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EVALUATION OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPACTS OF THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT’S HIRING PROCESS

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The Public Safety section of the City of Chicago Office of Inspector General (OIG), including its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director and together with OIG’s Compliance Unit, conducted an evaluation of the demographic impacts of the Chicago Police Department’s (CPD) multi-stage hiring process. Those wishing to become a Police Officer (PO) must complete an application with the City and successfully navigate numerous stages designed to evaluate a candidate’s cognitive ability, physical fitness, personal background, physical and mental health, and other predictors of job performance. By the end of this year-and-a-half long process, a narrowed pool of individuals are invited to CPD’s Academy as recruits. After successfully completing the Academy in six months, new CPD members spend twelve months as Probationary Police Officers, to complete an 18-month total probationary period. The objectives of this evaluation were to determine whether there are patterns in attrition rates for different demographic groups in the hiring process and which specific stages of the hiring process most impact the demographic composition of the candidate pool. Additionally, OIG assessed whether CPD’s applicant data allowed for unique applicants to be tracked throughout the hiring process; the time it took applicants to complete the hiring process; and the race, gender, preference status, and neighborhood of residence for candidates whose applications succeed through the entire hiring process and were therefore invited to enroll in CPD’s Academy.

OIG found that Black candidates, while comprising 37% of the initial applicant pool, comprised just 18% of the pool of candidates invited to the Academy. Conversely, Asian, Hispanic, and White candidates increased in their proportion of the applicant pool by the end of the hiring process. In addition, OIG found that female candidates submitted fewer applications than male candidates at the start of the hiring process, comprising 34% of the initial pool. The proportion of female applicants decreased throughout the process, such that female candidates comprised just 27% of those invited to the Academy.

OIG determined that the standardized test (Chicago Police Officer Exam), the physical fitness test (Peace Officer Wellness Evaluation Report), and the background investigation were the stages in the process that most decreased the representation of Black candidates in the candidate pool. Black male candidates experienced the highest attrition rate in the background investigation stage relative to all other candidates, while Black female candidates experienced the highest attrition rate in the physical fitness test stage relative to all other candidates. Additionally, the attrition rate in the physical fitness test was higher for female candidates of all races compared to their male counterparts.

In examining the reasons for candidate attrition evident from available applicant data, OIG concluded that higher no-show rates and higher failure rates for Black candidates compared to other racial/ethnic groups drove the disproportionately high attrition rates in the standardized test and physical fitness test stages for Black candidates. In addition, in the physical fitness test, female applicants had higher no-show rates than their male counterparts, and Black female, Hispanic female, and White female candidates had higher failure rates than their male counterparts, contributing to the high female attrition at this stage. OIG further found that CPD’s elimination of its standardized test payment requirement in 2016 reduced, but did not entirely eliminate, the disproportionate attrition of Black candidates at this stage by increasing test turnout.

OIG reviewed the employee data for candidates who successfully completed the hiring process and entered the Academy. The available evidence suggests that CPD’s process preferences for applicants who are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces and graduates of Chicago Public Schools high schools seemed to benefit non-White applicants, potentially improving the racial/ethnic diversity of the pool of recruits; the veterans status seemed to benefit male candidates, potentially worsening the gender imbalance in the Academy. Moreover, OIG found that Academy recruits were clustered by neighborhood. Poorly represented geographic areas of the city may warrant the targeting and tailoring of future CPD recruitment efforts.

In the course of this evaluation, OIG used data from multiple sources including City of Chicago Department of Human Resources (DHR) and CPD Human Resources (CPD HR), and found that individual applicants are not assigned unique individual ID numbers. This means, for example, that DHR and CPD HR cannot identify when a single individual has submitted multiple applications and cannot track patterns in candidate attrition by education level or neighborhood of residence through each stage of the hiring process. This limits the scope of this analysis as well as any analysis CPD or DHR may wish to undertake. Additionally, OIG identified inconsistent labels and categories for demographic characteristics across data sources.

OIG recommends that CPD evaluate the stages of its hiring process for biases that have most contributed to the disproportionate attrition of Black and female candidates. CPD should further assess whether the tests and standards with inequitable outcomes are valid predictors of high job performance, and if not, what modifications might be appropriate. Furthermore, OIG recommends that CPD seek to remediate major drivers of attrition through targeted outreach to reduce no-shows and efforts to boost candidate preparedness.

CPD and OPSA responded jointly to the report and agreed with all 17 of OIG’s recommendations. In their response letter, CPD and OPSA committed to several changes to their hiring process with expected implementation in the near term, including a change such that “a candidate who does not successfully pass all components of the Pre-POWER test will no longer be automatically disqualified” and a commitment to “post more detail about the disqualifying standards in the background investigation process.”



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