTED] do not have a good relationship, [REDACTED] has not alerted COPA to any recurrence of this type of behavior.

Approved:

[REDACTED]

July 15, 2025

Shannon Hayes
Acting Deputy Chief Administrator – Chief Investigator

Date

²⁵ Attachment 67.

Appendix A**Case Details**

Date/Time/Location of Incident:	May 26, 2023/4:55 pm/ unknown
Date/Time of COPA Notification:	March 28, 2023/ 9:09am
Involved Officer #1:	John Sanders, star # 9389, employee ID# [REDACTED] Date of Appointment: December 2, 2002, Unit of Assignment: 007, Male, Black
Involved Individual #1:	[REDACTED] female, Black

Applicable Rules

- Rule 2:** Any action or conduct which impedes the Department's efforts to achieve its policy and goals or brings discredit upon the Department.
- Rule 3:** Any failure to promote the Department's efforts to implement its policy or accomplish its goals.
- Rule 5:** Failure to perform any duty.
- Rule 6:** Disobedience of an order or directive, whether written or oral.
- Rule 8:** Disrespect to or maltreatment of any person, while on or off duty.
- Rule 9:** Engaging in any unjustified verbal or physical altercation with any person, while on or off duty.
- Rule 10:** Inattention to duty.
- Rule 14:** Making a false report, written or oral.
- Rule 38:** Unlawful or unnecessary use or display of a weapon.

Applicable Policies and Laws

Appendix B

Definition of COPA’s Findings and Standards of Proof

For each Allegation, COPA must make one of the following findings:

1. Sustained – where it is determined the allegation is supported by a preponderance of the evidence;
2. Not Sustained – where it is determined there is insufficient evidence to prove the allegations by a preponderance of the evidence;
3. Unfounded – where it is determined by clear and convincing evidence that an allegation is false or not factual; or
4. Exonerated – where it is determined by clear and convincing evidence that the conduct described in the allegation occurred, but it is lawful and proper.

A **preponderance of evidence** can be described as evidence indicating that it is **more likely than not** that a proposition is proved.²⁶ For example, if the evidence gathered in an investigation establishes that it is more likely that the conduct complied with Department policy than that it did not, even if by a narrow margin, then the preponderance of the evidence standard is met.

Clear and convincing evidence is a higher standard than a preponderance of the evidence but lower than the “beyond-a-reasonable doubt” standard required to convict a person of a criminal offense. Clear and convincing can be defined as a “degree of proof, which, considering all the evidence in the case, produces the firm and abiding belief that it is highly probable that the proposition . . . is true.”²⁷

²⁶ See *Avery v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co.*, 216 Ill. 2d 100, 191 (2005) (a proposition is proved by a preponderance of the evidence when it is found to be more probably true than not).

²⁷ *People v. Coan*, 2016 IL App (2d) 151036, ¶ 28 (quoting Illinois Pattern Jury Instructions, Criminal, No. 4.19 (4th ed. 2000)).

Appendix C

Transparency and Publication Categories

Check all that apply:

- Abuse of Authority
- Body Worn Camera Violation
- Coercion
- Death or Serious Bodily Injury in Custody
- Domestic Violence
- Excessive Force
- Failure to Report Misconduct
- False Statement
- Firearm Discharge
- Firearm Discharge – Animal
- Firearm Discharge – Suicide
- Firearm Discharge – Unintentional
- First Amendment
- Improper Search and Seizure – Fourth Amendment Violation
- Incidents in Lockup
- Motor Vehicle Incidents
- OC Spray Discharge
- Search Warrants
- Sexual Misconduct
- Taser Discharge
- Unlawful Denial of Access to Counsel
- Unnecessary Display of a Weapon
- Use of Deadly Force – other
- Verbal Abuse
- Other Investigation