

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

To: Emily Smart Woerner, City Solicitor
From: Catherine Burgett *Catherine Burgett*
Date: March 16, 2026
Re: Investigatory Fact Report and Conclusions

Introduction

The City of Cincinnati (“City”) requested FBT Gibbons LLP (formerly Frost Brown Todd, LLP) to conduct an investigation related to Teresa Theetge’s performance as Police Chief, including, but not limited to whether she: (i) has been an effective leader and manager of the Cincinnati Police Department (“CPD”), including personnel and resources; (ii) has been a leader within the context of city government, including by furthering the broader goals and objectives of the City Administration, (iii) has committed any infraction or policy violation while serving as Police Chief, and/or (iv) has disregarded best practices in the running of CPD to the detriment of public safety and crime prevention. This report summarizes the factual findings of the investigation.

Investigatory Methods

In conducting this investigation, Catherine Burgett and Jasmine Corrie Jones interviewed thirty-two witnesses and Teresa Theetge in person. Witnesses were selected independently of the City and were chosen: (1) by the investigators in an effort to talk to a broad cross-section of employees; (2) based on those who asked to be interviewed; and (3) based on those identified by other interviewees as someone with relevant knowledge. Forty-two witnesses in total were contacted for an interview. Some declined to participate or respond. Every witness that sought or asked to be interviewed was contacted, with the vast majority opting to sit for an interview. A number of emails, letters, and documents were supplied and reviewed. Public press briefings and interviews of Chief Theetge were reviewed. All witnesses were provided with a modified Upjohn warning and Garrity and Piper warnings. Each witness was informed they could be represented by counsel or a union representative if they chose. Each witness was cautioned about retaliation.

It is noted that Chief Theetge provided seven names of potential witnesses. All seven potential witnesses were contacted. Two declined to participate.

The investigation was conducted wholly independently of the City. While City officials were interviewed, the City Solicitor made clear to the investigative team the investigation was to be fully and completely independent, and the City would accept the factual findings of the investigators. The City responded to every information request made by the investigators and did

not withhold any requested information. At no time did the investigators believe the City Solicitor's office demanded a specific outcome.

Investigation Information

Chief Theetge's Effectiveness as a Leader

Chief Theetge believes she is one of the best Police Chiefs the City has ever had. Chief Theetge believes the duties of the Chief are to set the policy and procedure for the CPD and to ensure all members of the department are aligned with the vision. Chief Theetge indicated that she had not had a formal performance appraisal in seven years, and that she was unaware there were any issues with her performance. Chief Theetge claimed the first time she was aware her performance was deficient was on or on or around October 13, 2025, when the City Manager noted that Chief Theetge's leadership of the CPD could be blamed for the Fountain Square shooting.

Witnesses had a different assessment of Chief Theetge's effectiveness as a leader than Chief Theetge. Many members of the CPD were upset that Chief Theetge was selected as Police Chief, preferring anyone else. While many witnesses believed Chief Theetge was strong administratively, they also believed that Chief Theetge lacked operational knowledge and expertise, which hampered Chief Theetge's ability to lead during times of unrest. Numerous witnesses believed that Chief Theetge led with an "old school" approach (i.e. rigid and authoritarian) and did not adapt to current work culture expectations. Witnesses believe that Chief Theetge's leadership style led to a siloing of departments where departments competed for resources rather than working collaboratively for the good of the City. Witnesses believe Chief Theetge is not visible or accessible to lower ranks, and numerous witnesses believe Chief Theetge leads with intimidation and fear rather than with transparency and respect. Witnesses believe that the City Manager provided constructive and critical feedback to Chief Theetge regarding Chief Theetge's performance deficiencies. The vast majority of all witnesses believe it would not be in the best interest of the CPD for Chief Theetge to return as Chief.

Chief Theetge's Communication Style

Chief Theetge believes that she implemented communication changes to improve communication. Chief Theetge indicated that decisions are sometimes communicated to rank and file through email, followed up with a weekly note. She explained that Captains are responsible for pushing down information received during command staff meetings. Chief Theetge believes that if information is not known or shared it is the fault of the officers who don't read the notes or Captains who don't share information. Chief Theetge also implemented an advisory board that is restricted to lieutenants and below. This advisory board consists of a diverse group of CPD members, with board members changing annually.

Witnesses, however, believe Chief Theetge withheld information from the CPD, including her command staff. Several witnesses, including command staff, stated they would learn about things happening in the City or with the CPD from the media instead of through the chain of command. Witnesses believed there were avenues available for Chief Theetge to communicate more effectively, but she did not use them. Many witnesses complained that Chief Theetge would

announce staffing or other decisions to command staff and officers simultaneously – not giving command staff an opportunity to either provide feedback or adjust to their new assignment before officers learning of it. Several witnesses believed that Chief Theetge did not explain the work of the CPD to the public well, hampering the work of the CPD. Witnesses also believed that the Chief did not work to address concerns of local business leaders or build relationships with those business leaders. Witnesses believe Chief Theetge’s unwillingness to communicate and see things outside of her own perspective led to members of the CPD feeling unsupported and not involved. Witnesses stated that, unlike Chief Theetge, Interim Chief Hennie communicates well, includes others in decision-making, uses and explains reasoning to make decisions rather than using a “because I said so” approach, considers generational and cultural differences, and is flexible.

Ability to Work Within Larger City Government

Chief Theetge believes the CPD is extremely integrated with the rest of the City. Chief Theetge would have daily conversations with other department heads. While Chief Theetge indicated City Hall financially supported the CPD, she believed she needed more non-financial support. First, Chief Theetge believed the Mayor should intervene with local courts to address sentencing for property crimes from repeat offenders. Chief Theetge did not explain how the Mayor could impose any standards on an independent judiciary. Second, Chief Theetge believed the City should work with Cincinnati Public Schools to address student behavior, including holding parents responsible for student misconduct. Chief Theetge admitted to being provided a memorandum detailing the legal and other challenges with holding parents responsible for student misconduct.

Chief Theetge believes the City’s only response to challenges was to promise additional police support without first checking with Chief Theetge. Chief Theetge claims she expressed her concerns and frustrations about the Mayor’s commitment to the City Manager, but she said nothing was done to “stop the Mayor.” Chief Theetge did not explain what authority the City Manager had to “stop the Mayor.”

According to Chief Theetge, CPD never traditionally had a safety plan. Instead, CPD would monitor crime data and respond accordingly. Under Chief James Craig, the CPD began to document a written plan based on the data. In 2025, Chief Theetge’s command staff put together a summer safety plan based on data. Chief Theetge disclaims the plan and believes it was the Mayor’s plan. Chief Theetge believes the data did not support additional resources being deployed in the Central Business District (“CBD”) and elsewhere in the summer of 2025, and that the requests by the Mayor and business owners in the CBD and elsewhere for additional support were not supported by the data. Chief Theetge understood that the perception of crime became a reality for some in the community; however, she believes resources should always be allocated based on where the data says crime occurs. According to Chief Theetge, she was forced to disregard the data and allocate resources in a way not supported by the data.

Chief Theetge admits the summer safety plan was not fully and completely implemented and staffed. In the summer of 2025, the CPD was short-staffed. The City offered additional overtime funds to the CPD. Additionally, paid voluntary overtime (“PVO”) was offered every Friday evening, Saturday evening, and for special events. The Mayor offered the CPD double-time

to fill open overtime slots instead of the more usual time and a half, but Chief Theetge rejected this offer, believing it violated the collective bargaining agreement between the City and the Fraternal Order of Police (“FOP”). Chief Theetge did not request a Memorandum of Understanding with the FOP regarding providing double time. Chief Theetge also declined to offer or fill all available summer safety plan slots, believing doing so would lead to officers being overworked. Neither the Mayor nor the City Manager were told when slots were unfilled. Chief Theetge did not work with her command staff or others to create a plan to fill open slots and/or communicate with City Hall regarding unfilled slots.

In response to the unrest, the State of Ohio offered assistance and additional officers. While the City was supportive of accepting the offered assistance, Chief Theetge was initially reluctant to do so. Eventually, Chief Theetge agreed that if steps were taken to ensure the State adhered to the collaborative agreement and other terms were agreed upon, the City could accept assistance. These efforts caused a delay in accepting assistance from the State. Eventually, the State was permitted to assist on a limited basis.

Witnesses stated that Chief Theetge prohibited interactions between Assistant Chiefs and City Hall, including the City Manager and Assistant City Manager; demanding that all communication flow through her. Witnesses also believe that Chief Theetge told City Hall not to contact her command staff or officers. Witnesses believed this slowed the response time to requests or inquiries from City Hall and led to operational inefficiencies. Witnesses indicated that Chief Theetge complained about the City not involving the schools regarding student misconduct but didn’t attend meetings to which she was invited with the schools to address student misconduct. Witnesses indicated that Chief Theetge believed that the CPD’s job was to police and other efforts to prevent crime or respond to challenges were the work of other departments within the City.

Witnesses believed that Chief Theetge did not implement the summer safety plan as promised, which hindered the CPD’s response to the unrest in the summer of 2025. Witnesses indicated Chief Theetge was of the belief that the City did not need assistance. Witnesses further believe that in meetings with the Mayor and City Manager, Chief Theetge would agree to provide the requested resources and patrols and then not do so while also not admitting to members of the CPD that she had agreed to the requested patrols; instead claiming she was being forced to abide by the summer safety plan. Several witnesses believe that Chief Theetge could have tried harder to find ways to find solutions that worked for the City and the CPD rather than silently rejecting the Mayor’s proposals altogether.

Culture of Retaliation

Chief Theetge broadly denied any instances of retaliation or making decisions other than in the best interest of the CPD. She also dismissed any concerns of retaliation expressed by witnesses as a character flaw of the witnesses themselves. Witnesses, however, described a strong culture of retaliation. Many witnesses were visibly nervous and concerned to be interviewed and expressed that if their involvement in the investigation were known by Chief Theetge, their careers would be negatively impacted. Numerous witnesses described incidents where unfavorable decisions were made in connection with Chief Theetge’s family members or friends and those who

participated in those unfavorable decisions were transferred and/or blocked from promotions following the incidents.

Perception of Favoritism/Nepotism

Chief Theetge stated that she has never seen or experienced favoritism or nepotism in the CPD. She indicated that, although she has family in the department, including siblings and a nephew, she believes they have not received anything because of who they are, but because they earned it. Chief Theetge believes the concerns about favoritism and nepotism are just people's perceptions. Chief Theetge does not believe that managing perceptions is part of her job duties.

With respect to her nephew being given a preferred assignment, Chief Theetge asserted that he was not given preferential treatment. She explained that he put himself through law school, utilizing the City's tuition reimbursement program, while serving in the department. Chief Theetge initially indicated that at the time when the former Legal Liaison resigned, her nephew was the only member of the CPD who had a law degree and could fill the position. Chief Theetge later indicated she did not know if other members of the department had law degrees.

Chief Theetge explained the assignment and promotional assignment process at the CPD. The Chief is involved at nearly all levels. Chief Theetge indicated she changed the Assistant Chief position requirements to no longer require a bachelor's degree in order to be aligned with the Fire Department. Chief Theetge did not explain how this aligned with best practices. When one Assistant Chief position became available in 2025, Chief Theetge did not believe it was necessary to go through the entire promotional process because a process had recently concluded. Instead, Chief Theetge asked Human Resources and the City Manager if she could rotate the two remaining candidates to see who performed better. Before a selection was made, the Former Executive Officer resigned, which created a second Assistant Chief position. Both of the two candidates were then promoted.

Witnesses shared that Chief Theetge often makes assignment decisions without advance notice and without seeking input from anyone outside of her small, inner circle. Witnesses also believe that Chief Theetge favors certain people and struggles to separate her feelings from decision-making. There is a widespread perception that Chief Theetge gives preferential assignments to her favorite officers in the CPD. Some witnesses believe Chief Theetge favors people who have connections with her father and/or are from the West Side. For example, witnesses note that a Lt. for whom Chief Theetge used to babysit was assigned to a detail though the detail had failed to appropriately reimburse the City. Witnesses also believe Chief Theetge's nephew received a preferred assignment more quickly than others at his level.

Witnesses believe it was unusual and not proper to have two Assistant Chiefs take turns for the Assistant Chief promotion. One of those Assistant Chiefs also had a longer stay as acting Assistant Chief. Witnesses believe Chief Theetge favored the Assistant Chief who served a longer turn because his father is from the West Side. Witnesses also disagreed with Chief Theetge removing the bachelor's degree requirement for an Assistant Chief. Witnesses note that an Assistant Chief did not have a bachelor's degree and did not go to command school prior to being promoted by Chief Theetge. Some witnesses stated that favoritism within the CPD existed before

Chief Theetge was Chief, but that Chief Theetge did nothing to address either the issue or the perception. Indeed, there seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of what favoritism is by some. For example, one witness close to Chief Theetge indicated that selecting someone based on previous experience with that person can appear to be favoritism when it is actually familiarity.

Ability to Collaborate

Chief Theetge believes she collaborates well with others in the City. Chief Theetge indicated that except for discipline, which she handles alone, she chooses who assists her with decision-making based on the topic. Chief Theetge stated that she wants and incorporates feedback. She said she considers how certain decisions may affect different groups prior to making decisions. Chief Theetge also indicated she defers to those who have more expertise in certain areas like SWAT.

A majority of witnesses believe Chief Theetge heavily relied on an inner circle that consisted of a Former Executive Officer and Chief Theetge's Chief of Staff. Some witnesses included one Assistant Chief in Chief Theetge's inner circle. A majority of witnesses believe Chief Theetge does not collaborate with or utilize other members of the CPD leadership who are not in her inner circle. Witnesses believe that feedback provided by those who were not in Chief Theetge's inner circle would not be well-received. A majority of witnesses believe that Chief Theetge's performance as Chief was hindered by the smallness of her circle.

Witnesses believe delegation and collaboration with the entire command staff is essential to effectively operate a police department as large as CPD, to increase redundancies, and prevent single points of failure, and that Chief Theetge did not foster collaboration. Chief Theetge was told by the City Manager to bring others into the process and utilize her Assistant Chiefs but did not. Witnesses describe Chief Theetge as "rigid" and state that she would push back on recommendations and innovative ideas. Witnesses also believe that Chief Theetge holds things too close. Witnesses believe CPD responses to issues could have been handled better if more perspectives and expertise were utilized in the decision-making process. Witnesses believe involving more decision-makers could have led to better solutions in the summer of 2025 and more buy-in from members of the CPD. Witnesses believe that Chief Theetge's limited collaboration negatively impacted morale and operations.

Ability to Take Accountability

Chief Theetge indicates that she seeks and implements feedback. Though Chief Theetge described the Culture Survey done by the City for the CPD as a "gut punch," she largely disagreed with the findings and, because she had only been the Chief for a year, she took the results with a grain of salt. Though the assessment indicated there were issues with communication, Chief Theetge explained that she sends out communication, but people do not read it. Chief Theetge believes the fault may lie with the Captains. She indicated that CPD leadership implemented several initiatives as a result of the assessment results, including: (1) command staff meeting notes were posted every Tuesday, (2) some CPD leadership began attending roll calls, (3) CPD leadership began posting monthly videos, (4) CPD leadership committed to a State of the Department address for one hour at the beginning of the year, and (5) adjustments were made to

the Chief's internal advisory board. With respect to the results related to inequitable discipline, CPD worked with the Office of Performance and Data Analytics ("OPDA"). Further, Chief Theetge explained that she uses the discipline matrix to ensure fair discipline. She also explained that she provides zero input in the promotional process and uses the promotional list. Ultimately, Chief Theetge stated the participation rate of the Culture Survey was low, and she assumed that those who did not participate must be happy. Chief Theetge admits that she did not take steps to address concerns of discipline and favoritism in the Culture Survey, blaming others in the department. Chief Theetge explained that the Former Executive Officer was assigned to address the discipline concerns. After his resignation, the next Executive Officer took over the assignment. Chief Theetge asserted that due to the incorrect data from OPDA, CPD could not do much with the results of the Survey.

Witnesses believe Chief Theetge does not receive feedback from others and surrounds herself with people who will not push back. Witnesses also believe that Chief Theetge engages in blame-shifting behavior and list the response to the Culture Survey and the City's acceptance of assistance in the summer of 2025 as two examples. Specifically, witnesses believed Chief Theetge dismissed the Culture Survey as being the fault of Chiefs before her, blamed the Captains, and blamed others for not providing sufficient data for her to review. Witnesses also note that Chief Theetge told them she wanted to accept assistance from the State in the summer of 2025, but the City would not let her.

Effectiveness in Driving Positive Culture

Chief Theetge described the culture of the CPD as "the best I have ever seen it" until the fall of 2025. Chief Theetge proposed as a possible reason for the culture that as a woman, she brings "a more maternal instinct." She described her approach to the job as wanting people to love their job and want to come to work.

Witnesses describe Chief Theetge as bad for morale. Witnesses believe there was a lack of transparency in the department which exacerbated the cultural concerns. Witnesses expressed not feeling valued by Chief Theetge. Witnesses indicate that CPD morale has improved significantly with Assistant Chief Adam Hennie as Interim Chief. Interim Chief Hennie was consistently described as "a breath of fresh air," "involved," and "personable." Witnesses have described a "lightness" in the department after Interim Chief Hennie was named Interim Chief. Moreover, witnesses indicate that Interim Chief Hennie has taken positive steps to improve transparency and implement several projects that had been stalled under Chief Theetge.

Conclusions

Chief Theetge's Effectiveness as a Leader

Chief Theetge has not been an effective leader of the CPD. Modern policing requires cross-departmental collaboration, adapting to changing expectations in communities and with employees, and eliminating single points of failure. Chief Theetge's "old school" (i.e. rigid and authoritarian) approach led directly to a siloing of departments where departments competed for talent, resources, and information – to the detriment of the CPD and the City. Chief Theetge's

continued assertion that she is one of the best Police Chiefs the City has ever had, even in the face of contradictory information and critical feedback, denotes a lack of ability to receive and implement feedback. The majority of all witnesses interviewed indicated that Chief Theetge could not return to the CPD and be effective, and that assessment is supported by the investigation.

Chief Theetge's Communication Style

Ultimately, it is the Chief's responsibility to ensure effective communication, and if subordinates are not meeting their obligations, the Chief must take action. Chief Theetge failed to meet this obligation. Moreover, Chief Theetge's communication style led to a lack of transparency and distrust in the CPD. Because Chief Theetge did not share information widely within the CPD or offer explanations for decisions made, members of the CPD were left to learn information from outside sources or to infer explanations for decisions. This disjointed flow of information hurt morale and prevented Chief Theetge from benefiting from the experiences of others in formulating plans and making decisions.

Ability to Work Within Larger City Government

While Chief Theetge was strong administratively and ran the administrative side of the CPD well, she struggled to understand how the CPD could or should work collaboratively with the City to achieve broader City goals and objectives. Not only did Chief Theetge attempt to block City Hall, including the City Manager and at least one Assistant City Manager, from communicating with her command staff, Chief's Theetge's belief that the Mayor could effectively require or force an independent judiciary to impose harsher sentences or that the City Manager could effectively control the Mayor denotes a lack of understanding of the separation of powers within a government structure. Moreover, Chief Theetge's simultaneous complaints about the lack of accountability by the schools for student misconduct and missing meetings with the schools to address student misconduct demonstrate Chief Theetge's belief that the CPD's role is focused almost solely on policing and not being involved in efforts to prevent crime and build stability within the City. This is seen in the Chief's response to the summer safety plan in 2025. While Chief Theetge supported the plan to the broader community and in meetings with the Mayor and the City Manager, she was not supportive of the plan within the CPD and failed to take all appropriate steps to implement the summer safety plan. Moreover, dismissing citizen concerns as "not supported by the data" demonstrates a lack of empathy and understanding of the responsiveness demanded of public servants by those they represent. Ultimately, Chief Theetge was unable or unwilling to marshal the resources of the CPD to work collaboratively with the City to solve issues faced by the City.

Culture of Retaliation

There is a strong culture of retaliation within the CPD that Chief Theetge dismissed and did little to combat. An effective leader builds a culture of accountability where subordinates are encouraged and empowered to bring complaints forward for the good of the organization. That culture did not exist with the CPD and was not fostered by Chief Theetge, often leading to officers tolerating conduct out a belief they would be subject to retaliation for bringing complaints forward.

Perception of Favoritism/Nepotism

The perception of favoritism and nepotism is strong within CPD. While Chief Theetge may not have initially created that culture, nor does she accept that it is her responsibility to correct it. Chief Theetge's broad assertion that other people's perceptions are not her responsibility belies the fact that perception often becomes reality, and when a majority of individuals within an organization believe something, that thing has become the reality for the organization. Chief Theetge's indifference to others' perceptions led directly to her making decisions, like the assignment for her nephew or the promotional process for Assistant Chief position, that exacerbated the concerns related to favoritism and nepotism. Unaddressed concerns related to favoritism and nepotism have led directly to a lack of trust in the organization and a lack of respect, generally, for those selected for preferred assignments or given promotions. A lack of trust and respect within a police department negatively impacts the department's ability to function effectively.

Ability to Collaborate

Chief Theetge's lack of collaboration with others in the CPD negatively impacted her performance as Chief. Nearly every witness indicated that Chief Theetge's inner circle was too small and she too seldomly sought counsel or perspective from others – even after being specifically told to collaborate with her command staff by the City Manager. This lack of collaboration limited the opinions and ideas offered to respond to challenges within the CPD and the community as a whole. Not involving others in the decisional process also hampered others' ability to solicit buy-in and support from the rank-and-file members of the CPD.

Ability to Take Accountability

Chief Theetge struggles to accept accountability. Chief Theetge dismissed the Culture Survey, assumed if people didn't respond they were happy, blamed two Assistant Chiefs and the OPDA for not responding to the Culture Survey, blamed the Captains for any lack of communication with the CPD, blamed the City Manager for the Mayor, and blamed the Mayor for the schools and judges. Additionally, Chief Theetge misrepresented the hold-up on accepting assistance from the State to others – blaming it on City Hall.

Effectiveness in Driving Positive Culture

Chief Theetge's assessment that the culture of the CPD leading up to the fall of 2025 as being "the best I have ever seen it" demonstrates that Chief Theetge did not have a solid understanding of the culture of the CPD. The Culture Survey alone indicated there were issues to be solved. The fact that Chief Theetge did not accept those issues or believe them to be properly within her purview makes it extremely unlikely that Chief Theetge will be able to effectively drive change in the CPD and improve many of the issues the CPD faces.