FILED 9/30/2022 4:02 PM IRIS Y. MARTINEZ CIRCUIT CLERK COOK COUNTY, IL 2022CH09764 Calendar, 1 19722061

### IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS COUNTY DEPARTMENT, CHANCERY DIVISION

CHECK CU,	)
Plaintiff,	)
v.	)
THE CITY OF EVANSTON,	) )
Defendant.	) )

2022CH09764

#### **COMPLAINT**

NOW COMES Plaintiff CHECK CU, by the undersigned attorneys Loevy & Loevy, and brings this suit to overturn the CITY OF EVANSTON's willful violation of the Illinois Freedom of Information Act. Despite abundant case law making clear that public bodies cannot rely on blanket claims that release of records will impede an ongoing investigation or proceeding, CITY OF EVANSTON has refused to produce any records of police complaints and their investigation dated in calendar year 2022. CITY OF EVANSTON also issued only partial production of the records requested dated 2016 through 2021 absent any explanation, let alone a lawful one. In support of the Complaint, CHECK CU states as follows:

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Pursuant to the fundamental philosophy of the American constitutional form of government, it is the public policy of the State of Illinois that all persons are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts and policies of those who represent them as public officials and public employees consistent with the terms of the Illinois Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"). 5 ILCS 140/1.

2. Restraints on access to information, to the extent permitted by FOIA, are limited exceptions to the principle that the people of this state have a right to full disclosure of information relating to the decisions, policies, procedures, rules, standards, and other aspects of government activity that affect the conduct of government and the lives of the people. 5 ILCS 140/1.

3. Under FOIA Section 1.2, "[a]ll records in the custody or possession of a public body are presumed to be open to inspection or copying. Any public body that asserts that a record is exempt from disclosure has the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that it is exempt." 5 ILCS 140/1.2.

#### PARTIES

4. Plaintiff CHECK CU made the FOIA request at issue in this case. CHECK CU is a news website with the mission to aid in disseminating information about civic and government affairs.

5. Defendant the CITY OF EVANSTON ("EVANSTON") is a public body located in Cook County, Illinois.

#### JULY 22, 2022 FOIA REQUEST

6. On July 22, 2022, CHECK CU submitted a FOIA request to the EVANSTON for the following records:

any police complaints, formal and informal, which have been submitted in 2015 through 2022; any disposition or findings letters, complaint investigation documents such as reports; and memorandums, and any documents related to any appeals which may have been filed on the Chief's disposition.

7. A true and correct copy of CHECK CU's FOIA request is attached as Exhibit 1.

8. EVANSTON assigned reference number 22-1731 to the request.

9. A true and correct copy of EVANSTON's acknowledgement of receipt of CHECK CU's FOIA request is attached as Exhibit 2.

10. On August 17, 2022, EVANSTON partially granted the request by producing some records from years 2016-2021. For 2015 records, EVANSTON stated that the records do not exist. For records from 2022, EVANSTON provided no response.

11. A true and correct copy of EVANSTON's August 17, 2022 response is attached as Exhibit 3.

#### A. The 2022 Police Complaints and Records

12. On August 17, 2022, CHECK CU inquired about the absence of the 2022 Police Complaints and other records, such as investigative documents, pertaining to those complaints (the "2022 Police Complaints and Records").

 A true and correct copy of CHECK CU's August 17, 2022 email is attached as Exhibit 4.

14. On August 18, 2022, EVANSTON stated, "Complaints for 2022 are still pending."

15. A true and correct copy of EVANSTON's response to CHECK CU's August 17,2022 email is attached as Exhibit 5.

16. In response, CHECK CU followed up to clarify whether "pending" means that EVANSTON intends to produce the 2022 Police Complaints and Records or it is refusing to produce them. CHECK CU also asked EVANSTON to identify the exemptions to withhold the 2022 Police Complaints and records if it intended to deny them.

17. A true and correct copy of CHECK CU's email is attached as Exhibit 6.

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18. On August 22, 2022, EVANSTON asserted Sections 7(1)(d)(i) and (ii) of FOIA

regarding the 2022 Police Complaints and Records.

19. A true and correct copy of EVANSTON's August 22, 2022 response is attached

as Exhibit 7.

20. Sections 7(1)(d)(i)-(ii) exempts, in relevant part:

Records in the possession of any public body created in the course of administrative enforcement proceedings, and any law enforcement or correctional agency for law enforcement purposes, but *only to the extent that the disclosure would*:

(i) interfere with pending or actually and reasonably contemplated law enforcement proceedings conducted by any law enforcement or correctional agency that is the recipient of the request;

(ii) interfere with active administrative enforcement proceedings conducted by the public body that is the recipient of the request.

5 ILCS 140/7(1)(d)(i)-(ii).

21. In violation of Section 9(a) of FOIA, EVANSTON has not provided a "detailed

factual basis for the application of any exemption claimed." 5 ILCS 140/9(a).

22. More specifically, EVANSTON has not shown how the records responsive to the request are exempt pursuant to Sections 7(1)(d)(i)-(ii).

23. Instead, EVANSTON made generic statements that the Police Complaints for 2022 were "created in the course of administrative enforcement proceeding [sic] or for law enforcement purposes, and would: 1) Interfere with a pending or actually and reasonably contemplated law enforcement proceeding by the City § 7(1)(d)(i); 2) Interfere with active administrative enforcement proceedings by the City § 7(1)(d)(i)."

24. A true and correct copy of EVANSTON's August 22, 2022 response is attached as Exhibit 7.

25. EVANSTON has not demonstrated that there is a "pending or actually and reasonably contemplated law enforcement proceedings" or an "active administrative proceeding" conducted by EVANSTON that relates to each and every Police Complaint that EVANSTON received in 2022.

26. Further, even if EVANSTON had connected each complaint to an "active administrative enforcement proceeding," which it has not, EVANSTON has not shown how the disclosure of the records *would interfere* with such proceeding conducted by EVANSTON.

27. EVANSTON did not explain how the disclosure of the records would interfere with any pending investigations or administrative enforcement investigations.

28. EVANSTON has not demonstrated that the records are exempt.

29. As of the date of the filing of this Complaint, EVANSTON has failed to comply with FOIA and has produced no responsive records.

30. The First District Appellate Court has repeatedly held that government agencies cannot rely on blanket ongoing investigation claims. *Kraft v. Chicago Police Dep't*, 2022 Ill. App. (1st) 211194-U; *Kelly v. Vill. of Kenilworth*, 2019 IL App (1st) 170780; *Day v. City of Chicago*, 388 Ill. App. 3d 70 (2009); *see also Illinois Educ. Ass'n v. Illinois State Bd. Of Educ.*, 204 Ill. 2d 456, 464 (2003) (public bodies are required to "address the withheld records specifically.").

#### B. The 2016-2021 Police Complaints

31. On August 17, 2022, EVANSTON produced some records, such as the officer names and city employees' synopses of the complainant's complaint, that were responsive to CHECK CU's FOIA request for 2016-2021 Police Complaints.

32. The produced records, however, did not contain the actual and original complaints that citizens or complainants submitted to EVANSTON between 2016 and 2021.

33. CHECK CU's FOIA request explicitly requested "any police complaints, formal and informal, which have been submitted in 2015 through 2022."

34. A true and correct copy of CHECK CU's FOIA Request is attached as Exhibit 1.

35. On August 18, 2022, upon reviewing the records produced, CHECK CU informed EVANSTON that it failed to produce the actual and original complaints from 2016 to 2021 and asked whether EVANSTON plans to produce them.

36. A true and correct copy of CHECK CU's August 18, 2022 email is attached asExhibit 9.

37. On August 18, 2022, EVANSTON addressed a separate question and asked CHECK CU to clarify if there is a "specific year" where the complaints are missing.

38. CHECK CU indicated that EVANSTON failed to produce the actual and original complaints from 2016 to 2021.

39. A true and correct copy of the correspondence referenced in 37-38 is attached asExhibit 6.

40. On August 22, 2022, CHECK CU asked EVANSTON again about the actual and original complaints from 2016 to 2021.

41. A true and correct copy of the CHECK CU's August 22, 2022 email is attached asExhibit 8.

42. As of the date of the filing of this Complaint, EVANSTON has not responded to CHECK CU's inquiries about the actual and original complaints from 2016 to 2021.

43. EVANSTON has not demonstrated that the records are exempt.

44. As of the date of the filing of this Complaint, EVANSTON has failed to comply with FOIA and has not produced all records responsive to the request.

## COUNT I – JULY 22, 2022 FOIA REQUEST, FAILURE TO PRODUCE RECORDS

45. The above paragraphs are incorporated by reference.

46. EVANSTON is a public body under FOIA.

47. The records sought in the FOIA request are non-exempt public records of EVANSTON.

48. EVANSTON violated FOIA by failing to produce all records responsive to the

request.

## COUNT II – JULY 22, 2022 FOIA REQUEST, FAILURE TO CONDUCT AN ADEQUATE SEARCH

49. The above paragraphs are incorporated by reference.

50. EVANSTON is a public body under FOIA.

51. EVANSTON bears the burden of proving beyond material doubt that it performed

an adequate search for records responsive to the request.

52. EVANSTON has failed to come forward with sufficient evidence to carry this burden.

53. EVANSTON has violated FOIA by failing to adequately search for records responsive to the request.

## COUNT III – JULY 22, 2022 FOIA REQUEST, WILLFUL AND INTENTIONAL VIOLATION OF FOIA

- 54. The above paragraphs are incorporated by reference.
- 55. EVANSTON is a public body under FOIA.

56. CHECK CU's FOIA request sought records that are non-exempt public records of EVANSTON.

57. At the time of the response to the request, EVANSTON's FOIA Officer was aware that it must conduct its analysis of Sections 7(1)(d)(i)-(ii) on a document-by-document basis.

58. EVANSTON did not conduct a document-by-document analysis before denying Check CU's FOIA Request.

59. EVANSTON's policy and practice is to withhold all information in the current calendar year without considering whether each piece of information requested would interfere with a purported pending investigation or active administrative enforcement proceeding.

60. Upon information and belief based on the clarity of the law, EVANSTON has denied the request not based on a good-faith belief that the record is exempt, but because it is concerned about bad publicity resulting from its release or for other illegitimate reasons.

61. Further, despite CHECK CU's multiple follow-ups regarding its failure to produce the actual and original Police Complaints from 2016 to 2021 and its constructive denial, EVANSTON refused to remedy its failure and has failed to provide a detailed factual basis to withhold the records.

62. EVANSTON willfully and intentionally, or otherwise in bad faith failed to comply with FOIA.

WHEREFORE, CHECK CU asks that the Court:

i. declare that EVANSTON has violated FOIA;

ii. order EVANSTON to conduct an adequate search for the requested records;

iii. order EVANSTON to produce the requested records;

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- iv. enjoin EVANSTON from withholding non-exempt public records under FOIA;
- v. order EVANSTON to pay civil penalties;
- vi. award Plaintiff reasonable attorneys' fees and costs; and
- vii. award such other relief the Court considers appropriate.

Dated: September 30, 2022

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED, /s/ Merrick J. Wayne

Attorneys for Plaintiff, CHECK CU

Matthew Topic Josh Loevy Merrick Wayne Shelley Geiszler LOEVY & LOEVY 311 North Aberdeen, 3rd Floor Chicago, IL 60607 312-243-5900 foia@loevy.com Atty. No. 41295 Subject: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Check CU To: FOIA@cityofevanston.org Date Sent: Friday, July 22, 2022 11:26:38 PM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Friday, July 22, 2022 11:26:38 PM GMT-05:00

I am requesting records under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.

Please provide:

Please provide any police complaints, formal and informal, which have been submitted in 2015 through 2022. Please also provide any disposition or findings letters, complaint investigation documents such as reports and memorandums, and any documents related to any appeals which may have been filed on the Chief's disposition

This is not a commercial request. Please provide the records in digital format via email.

This request is being made by news media (see credentials below), and cannot be treated as voluminous or as a request from a recurrent requester.

I am requesting a fee waiver for any fees that may be assessed.

Thank you, Christopher Hansen CheckCU.org

I am a writer and contributor for CheckCU.org, CorruptCU.com, and ILDocs.com, all of which are non-profit. I am also a writer for the Public i and the IMC, a non-profit organization. In that capacity, I write and publish articles regarding issues of public interest at regular intervals. My content is viewed by thousands of readers per month. I regularly post videos to Check CU's YouTube page <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCStfHy5d5Gl">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCStfHy5d5Gl</a> EuPnbxgPpvw

I regularly post articles on CheckCU's Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/CheckCU

My websites CheckCU.org and ILDocs.com also host thousands of pages of public records, largely sourced through FOIA, and all available for free access by the public. Records posted on my sites are frequently used and cited by the public and by public officials.

I also send FOIA documents and information to various news outlets, such as CU-CitizenAccess, the Daily Illini, WCIA, Smile Politely, the Public i, and Illinois Leaks for their use. I am a member of the Investigative Journalists and Editors (IRE) and the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). I intend to access and disseminate the information to the public, I intend to write articles on the information, and I intend to research and speak on the information at public meetings for the purposes of public education.

You can find a some of my media references and credentials here <u>https://checkcu.org/press-and-media-references/</u>

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"For purposes of this definition, requests made by news media and non-profit, scientific, or academic organizations shall not be considered in calculating the number of requests made in the time periods in this definition when the principal purpose of the requests is (i) to access and disseminate information concerning news and current or passing events, (ii) for articles of opinion or features of interest to the public, or (iii) for the purpose of academic, scientific, or public research or education." -- Attach a non-image file and/or reply ABOVE THIS LINE with a message, and it will be sent to staff on this request. --

City of Evanston Public Records

Your record request #22-1731 has been submitted. You can see it anytime at the link below.

## View Request 22-1731

https://evanston.nextrequest.com/requests/22-1731



The All in One Records Requests Platform

Questions about your request? Reply to this email or sign in to contact staff at City of Evanston.

Technical support: See our help page

Too many emails? Change your email settings here

Subject: Re: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Omar Sheikh <osheikh@cityofevanston.org> To: Check CU Date Sent: Wednesday, August 17, 2022 11:40:51 AM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Wednesday, August 17, 2022 11:41:42 AM GMT-05:00 Attachments: 2019.pdf,2020.pdf,2018.pdf,2016.pdf,2017.pdf,2021.pdf

Christopher Hansen,

Denied: Partial

Your Request has been denied in part. The records for which Your Request is denied and granted are detailed below:

(a) Your Request is denied as to the following records (the "Specified Records"):

Year: 2015 - The public records requested do not exist. (State approval for destruction).

(b) Your Request is granted in part as the following records (the "Approved Records"):

Years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021.

You have a right to appeal this decision within 60 days to Sarah Pratt, Acting Public Access Counselor, Office of the Illinois Attorney General, 500 S. 2nd Street, Springfield, Illinois 62706, (phone number 1-877-299-FOIA) or to seek judicial review under Section 11 of FOIA, 5 ILCS 140/11.

Attached are the responsive documents.

On Fri, Jul 22, 2022 at 11:26 PM Check CU wrote: I am requesting records under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.

Please provide:

Please provide any police complaints, formal and informal, which have been submitted in 2015 through 2022. Please also provide any disposition or findings letters, complaint investigation documents such as reports and memorandums, and any documents related to any appeals which may have been filed on the Chief's disposition

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# Exhibit 3

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**Omar Sheikh** Deputy City Clerk City Clerk's Office City of Evanston 2100 Ridge Avenue. Rm 1200 | Evanston, IL 60201 | 847-859-7801 osheikh@cityofevanston.org | https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-clerk 

## Exhibit 4

Subject: Re: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Check CU To: Omar Sheikh <osheikh@cityofevanston.org> Date Sent: Wednesday, August 17, 2022 3:42:17 PM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Wednesday, August 17, 2022 3:42:17 PM GMT-05:00

Thanks, but what about 2022?

On Wed, Aug 17, 2022, 11:41 AM Omar Sheikh <<u>osheikh@cityofevanston.org</u>> wrote: Christopher Hansen,

Denied: Partial

Your Request has been denied in part. The records for which Your Request is denied and granted are detailed below:

(a) Your Request is denied as to the following records (the "Specified Records"):

Year: 2015 - The public records requested do not exist. (State approval for destruction).

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Years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021.

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wrote:

Attached are the responsive documents.

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Thank you, Christopher Hansen CheckCU.org

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2100 Ridge Avenue. Rm 1200 | Evanston, IL 60201 | 847-859-7801

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Omar Sheikh Deputy City Clerk City Clerk's Office City of Evanston

## Exhibit 5

Subject: Re: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Omar Sheikh <osheikh@cityofevanston.org> To: Check CU Date Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2022 4:00:00 PM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Thursday, August 18, 2022 4:00:59 PM GMT-05:00

Christopher Hansen,

Complaints for 2022 are all still pending.

Is there a specific year or complaint that "mention of written complaints submitted by the complainant, and complaints submitted via the City's online portal" that are missing?

On Thu, Aug 18, 2022 at 9:32 AM Check CU wrote: Furthermore, after leafing through a few of these PDFs, it seems you have not provided all responsive records. Where are the original complaints? The reports make mention of written complaints submitted by the complainant, and complaints submitted via the City's online portal.

wrote:

On Wed, Aug 17, 2022 at 3:42 PM Check CU Thanks, but what about 2022?

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#### Omar Sheikh

Deputy City Clerk

City Clerk's Office

City of Evanston

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osheikh@cityofevanston.org | https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-clerk



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Omar Sheikh Deputy City Clerk City Clerk's Office City of Evanston 2100 Ridge Avenue. Rm 1200 | Evanston, IL 60201 | 847-859-7801 osheikh@cityofevanston.org | https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-clerk

Subject: Re: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Check CU To: Omar Sheikh <a href="https://www.cityofevanston.org">osheikh@cityofevanston.org</a> Date Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2022 4:59:34 PM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Thursday, August 18, 2022 4:59:34 PM GMT-05:00

Mr. Sheikh,

Does "pending" mean that you are still preparing the records to send to me? Or are you denying those records? If the latter, please issue the denial and the exemption(s) you are applying. Have you withheld any portion of the 2016-2021 complaints on the same basis?

Reviewing your 2021 PDF, I found the following:

"On July 22, 2021, the Office of Professional Standards received an email from the Complainant." "On July 21, 2021, the Office of Professional Standards received an online Police Employee Complaint Form and a voicemail from the Complainant."

"On September 27, 2021, the Office of Professional Standards received an email from an anonymous Complainant."

2019 starts with:

"On January 29, 2019, the Office of Professional Standards received a Complaint Register from the Complainant."

And the files continue with more of the same, but I don't see any of these records in your response.

Why haven't any of the original complaints been provided?

On Thu, Aug 18, 2022 at 4:00 PM Omar Sheikh <<u>osheikh@cityofevanston.org</u>> wrote: Christopher Hansen,

Complaints for 2022 are all still pending.

Is there a specific year or complaint that "mention of written complaints submitted by the complainant, and complaints submitted via the City's online portal" that are missing?

On Thu, Aug 18, 2022 at 9:32 AM Check CU < wrote:</li>
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On Fri, Jul 22, 2022 at 11:26 PM Check CU < wrote: I am requesting records under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.

Please provide:

Please provide any police complaints, formal and informal, which have been submitted in 2015 through 2022. Please also provide any disposition or findings letters, complaint investigation documents such as reports and memorandums, and any documents related to any appeals which may have been filed on the Chief's disposition

This is not a commercial request. Please provide the records in digital format via email.

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Thank you, Christopher Hansen CheckCU.org

I regularly post videos to Check CU's YouTube page <u>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCStfHy5d5GI\_EuPnbxgPpvw</u>

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Omar Sheikh Deputy City Clerk City Clerk's Office City of Evanston 2100 Ridge Avenue. Rm 1200 | Evanston, IL 60201 | 847-859-7801 osheikh@cityofevanston.org | https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-clerk

I am a writer and contributor for CheckCU.org, CorruptCU.com, and ILDocs.com, all of which are non-profit. I am also a writer for the Public i and the IMC, a non-profit organization. In that capacity, I write and publish articles regarding issues of public interest at regular intervals. My content is viewed by thousands of readers per month.

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Subject: Re: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Omar Sheikh <osheikh@cityofevanston.org> To: Check CU < Date Sent: Monday, August 22, 2022 5:00:00 PM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Monday, August 22, 2022 5:01:03 PM GMT-05:00

Christoper Hansen,

Denied: Partial

Your Request has been denied in part. The records for which Your Request is denied and granted are detailed below:

(a) Your Request is denied as to the following records (the "Specified Records"):

Year: 2022

The Specified Records were created in the course of administrative enforcement preceding, or for law enforcement purposes, and disclosure would:

1) Interfere with a pending or actually and reasonably contemplated law enforcement proceeding by the City 7(1)(d)(i)

2) Interfere with active administrative enforcement proceedings by the City § 7(1)(d)(ii)

On Thu, Aug 18, 2022 at 4:59 PM Check CU < wrote: Mr. Sheikh,

Does "pending" mean that you are still preparing the records to send to me? Or are you denying those records? If the latter, please issue the denial and the exemption(s) you are applying. Have you withheld any portion of the 2016-2021 complaints on the same basis?

Reviewing your 2021 PDF, I found the following:

"On July 22, 2021, the Office of Professional Standards received an email from the Complainant." "On July 21, 2021, the Office of Professional Standards received an online Police Employee Complaint Form and a voicemail from the Complainant."

"On September 27, 2021, the Office of Professional Standards received an email from an anonymous Complainant."

2019 starts with: "On January 29, 2019, the Office of Professional Standards received a Complaint Register from the Complainant."

And the files continue with more of the same, but I don't see any of these records in your response.

Why haven't any of the original complaints been provided?

On Thu, Aug 18, 2022 at 4:00 PM Omar Sheikh <<u>osheikh@cityofevanston.org</u>> wrote: Christopher Hansen,

Complaints for 2022 are all still pending.

## Exhibit 7

Is there a specific year or complaint that "mention of written complaints submitted by the complainant, and complaints submitted via the City's online portal" that are missing?

On Thu, Aug 18, 2022 at 9:32 AM Check CU < wrote: Furthermore, after leafing through a few of these PDFs, it seems you have not provided all responsive

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Where are the original complaints? The reports make mention of written complaints submitted by the complainant, and complaints submitted via the City's online portal.

On Wed, Aug 17, 2022 at 3:42 PM Check CU < wrote: Thanks, but what about 2022?

On Wed, Aug 17, 2022, 11:41 AM Omar Sheikh <<u>osheikh@cityofevanston.org</u>> wrote: Christopher Hansen,

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Your Request has been denied in part. The records for which Your Request is denied and granted are detailed below:

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Year: 2015 - The public records requested do not exist. (State approval for destruction).

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Years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021.

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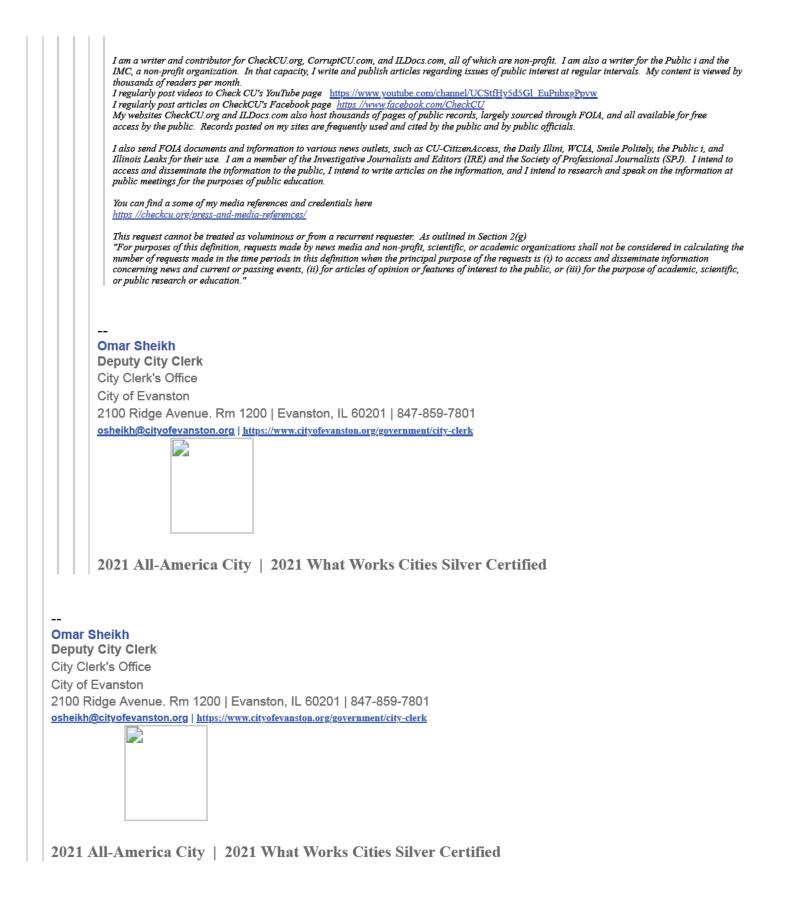
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Subject: Re: City of Evanston FOIA Request - Police Complaints From: Check CU < To: Omar Sheikh <osheikh@cityofevanston.org> Date Sent: Monday, August 22, 2022 7:36:57 PM GMT-05:00 Date Received: Monday, August 22, 2022 7:36:57 PM GMT-05:00

Mr. Sheikh,

You have cited exemptions which you appear to be applying to 100% of the responsive records from 2022. Can you provide a description of what responsive records exist?

What about the other items I described in my August 18th emails in regards to all of the prior years?

On Mon, Aug 22, 2022 at 5:01 PM Omar Sheikh <<u>osheikh@cityofevanston.org</u>> wrote: Christoper Hansen,

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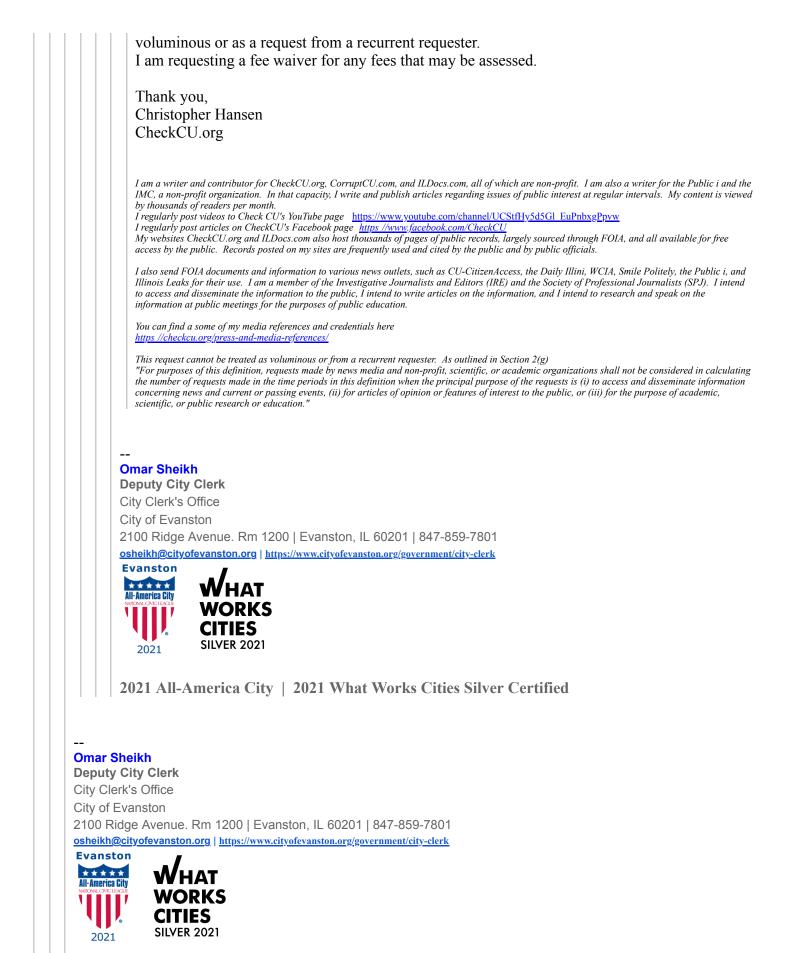
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