



Log # 2024-6342

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT¹

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 24, 2024, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) received a web complaint from [REDACTED] ([REDACTED] alleging misconduct by members of the Chicago Police Department (CPD). [REDACTED] alleged that on July 24, 2024, Officers Joseph Vecchio and William Sierzega detained and searched him, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] all without justification. [REDACTED] further alleged that the officers searched his vehicle without justification.² Upon review of the evidence, COPA served additional allegations that Officers Vecchio and Sierzega failed to complete Investigatory Stop Reports (ISRs) for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and failed to provide an ISR receipt to [REDACTED]. COPA also alleged that Officer Sierzega failed to properly process property under Department control ([REDACTED] driver's license), in violation of Special Order 07-01. Following its investigation, COPA reached sustained findings for the allegations regarding the ISR and ISR receipt, that Officer Sierzega failed to process property under Department control, that Officer Vecchio searched the vehicle without justification, and that Officer Sierzega searched [REDACTED] without justification.³

II. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE⁴

On July 24, 2024, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were in downtown Chicago, visiting from Wisconsin. After leaving a restaurant, they went to their vehicle and noticed there was a parking citation on it.⁵ As [REDACTED] drove out of the parking spot, the group noticed a CPD vehicle nearby, and they tried to flag down the officers to ask a question about their citation.⁶ In response, Officers Vecchio and Sierzega conducted a traffic stop, stating that when [REDACTED] exited the parking spot, he did not turn on his turn signal, he was parked in a tow zone, and his vehicle was more than 12 inches away from the curb.⁷ Officer Sierzega requested [REDACTED]

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

³ COPA originally closed this log on December 22, 2025. Att. 35. On March 20, 2026, the Superintendent asked COPA to conduct further investigation to reassess the validity of the vehicle search and the penalty recommendation. Att. 37. COPA agreed to that request on March 24, 2026. COP-0611439.

⁴ The following is a summary of what COPA finds most likely occurred during this incident. This summary utilized information from several different sources, including BWC footage, police reports, civilian interviews, and officer interviews.

⁵ Att. 18, [REDACTED] COPA Statement, pg. 4, Lns. 16 to 18.

⁶ Att. 18, at pg. 4, Lns. 23 and 24

⁷ Att. 3, PO Vecchio BWC, at 2:26; and Att. 1 ISR narrative

driver's license, which he used to look up [REDACTED] on the officers' portable data transmitter.⁸ Officer Sierzega then returned to [REDACTED] vehicle but failed to return his driver's license.⁹

Officer Vecchio, who had remained on the passenger's side of [REDACTED] vehicle, commented that there was cannabis inside the vehicle.¹⁰ Officer Vecchio later told COPA that he saw "burnt" cannabis in plain sight, inside a tan and black paper cone that was in the center cup holder of the vehicle.¹¹ Officer Vecchio relayed his observation to Officer Sierzega and the officers asked everyone to exit the vehicle.¹² [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were handcuffed together, [REDACTED] was patted down, and [REDACTED] purse was searched.¹³ The officers also searched the passenger compartment of the vehicle and several bags inside the vehicle.¹⁴ After the search, the officers released everyone and no citations were issued.¹⁵ The alleged cannabis was not inventoried and the BWC footage does not appear to show cannabis.

III. ALLEGATIONS

Officer Joseph Vecchio:

1. Detaining [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] without justification.
 - Not Sustained.
2. Searching [REDACTED] and their vehicle without justification.
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 6, and 10.¹⁶
3. Failing to complete an ISR for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] without justification.
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, 10.
4. Failing to provide an ISR Receipt for [REDACTED] without justification.
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, 10.

Officer William Sierzega:

1. Detaining [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] without justification.
 - Not Sustained.

⁸ Att. 2, Officer Sierzega BWC, at 2:28

⁹ Att. 26, Officer Sierzega COPA Statement, at Pg. 53, Lns. 8-24.

¹⁰ Att. 3, at 4:44.

¹¹ Att. 24, Officer Vecchio COPA Statement, at Pg. 10, Lns. 17-18, and Pgs. 14-16.

¹² Att. 3, at 4:58

¹³ Att. 2, at 5:06

¹⁴ Att. 3, at 5:28 to 6:46

¹⁵ Att. 1

¹⁶ As discussed more fully below, COPA only finds that Officer Vecchio searched the vehicle without justification.

2. Searching [REDACTED] and their vehicle without justification.¹⁷
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 6, and 10.
3. Failing to complete ISR for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] without justification.
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, 10.
4. Failing to provide an ISR Receipt for [REDACTED] without justification.
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, 10.
5. Failing to properly process property under department control in violation of Special Order 07-01.
 - Sustained, in violation of Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 40.

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.

COPA found no evidence causing it to question Officer Sierzega's truthfulness or to otherwise question the credibility of his statement. COPA found that Officer Sierzega was forthcoming and credible about not being able to recall certain details of the incident during his statement.¹⁸ Officer Sierzega further acknowledged that he had forgotten to return [REDACTED] driver's license,¹⁹ and took responsibility for this mistake.²⁰

In contrast, COPA found reasons to question the reliability of Officer Vecchio's claim that he observed burnt cannabis while standing outside the vehicle. There are discrepancies between Officer Vecchio's BWC footage and his statements that he saw cannabis inside the vehicle, which was the justification he provided for the vehicle search. As addressed in the analysis, COPA finds it implausible that Officer Vecchio could have seen inside the paper funnel that he alleged contained the cannabis *before* he began the search. Officer Vecchio's behavior was also not

¹⁷ As discussed more fully below, COPA only finds that Officer Sierzega searched [REDACTED] without justification.

¹⁸ Att. 26, pg. 12, lns. 18 to 20; pg. 23, lns. 9 to 10; pg. 31, lns 10 to 15; pg. 52, lns. 13 to 20.

¹⁹ Att. 26, pg. 49, lns. 2 to 7.

²⁰ Att. 26, pg. 52 lns. 1 to 5.

consistent with that observation, as he did not immediately search the area where he claimed to have observed the cannabis, and he also failed to inventory any cannabis.²¹

Finally, [REDACTED] also provided a statement to COPA.²² COPA found her to be generally credible, although one of her statements was not supported by the BWC evidence. Specifically, she stated that both she and her mom were patted down.²³ COPA attributes this discrepancy to a misperception rather than lack of truthfulness. [REDACTED] also described the pat down as a light touch by the pockets, so it is possible that action was not captured on BWC.

V. ANALYSIS²⁴

a. Detaining without Justification

COPA finds Allegation #1, that Officers Vecchio and Sierzega detained [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] without justification, is **Not Sustained**.

There are two legal standards under which law enforcement officers may justifiably detain individuals they encounter. The first standard is called reasonable articulable suspicion; this exists when a sworn member possesses “specific and articulable facts which, combined with rational inferences from these facts, reasonably warrant a belief that the suspect is committing, is about to commit, or has committed a criminal offense.”²⁵ The second standard is probable cause, which “exists where the police have knowledge of facts that would lead a reasonable person to believe that a crime has occurred and that the subject has committed it.”²⁶ Probable cause is the more stringent standard of the two; the facts supporting a reasonable articulable suspicion do not need to meet the same requirements as probable cause, although they must entail more than a mere hunch or generalized suspicion.²⁷

In this case, the officers claimed they stopped [REDACTED] vehicle for moving violations because [REDACTED] failed to indicate when exiting his parking spot, he was parked in a tow zone, and he was parked more than 12 inches from the curb. If taken as true, those moving violations would provide a justification for the traffic stop. However, there is no evidence that independently

²¹ Although COPA questions Officer Vecchio’s credibility in this case, COPA does not believe his statements rise to the level of a Rule 14 violation. CPD Rule 14 forbids an officer from making a false report, written or oral. An officer cannot be found guilty of a Rule 14 violation unless it has been determined that (1) the officer willfully made a false statement and (2) the false statement was made about a fact that was material to the incident under investigation. *See* Agreement between City of Chicago Department of Police and Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Lodge No. 7 §6.1(M); In this case, although COPA finds it improbable that Officer Vecchio observed cannabis from his position, COPA does not believe it can prove that Officer Vecchio willfully provided false information.

²² Att. 18. COPA attempted to obtain a statement from [REDACTED] but was not successful. CMS Notes CO-141432; CO-1415059; CO-1419133,

²³ Att. 18, pg. 19, Lns. 14-15.

²⁴ For a definition of COPA’s findings and standards of proof, *see* Appendix B.

²⁵ Att. 29, S04-13-09 II (C)(1), Investigatory Stop System (effective July 10, 2017 to February 2, 2026).

²⁶ Att. 29, S04-13-09 II(D).

²⁷ Att. 29, S04-13-09 II(D).

corroborates the alleged moving violations. The officers did not issue citations, [REDACTED] was captured on BWC saying “I’m not parked here” when the officers approached, the officers’ BWCs did not capture the alleged moving violations, and their CPD vehicle was not equipped with in-car camera.²⁸ While the officers may have had probable cause to curb [REDACTED] vehicle and briefly detain him and the other occupants of the vehicle, COPA lacks sufficient evidence to prove or disprove this allegation. Therefore, this allegation is **Not Sustained**.

b. Searching without Justification

COPA finds Allegation #2, that Officers Vecchio and Sierzega searched [REDACTED] and their vehicle without justification, is **Sustained**. For Officer Vecchio, this allegation is sustained only with respect to the vehicle search. For Officer Sierzega, this allegation is sustained only with respect to the pat down search of [REDACTED]

i. Vehicle Search

The Fourth Amendment protects citizens from unreasonable searches.²⁹ Searches without a warrant are presumed to be unreasonable except under certain circumstances. Under one exception, officers are allowed to search and seize evidence of crimes that are in plain view without it constituting an unlawful search, so long as certain conditions are met. Specifically, (1) the officer must not have “violate[d] the Fourth Amendment in arriving at the place from which the evidence could be plainly viewed;” (2) the “incriminating character” of the evidence must be “immediately apparent;” and (3) the officer “must also have a lawful right of access to the object itself.”³⁰ “What a person knowingly exposes to the public, even in his own home or office, is not a subject of Fourth Amendment protection.”³¹ Officers do not violate the Fourth Amendment by viewing items in plain sight, “from a public vantage point where [they] have a right to be.”³² Further, the incriminating nature of an item is “immediately apparent” if an officer has “probable cause to believe that the item is contraband or otherwise linked to criminal activity.”³³ Even “an ordinarily innocuous object” may be seized under this doctrine “when the context of an investigation casts that item in a suspicious light.”³⁴ However, seizure of suspected contraband is not permissible if the object’s incriminating nature is not immediately apparent without further search of the object.³⁵

²⁸ Att. 2, at 1:55 to 2:05; Att. 1

²⁹ U.S. Const. amend. IV.

³⁰ *Horton v. California*, 496 U.S. 128, 136-37 (1990), (quoting *Coolidge v. New Hampshire*, 403 U.S. 443, 466 (1971)); *People v. Jones*, 215 Ill.2d 261, 271-72 (2005); *People v. Garcia*, 2012 IL App (1st) 1092940 *P5 (2012).

³¹ *Florida v. Riley*, 488 U.S. 445, 449 (1989).

³² *Florida v. Riley*, 488 U.S. 445, 458 (1989) (citing *California v. Ciraolo*, 476 U.S., 207, 213 (1986)).

³³ *United States v. Cellitti*, 387 F.3d 618, 624 (7th Cir. 2004) (citing *United States v. Bruce*, 109 F.3d 323, 328 (7th Cir. 1994)).

³⁴ *Cellitti*, 387 F.3d 618, 624 (7th Cir. 2004).

³⁵ *People v. Molnar*, 2021 IL App (2d) 190289, ¶ 12.

While Illinois legalized the recreational use of cannabis in 2020, and possession is lawful under some circumstances, it remains unlawful under others.³⁶ Notably, the Chicago Municipal Code and Illinois law still prohibit the possession of cannabis in a vehicle unless it is in a reasonably secured, sealed container that is both odor-proof and child resistant.³⁷ Additionally, no one may use cannabis while in a vehicle.³⁸

Officer Vecchio claimed to have observed unsecured cannabis, located in a paper cone, while he was standing outside the passenger window of [REDACTED] vehicle. If accurate, the officers could have lawfully searched the vehicle. However, there are several reasons to question the accuracy of Officer Vecchio's claim.



Figure 1: A screenshot from Officer Vecchio's BWC, with the red arrow added to show the location of the paper cone in the cupholder.³⁹

First, COPA does not believe Officer Vecchio could have observed the cannabis from his position outside the vehicle. As shown in the screenshot above, from Officer Vecchio's BWC, the narrow paper cone is somewhat obscured by a water bottle.⁴⁰ The officers approximated there was

³⁶ Illinois.gov, Adult Use Cannabis Summary, available at https://www2.illinois.gov/HISNews/20242-Summary_of_HB_1438_The_Cannabis_Regulation_and_Tax_Act.pdf (last accessed May 9, 2024).

³⁷ M.C.C. § 7-24-099(b)(4); 410 ILCS 705/10-10; Att. 39, S04-32 IV.A.4: Cannabis Enforcement (effective July 9, 2020 to present).

³⁸ M.C.C. § 7-24-099(c)(4); 410 ILCS 705/10-10: Att. 39, S04-32 IV.B.4.

³⁹ See Att. 3 at 5:34.

⁴⁰ The cone appears to be the diameter of one to two fingers.

one gram of cannabis inside the cone.⁴¹ One gram of cannabis is variously described as being the size of a nickel, a grape, or the diameter of a standard paper clip.⁴² COPA does not believe it is plausible that Officer Vecchio could have seen such a relatively small amount of cannabis, contained inside a narrow paper funnel, from outside the vehicle.⁴³

Second, the paper cone appears to be a rolling papers product, “Raw: Slow Burning Papers.”⁴⁴ It is possible that Officer Vecchio observed the papers, which could conceivably be associated with cannabis use, and assumed there was cannabis in the cone. However, COPA also does not believe it was “immediately apparent” that the paper funnel was contraband or held contraband, as the product could also be used for tobacco. Importantly, Officer Vecchio never claimed the paper cone itself was evidence of contraband.

Third, Officer Vecchio’s behavior during the stop was not consistent with having observed illegal cannabis. Officer Vecchio argued with the occupants of the vehicle for several minutes about the reason for the stop,⁴⁵ before eventually saying words to the effect of, “I mean, you guys already have weed in the car. Now one thing leads to another.”⁴⁶ Officer Vecchio told Officer Sierzega the driver needed to exit the vehicle “because there’s weed in the car,” then ordered the passengers out of the vehicle.⁴⁷ Officer Vecchio then began searching the passenger compartment of the vehicle, beginning with the front passenger seat and the glove box, *not* the paper cone where the cannabis was allegedly stored.⁴⁸ Officer Sierzega did promptly go to the paper cone, but he picked it up and placed it back in the cupholder rather than securing it. Officer Vecchio eventually picked up the paper cone but did not appear to look inside it; he tilted the cone and then immediately put it back down.⁴⁹ COPA believes it is possible the officers observed cannabis at this time; however, prior to this point the officers lacked probable cause to conduct the vehicle search, and therefore were not “lawfully in a position from which” to view inside the paper cone.⁵⁰

Further, the officers also did not inventory any cannabis.⁵¹ Officer Vecchio explained they used “officer discretion” and did not need to inventory the cannabis.⁵² However, CPD policy does

⁴¹ Att. 24, pg. 26, lns. 12 to 15.

⁴² See Montana Department of Revenue, Marijuana Measurements & Sizes <https://revenuefiles.mt.gov/card/cannabis/education/marijuana-measurements-sizes> (last visited May 7, 2026); Verona Collective, Weed Measurements: Why They Matter <https://www.veronacollective.com/blog/education/weed-measurements-why-they-matter#:~:text=Without%20a%20Scale,exact%20weight%20of%20your%20weed> (last visited May 7, 2026).

⁴³ In addition, during the traffic stop, Officer Sierzega spoke with the vehicle occupants through the front passenger window. Given that positioning, it is notable that Officer Sierzega only observed cannabis when he entered the car.

⁴⁴ <https://rawthentic.com/prawducts/cones/> (last visited May 8, 2026).

⁴⁵ Att. 3, at 2:23 to 4:42.

⁴⁶ Att. 3, at 4:43 to 4:48.

⁴⁷ Att. 3, at 4:56 to 5:25.

⁴⁸ Att. 3, at 5:25 to 5:45

⁴⁹ Att. 2 at 5:52. Officer Vecchio makes some remark about “weed” but it is unclear what he said.

⁵⁰ *People v. Jones*, 215 Ill. 2d 261, 271-72 (2005) (citing *Minnesota v. Dickerson*, 508 U.S. 366, 374-75 (1993)).

⁵¹ Atts. 2, 3, and 22, eTrack Inventory Inquiry (showing two other inventoried cannabis incidents but not one matching this case).

⁵² Att. 24, pg. 14, lns. 21 to 24.

not appear to allow for officer discretion in seizing cannabis. Rather, the policy requires that officers seize cannabis when a person over 18 years of age is found in violation of the Municipal Code.⁵³

For these reasons, COPA finds by a preponderance of the evidence that Officer Vecchio lacked probable cause to conduct the vehicle search. Therefore, find this part of Allegation #2 against Officer Vecchio is **Sustained**.

Officer Sierzega did not begin the vehicle search until after Officer Vecchio had communicated that he observed cannabis in the vehicle.⁵⁴ Officer Sierzega reasonably relied on Officer Vecchio's statements that the officers had probable cause to search the vehicle. Therefore, this part of Allegation #2 against Officer Sierzega is **Not Sustained**.

ii. Searches of Persons

1. [REDACTED]

CPD policy defines a "Protective Pat Down" as "a limited search during an Investigatory Stop in which the sworn member conducts a pat down of the outer clothing of a person for weapons for the protection of the sworn member or others in the area."⁵⁵ To conduct a pat down, "a sworn member must possess specific and articulable facts, combined with rational inferences from these facts, that the suspect is armed and dangerous or reasonably suspects that the person presents a danger of attack to the sworn member or others in the area."⁵⁶ In other words, "the fact that an officer has reason to stop a citizen does not necessarily justify the further intrusion of a search for weapons; the officer may conduct a pat-down search only if he has reason to believe that he is dealing with an armed and dangerous individual."⁵⁷ An officer's subjective belief is not determinative, but is probative in determining the validity of the frisk.⁵⁸ The Supreme Court of Illinois has explained that "the sole justification for the search allowed by the *Terry* exception is the protection of the police officer and others in the vicinity, not to gather evidence."⁵⁹

⁵³ Att. 39, S04-32.VII.A and VIII. Officers do have discretion on whether to arrest a person for a violation of the Municipal Code. See S04-22.II.A, Municipal Administrative Hearings (effective January 9, 2020 to present). The failure to inventory is also curious because burnt cannabis within a motor vehicle suggests some possibility of impairment by the driver, but neither officer appeared concerned with this possibility.

⁵⁴ Att. 3, at 4:56 to 5:25; Att. 26, pg. 22, lns. 11 to 19.

⁵⁵ Att. 29, S04-13-09(II)(B).

⁵⁶ Att. 29, S04-13-09(II)(C)(2); pursuant to 725 ILCS 5/108-1.01, officers are permitted to conduct a limited search on a person for weapons if the officer has lawfully stopped the person for temporary questioning and reasonably suspects that they are in danger of attack.

⁵⁷ *People v. Watson*, 145 Ill. App. 3d 492, 497 (1st Dist. 1986).

⁵⁸ *People v. Flowers*, 179 Ill. 2d 257, 264 (1997) ("Although the standard is an objective one, the officer's subjective belief regarding the safety of the situation is one of the factors that may be considered in determining whether a weapons frisk was valid under *Terry*."); *People v. Sorenson*, 196 Ill. 2d 425, (2001); *People v. Walker*, 2013 IL App (4th) 120118, ¶ 46.

⁵⁹ *People v. Flowers*, 179 Ill. 2d 257, 263 (1997) (citing *Minnesota v. Dickerson*, 508 U.S. 366, 373 (1993)).

Officer Sierzega patted down ██████████ but he did not articulate any basis to believe that ██████████ was armed and dangerous. Officer Sierzega told COPA he could “make a decent argument” that ██████████ “was showing some indications of being nervous;”⁶⁰ however, the objective evidence does not support this. Rather, the BWC footage shows that ██████████ remained calm, cooperative, and compliant throughout the interaction.⁶¹ The footage contains no indication that ██████████ was either armed or dangerous. For these reasons, COPA finds this part of Allegation #2 against Officer Sierzega, that he searched ██████████ without justification, is **Sustained**. This part of Allegation #2 is **Not Sustained** for Officer Vecchio.

2. ██████████ and ██████████

One important exception to the Fourth Amendment’s warrant requirement is consent. Officers do not violate a person’s Fourth Amendment rights if a person consents to a search.⁶² Whether a person has consented to a search is a heavily fact-dependent analysis. Courts have made it clear that consent must be “freely and voluntarily given” and not merely the “acquiescence to a claim of lawful authority.”⁶³ A search based on consent must satisfy three requirements. First, the person who granted consent to search must do so voluntarily, meaning without “implied threat or covert force.”⁶⁴ Second, the person who granted consent must have the authority to grant consent to officers – or must appear to have authority to grant such consent.⁶⁵ Third, the officers must limit the search to the scope of the consent – unless they develop further probable cause to justify expanding the search.⁶⁶

BWC footage shows that Officer Sierzega searched ██████████ purse. However, it appears more likely than not that the search was consensual, as both ██████████ and ██████████ held out their purses to officers without being asked to do so.⁶⁷ Further, ██████████ told COPA she went along with the officer’s request to open her purse.⁶⁸ In addition, COPA did not find evidence that ██████████ or ██████████ were patted down by either officer. For this reason, this part of Allegation #2, that Officers Vecchio and Sierzega searched ██████████ and ██████████ without justification, is **Not Sustained**.

⁶⁰ Att. 26, pg. 27, lns. 13 to 18.

⁶¹ Att. 2 at 5:07 to 5:16.

⁶² *People v. Anthony*, 198 Ill. 2d 194, 202 (IL, 2001) (citing *Schneckloth v. Bustamonte*, 412, U.S. 218, 222 (1973)); *Schneckloth v. Bustamonte*, 412 U.S. 218, 222 (1973).

⁶³ *Bumper v. North Carolina*, 391 U.S. 543, 549 (1968). See also *United States v. Nafziger*, 956 F.2d 213, 246 (7th Cir. 1992); *United States v. Jones*, 22F.4th 667, 677 (7th Cir. 2022).

⁶⁴ *People v. Anthony*, 198 Ill. 2d 194, 202 (IL, 2001) (citing *Schneckloth v. Bustamonte*, 412, U.S. 218, 228 (1973)).

⁶⁵ *United States v. Matlock*, 415 U.S. 164 (1974); *People v. Crump*, 2021 IL App (1st) 182282-U; *Illinois v. Rodriguez*, 497 U.S. 177 (1990) (holding a warrantless search is valid if officers receive consent from someone who they mistakenly but reasonably believe has authority to give consent).

⁶⁶ *Florida v. Jimeno*, 500 U.S. 248 (1991); *People v. Phillips*, 264 Ill. App. 3d 213 (1994) (holding an officer may extend their search if they reasonably believe the item being looked for is inside of items or containers located inside the consented search area).

⁶⁷ Att. 2 at 6:40; Att. 3 at 6:47.

⁶⁸ Att. 18, Pg. 18, lns. 7-18.

c. Failure to Complete an ISR and Provide an ISR Receipt

i. Failure to complete an ISR

COPA finds Allegation #3, that Officers Vecchio and Sierzega failed to complete an ISR for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] is **Sustained**. Officers must submit an Investigatory Stop Report (ISR) following an investigatory stop, probable cause stop, and protective pat down “or other search in a public place.”⁶⁹ In the narrative portion of the ISR, officers must document “[a]ll the factors” supporting reasonable articulable suspicion to temporarily detain an individual for investigation, and if applicable, to perform a protective pat down.⁷⁰ Additionally, officers who conduct a probable cause stop must document all the factors supporting probable cause in the narrative portion of the ISR if “no other document captures the reason for the detention.”⁷¹

Here, Officer Vecchio told [REDACTED] that she was not free to leave, and later, Officer Sierzega searched her purse.⁷² [REDACTED] was also told she was “required to comply” because she was “being detained.”⁷³ CPD policy is clear that when an individual is detained for investigation, an ISR must be completed. While officers did complete an ISR for [REDACTED] they failed to complete one for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] – who were also detained. Therefore, COPA finds this allegation is **Sustained**.

ii. Failure to Provide an ISR Receipt

Similarly, COPA finds Allegation #4, that Officers Vecchio and Sierzega failed to provide ISR receipt to [REDACTED] is **Sustained**. As discussed above, CPD officers who conduct an investigatory stop are required to complete an Investigatory Stop Report.⁷⁴ Additionally, if the investigatory stop involved a protective pat down or any other search, officers are required to provide an Investigatory Stop Receipt to the subject.⁷⁵

Here, the officers completed an ISR documenting the detention of [REDACTED]. However, they failed to provide [REDACTED] with an ISR receipt. CPD policy is clear that an ISR receipt is not an optional part of the process if the detention involves a search. In this case, the officers searched [REDACTED] vehicle and conducted a pat down of his person, requiring them to provide an ISR receipt. Therefore, COPA finds this allegation is **Sustained**.

⁶⁹ Att. 29, S04-13-09 (VIII)(A)(1).

⁷⁰ Att. 29, S04-13-09 (VIII)(A)(1).

⁷¹ Att. 29, S04-13-09 (VIII)(A)(1). For example, officers do not need to complete an ISR if they (1) observe factors giving them probable cause to arrest a subject, (2) perform an arrest, and (3) complete an arrest report explaining the probable cause.

⁷² Att. 3, at 5:08 and at 6:56.

⁷³ Att. 3, at 5:18.

⁷⁴ Att. 29, S04-13-09(III)(C).

⁷⁵ Att. 29, S04-13-09(VIII)(A)(3).

d. Failure to Properly Process Property

COPA finds Allegation #5 against Officer Sierzega, that he failed to properly process property under Department control, in violation of Special Order 07-01, is **Sustained**. CPD members must inventory all property that they seize, recover, find, or otherwise take into custody as soon as it is practicable to do so.⁷⁶ In this case, Officer Sierzega did not properly inventory [REDACTED] driver's license after seizing it.⁷⁷ Officer Sierzega took accountability for the mistake and expressed remorse upon realizing that he had [REDACTED] driver's license in his possession.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Officer Sierzega mailed the driver's license back to [REDACTED] paying for it out of his own pocket, as he acknowledged that the CPD process for retrieving property is tedious, and [REDACTED] was from Wisconsin.⁷⁹ Regardless, Officer Sierzega violated CPD policy, and therefore, COPA finds this allegation is **Sustained**.

VI. DISCIPLINARY RECOMMENDATION

a. Officer Joseph Vecchio

i. Complimentary and Disciplinary History⁸⁰

Officer Vecchio has been employed by CPD since October 16, 2019. He has received 144 total complimentary awards, including 126 honorable mentions, ten Department commendations, and one Superintendent's Honorable Mention Certificate. He has 3 prior sustained complaints, which are summarized below:

- A 15-day suspension for a domestic violence incident where he threw eggs at a vehicle, threw and/or kicked a cellphone, stepped on a vacuum cleaner, and made multiple threatening statements (2020-0001524);
- A two-day suspension for failing to immediately notify OEMC when he was involved in a traffic crash involving a CPD vehicle, and for failing to complete the appropriate paperwork related to the accident (2024-0002494); and
- A Reprimand for failing to submit a Traffic Stop Statistical Study (TSSS) and for issuing a ticket without giving the motorist a copy after giving the motorist a verbal warning (2023-0000861).⁸¹

⁷⁶ Att. 30, G07-01(II)(A) Processing Property Under Department Control (effective April 14, 2015 to present).

⁷⁷ Att. 26, at Pg. 50, Ln. 11.

⁷⁸ Att. 26, at Pg. 56, Lns. 4 to 19.

⁷⁹ Att. 26, at Pg. 53, Lns. 1 to 7.

⁸⁰ Atts. 31 and 32.

⁸¹ COPA or BIA also previously investigated Officer Vecchio under Logs 2023-0004908, 2023-0005027, 2023-0005907, 2023-0006064, 2024-0002875, 2024-0003378, 2024-0006573, 2024-0007034, 2024-0007408, and 2024-0008374. Each of these cases involved at least one sustained allegation of misconduct related to a failure to follow

ii. Recommended Discipline

COPA has found that Officer Vecchio violated Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, and 10 when he searched [REDACTED] vehicle without justification, failed to provide [REDACTED] with an ISR receipt, and failed to complete an ISR for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

In mitigation, COPA has considered Officer Vecchio's awards and honors.

In aggravation, Officer Vecchio's actions brought discredit to CPD and damaged the trust between CPD and members of the public. [REDACTED] told COPA that her family has not returned to Chicago since this incident due to their "horrible experience" with the officers.⁸² Additionally, COPA has considered Officer Vecchio's disciplinary history and troubling patterning of violating CPD policy as an aggravating factor. Officer Vecchio has prior sustained findings for failing to complete required reports, which is misconduct he has repeated in this case. Officer Vecchio's previous discipline has failed to bring about lasting change in his conduct as a police officer. COPA further notes that Officer Vecchio had been a CPD member for more than four years at the time of this incident, so his behavior cannot be attributed to a lack of training or experience.

For these reasons, COPA recommends Officer Vecchio receive an **11 to 29 Day Suspension and Retraining** on vehicle searches and related reporting requirements (S04-13-09, now G03-08 and G03-08-03).

b. Officer William Sierzega

i. Complimentary and Disciplinary History⁸³

Officer Sierzega has been employed by CPD since December 12, 2016. He has received 102 total complimentary awards, including 84 honorable mentions, three life saving awards, and two Department commendations. Officer Sierzega has one prior sustained complaint for conducting a warrantless entry into an individual's residence and arresting the individual without justification, for which he received a reprimand (Log 2022-0003752). He has also received two recent SPARs for court appearance violations.

ii. Recommended Discipline

COPA has found that Officer Sierzega violated Rules 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 40 when he conducted a pat down of [REDACTED] without justification, failed to provide [REDACTED] with an

CPD policy during a traffic stop and/or search. CPD agreed with these findings and imposed penalties ranging from a reprimand up to a 20-day suspension. However, all of these cases are subject to the grievance process and have not yet been finalized.

⁸² Att. 18, at Pg. 6, Lns. 20 to 22.

⁸³ Atts. 31, 33.

ISR receipt, failed to properly process [REDACTED] property, and failed to complete an ISR for [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

In mitigation, COPA has considered Officer Sierzega's awards, honors, and disciplinary history. Additionally, Officer Sierzega was remorseful and admitted his mistake in handling [REDACTED] driver's license. In fact, Officer Sierzega told COPA that he paid out of pocket to mail [REDACTED] driver's license to him directly.

In aggravation, Officer Sierzega's actions brought discredit to CPD and damaged the trust between CPD and members of the public. [REDACTED] told COPA that her family has not returned to Chicago since this incident due to their "horrible experience" with the officers.⁸⁴ Additionally, COPA has considered Officer Sierzega's disciplinary history as an aggravating factor. Officer Sierzega has a prior sustained finding for violating an individual's Fourth Amendment rights, which is the same category of misconduct he committed in this case. COPA further notes that Officer Sierzega had been a CPD member for more than seven years at the time of this incident, so his behavior cannot be attributed to a lack of training or experience.

For these reasons, COPA recommends Officer Sierzega receive a **1 to 10 Day Suspension**⁸⁵ and **Retraining** on protective pat downs (G03-08), related reporting requirements (G03-08-03), and processing property under CPD control (G07-01).

Approved:

[REDACTED]

Steffany Hreno
Deputy Chief Administrator

5/19/2026

Date

⁸⁴ Att. 18, at Pg. 6, Lns. 20 to 22.

⁸⁵ COPA is recommending that Officer Sierzega receive a lower penalty than Officer Vecchio. This is due to Officer Vecchio's extensive disciplinary history, as well as the leading role that Officer Vecchio played during this incident.

Appendix A**Case Details**

Date/Time/Location of Incident:	July 24, 2024 / 7:35pm / 444 N. Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60611
Date/Time of COPA Notification:	July 24, 2024 / 10:36am
Involved Member #1:	Joseph Vecchio, Star #14469, Employee ID # [REDACTED] DOA: 11/16/2019, Unit: 006, Male, White
Involved Member #2:	William Sierzega, Star #19352, Employee ID # [REDACTED] DOA: 12/12/2016, Unit: 018, Male, White
Involved Individual #1:	[REDACTED] Male, Black
Involved Individual #2:	[REDACTED] Female, Black
Involved Individual #3:	[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.
- ☒ **Rule 40:** Failure to inventory and process recovered property in conformance with Department orders.

Applicable Policies and Laws

- S04-13-09: Investigatory Stop System (effective July 10, 2017 to present).
- G07-01: Processing Property Under Department Control (effective April 14, 2015 to present)

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.⁸⁶ For example, if the evidence gathered in an investigation establishes that it is more likely that the conduct complied with CPD 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.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ 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).

⁸⁷ *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