

Crisis mounts in Chicago as Lightfoot admits lying and an official resigns following brutal police raid

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Chicago Corporation Counsel Mark Flessner, the head of the city's Law Department, tendered his resignation on Sunday as the political fallout mounts following the release of footage of the brutal police raid last year on the home of social worker Anjanette Young. On Monday, Mayor Lori Lightfoot also announced all the officers involved will be placed on desk duty.

The resignation of Flessner and other measures announced by Lightfoot are part of a campaign to deflect attention away from the deeply entrenched lawlessness and violence that has been cultivated in the Chicago Police Department (CPD) through nearly a century of Democratic Party rule. As the incident with Young makes clear, police violence and illegal searches and police raids have continued unabated through the current Lightfoot administration, even though she herself was brought in to clean up the image of the police after the exposure of the coverup of the police murder of Laquan McDonald by her predecessor, Rahm Emanuel, in 2014.

In speaking to the press, Mayor Lightfoot initially lied about not having knowledge of the Young raid, claiming to have only heard about it following the CBS broadcast this month. On December 17, however, she admitted city officials first told her about the raid in November 2019, when CBS was reporting extensively about other illegal no-knock warrants in the city.

As the revelations about the Young raid—and Lightfoot's role in its coverup—threaten to expose her administration as an unbroken continuation of the thuggish policies of Rahm Emanuel and the Democratic Party in Chicago, the mayor has announced other cosmetic changes and issued token criticisms of different agencies for their role in the embarrassment to her administration.

Claiming her administration will no longer seek to

stonewall police victims seeking body camera footage, Lightfoot also issued a cynical criticism of the Civilian Office of Police Accountability, created by the city following recommendations issued by the Police Accountability Task Force, which she once led, for taking too long in investigating the raid. She said, "Frankly, there is no excuse that this matter has languished for a year without any significant movement on the part of COPA." She also promised she will carry out a "full review of everything that occurred surrounding this incident, will take corrective action where appropriate, and will hold people accountable."

In an email to Law Department employees, Lightfoot threatened lawyers who might cause her any further embarrassments, saying "You are ambassadors of our values as a city," and adding, "If you lose sight of those things, I need your resignation now. I intend to follow through on that."

Although Flessner has not said whether Lightfoot asked him to resign, his sacrifice was required after CBS 2's December 14 broadcast of police body camera footage depicting the illegal raid on Young's home, in which the social worker was handcuffed and left naked while police stood around her apartment for nearly 20 minutes. Young's home was targeted for the raid after police failed to properly investigate a police informant's tip, which erroneously named her address.

Flessner's position as head of the Law Department became untenable after it emerged that he allowed subordinates to attempt to prevent the broadcast of the video by CBS and sanction Young's lawyer, Keenan Saulter, over the alleged release of the footage to CBS. City lawyers had previously fought to place the body camera footage under an order of confidentiality precisely to cover up the raid, but their attempt to prevent the

broadcast was denied by a judge as an unwarranted restriction on freedom of the press.

Flessner, a long-time friend of Lightfoot dating back to their days at the US Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois, had previously come under fire for skirting the city's residence requirements. Maintaining two homes, a house in suburban Naperville and a downtown Chicago condominium, Flessner apparently violated state law by claiming a homestead exemption on his taxes for both properties, which he promised to pay back after being caught. Lightfoot's office initially denied Flessner had claimed two exemptions before reversing position and claiming Flessner got the tax break of thousands of dollars by accident.

In just the same fashion, Lightfoot told the media, "Filing a motion against a media outlet to prevent something from being published is something that should rarely, if ever, happen," she said during a news conference. "And had I been advised that this was in the works, I would have stopped it in its tracks. This is not how we operate. Period." But in fact, it is exactly how the city of Chicago operates.

Flessner's account of the decision to attempt to sanction Young's lawyer for allegedly releasing the video to CBS presents it as a matter of pure routine, which is quite revealing. As Flessner said, one of his deputies told him "they wanted to go in and make the judge aware that the protective order or the confidentiality order has been violated and I said yes." In other words, this is such a common and normal request it barely merits further discussion regarding the particulars of the case.

Flessner's attitude is a reflection of the fact that one of the Law Department's main activities is to defend crooked and murderous cops and cover up for corrupt dealings and criminal actions among city politicians as they carry out their work on behalf of the financial aristocracy. When it is impossible to stonewall or intimidate victims into silence, it is the Law Department which negotiates settlements to attempt to buy off victims, or their family members, in the cases of people who have been killed.

This is not even the first time in recent years that a Law Department attorney has resigned because their actions brought this reality to light. In 2016, Senior Corporation Counsel Jordan Marsh resigned after he was sanctioned by US District Court Judge Edmond Chang for intentionally withholding evidence in a wrongful death lawsuit brought against the city and two CPD officers for the shooting of Darius Pinex in 2011. Indeed, an

investigation by the *Chicago Tribune* in 2016 found judges were forced to order the city's lawyers to hand over evidence in nearly 20 percent of police misconduct cases.

Beyond the Law Department, the Young raid has also exposed the role of the Cook County State's Attorney's office and local judges in enabling illegal police searches. Police officers are supposed to carry out their own investigations and not simply rely on tips from informants in seeking warrants. Additionally, their requests for search warrants must be supported by the state's attorney's office and authorized by a judge. Clearly, in this case and many others, judges and prosecutors simply take the police at their word.

In fact, after Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx criticized the CPD's actions and the city's attempt to withhold the video, Lightfoot threatened, "Kim Foxx has a lot to worry about on her own and I would be very careful if I were her about pointing fingers. I would make sure my house was in order."

While the continued fallout from this crisis will no doubt lead to further recriminations and finger-pointing among the Democratic Party political establishment, there have been no serious calls for changes, even among the purported socialist aldermen on the Chicago City Council. None have gone beyond issuing *pro forma* denunciations of the raid, calls for COPA to finish their investigation into the raid or increased civilian oversight of police.

The Council's Progressive Caucus issued a statement calling for "transparency and accountability" and pushing for a Civilian Oversight Board "empowered to recommend solutions." Nowhere is the vast inequality underlying these incidents of police violence addressed, or that their source lies in the profit system which the Democrats and Republicans defend, and not simply in bad policies.



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