



## CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

# PAX 501

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### DIFFICULT TIMES — SAME DEPARTMENT

If each of us were to look back on our own lives, we would undoubtedly remember periods in which everything seemed to go wrong. Tragic and difficult events often seem to come in waves. This is true in our personal lives, as well as in the "lives" of organizations. Our Department seems to be going through one of those periods now.

In the last several weeks, we have buried too many of our own, killed in tragic circumstances while on duty and off duty. There have been unfortunate instances of Department officials using inappropriate and offensive language concerning the community and our Department. Serious allegations of excessive use of force and criminal acts have been leveled against members of the Department. And various policy and management decisions of the Department have been called into question.

These situations — and their portrayal in the news media — are of grave concern to me, as they should be to all members of the Department. Of particular concern is the fact that recent events have caused some to question the strength and staying power of our relationship with the community — a relationship which is, after all, the centerpiece of our whole policing strategy.

But in the midst of these controversies, it is important for all of us to remember that we are the same Chicago Police Department... The same Police Department that 12 short months ago was being hailed by the local, national, and international media for our superb handling of the Democratic National Convention... The same Police Department that has helped to bring about a steady and significant reduction in crime over the last six years... The same Police Department that President Clinton and others have held up as a national model of community policing... The same Department that, day in and day out, gives its all to protect the lives, property, and rights of all Chicagoans — irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or economic status.

As we look inside ourselves during these difficult times, we must keep in mind these important and valid considerations. And as we evaluate our relationship with the community, we must consider barometers other than the headlines of the day — barometers such as the 5,000 residents who turn out for monthly beat community meetings, the hundreds of Court Advocacy volunteers who show up each month to show concern for their neighbors and neighborhoods, and all the other members of the community who have embraced our offer of partnership.

At the same time, we must be ever mindful that, as members of the Police Department, our actions and our words do have unique consequences. As I pointed out in a PAX 501 earlier this year, a seemingly isolated instance of unnecessary force or inappropriate language directed at a single

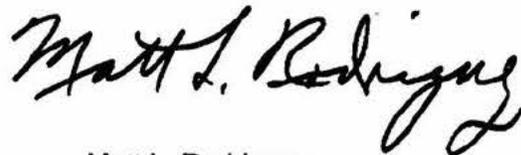
individual can — and, often times, does — affect the impressions and attitudes of countless others. And the repercussions from illegal and inappropriate activity affect more than just the officers who are directly involved; they impact how all police officers are perceived and treated by the community.

That is why I will continue to emphasize that our Department will have absolutely zero tolerance for such activity — be it unnecessary force, verbal abuse, or criminal activity. There is no place in our family for corruption, bigotry, or intolerance. When members exhibit such unacceptable behaviors, they will be dealt with swiftly and surely. At all times — but especially in these times of heightened media attention and community concern — each of us must treat our citizens with dignity and respect.

Some of the recent controversies involving our Department have been the result of management decisions that I have made. Such decisions are often difficult and painful and hard for some to understand. And while it would probably be easier just to follow my heart and instincts in these matters, I cannot make decisions that way. I have to make decisions based on what is best for our Department — now and for the future. I will live with these decisions, and I bear full responsibility for them.

But just as I am called upon to make sometimes difficult decisions, I recognize that each of you — day in and day out — must make difficult decisions as well. In making those decisions, always keep in mind how your decisions — your actions and your words — can affect your fellow officers, the Department as whole, and the relationship with the community we have worked so hard to build and flourish. Make good and safe decisions.

Our Department will weather these difficult times. Before the current period of controversy began, and long after it has faded away, we remain the same Police Department. And you remain the same people, performing the most critical job there is in our City — and performing it exceptionally well. You are now achieving what most of you had in mind when you first joined the Department: protecting life and property, and ensuring a better quality of life for our citizens. Without you, our success would be impossible.



Matt L. Rodriguez  
Superintendent of Police