

# CHICAGO POLICE LIEUTENANTS ASSOCIATION

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November 15, 2010



The Chicago Police Department has proposed a new method of assigning Watch Commanders. The proposal, known as the Radio Zone Watch Commander policy is supposed to take effect in early 2011. The Board of Directors of the Chicago Police Lieutenants Association is deeply concerned about this drastic policy change and believes it seriously undermines effective supervision and has as the potential to adversely affect public safety. Our overall impression is that this policy is likely to fail, administratively, financially and operationally.

First, the proposed policy is extremely confusing. Secondly, the department will not be able to manage and administer this order without stepping all over the contractual rights of Lieutenants

Currently, Lieutenants and Captains function as Watch Commanders throughout the City in all 25 police districts. In other words, at all times, in all districts there is a designated Watch Commander on duty. The proposal eliminates this crucial, time tested method of supervision. Under the current contract, Lieutenants working as Watch Commanders earn the pay of Captains. This is a contractually granted pay increase. In order to save on that enhanced rate of pay, under the proposal, Captains will function as Watch Commanders *simultaneously in 2 police districts*.

If the City is motivated by financial concerns, this policy does not create significant financial savings. Under the proposal, Lieutenants will be working in the district and will not be the Watch Commander and the district may not have a Watch Commander. , The City saves \$40 a tour for each Lieutenant who is not permitted to function as Watch Commander, maybe \$80 a day per radio zone. Why is the Department jeopardizing the safety of the City for such a miniscule savings? Is this small savings really worth the risk of potential liability created by less effective supervision? Many of the department's most embarrassing moments and costly lawsuits in the last 5 years have been attributed to a lack of proper supervision.

The true cost of this plan will be the detrimental effect it will have on public safety and the safety of the officers on the CPD. For example the midnight watch has the lowest seniority and least experienced officers in many districts. These are young officers and supervisors who need the guidance of a more experienced Watch Commander. Also, this plan calls for Watch Commanders to approve probable cause on arrest reports electronically while the watch commander is in one location and the arresting officers and the arrested person are in another location. It is our contention that the Watch Commander can't properly do their job without in-person discussion with arresting officers. The arrest report and proper documentation of probable cause is the cornerstone of successful prosecution.

There is a relational component to supervision. Lieutenants, as Watch Commanders, recognize the individuality of each police officer and the uniqueness of the situations that officers find themselves in a daily basis. Who is the best person available to handle a particular situation? That decision can be best made by watch commanders who know the abilities of their personnel. Likewise, District Commanders rely on their watch commanders to assess and handle personnel issues. As watch commanders become increasingly removed from the personnel on the watch, the talents of some officers may be overlooked while shortcomings of others will go unaddressed. The draft order ignores the inherently valuable guidance that comes from informal conversations and interactions between watch commanders, sergeants and officers. How will future Department leaders be developed? Is that even a concern for the current administration?

There is no doubt that the members of CPLA are providing a valuable service to the City of Chicago. Leadership requires preparedness and experience; we have that to offer the officers; but first of all, leaders must be available, accessible and present. Sometimes, subordinates seek the watch commander out for guidance; sometimes the watch commanders can intuitively know that a situation needs their attention by just walking around the station and observing that something seems out of the ordinary. Both of those scenarios are less likely to occur if the watch commander's office is unoccupied. Additionally, the proposed order creates uncertainty as to who is in charge at any given time; uncertainty breeds indecision and worse, indifference.

All of these concerns lead to a less professional and less skilled police force. This plan jeopardizes the safety of the people of Chicago. It jeopardizes the safety of the Officers of the Chicago Police Department. Is this what Mayor Daley wants to leave as his legacy as he prepares for retirement? The Board of Directors of the Chicago Police Lieutenants Association sincerely hopes not.

Thank you,  
The Board of Directors of the Chicago Police Lieutenants Association