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Chief of Police Paul Pazen to Retire after 28-year Career with DPD

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Chief of Police Paul Pazen today informed Mayor Michael B. Hancock that he will be retiring from the Denver Police Department (DPD), effective Oct. 15. Pazen has served as Chief of Police of since June 2018 and was the second Latino Chief of Police in Denver's history.

“Chief Pazen has had a distinguished career with the Denver Police Department, and over his nearly three decades in law enforcement, he has served the residents of our city at nearly every level of the department, including its highest rank, with integrity and a community-focused approach to policing,” Mayor Hancock said. “I want to thank Chief Pazen for answering the call to serve, and for his leadership of our community's police department during these difficult past few years in the life of our city and our country.”

Pazen has been a uniformed officer of the police department for nearly 28 years, and before being named Chief of Police served as the Commander for DPD District 1 in North Denver from April 2012 to June 2018. Prior to his time

with DPD, Pazen served our country in the armed services as a five-year veteran of the United States Marine Corp, including a tour in the Middle East during Operation Desert Storm.

“It’s been an honor to serve the people of this city, and I couldn’t be prouder to have done it alongside these dedicated women and men of the department who’ve answered the call to protect the residents of Denver no matter the circumstance,” Chief Pazen said. “It’s important to me that the next police chief take the reins at this time so the department and our officers are well positioned for the future of policing in our community.”

During his tenure as Chief of Police, Pazen has overseen the police department during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery period, some of the most challenging times in Denver’s history, as well as the nationwide increase in crime and an unprecedented loss of over 170 uniformed officers. As Chief, Pazen has been an advocate for improved and comprehensive training of officers and alternative police responses, including expansion of the city’s co-responder program and introduction of the nationally acclaimed STAR program.

Pazen has also introduced new initiatives to divert those charged with low-level offenses away from jails by hiring resource navigators and worked to launch the city’s Assessment Intake Diversion (AID) Center, scheduled to open in the fall. To address rising crime through a data driven and precision policing approach, Pazen has worked to curb violent crime in “hot spot” areas of the city where it has been occurring the most often, stem the proliferation of illegal guns on Denver’s streets, and tackle the increasing prevalence of illegal drugs, particularly fentanyl, in our community.

Mayor Hancock has selected Ron Thomas, currently the department’s Division Chief of Patrol, as his nominee to be the next Chief. The nomination is subject to City Council confirmation. In Chief Pazen’s absence, Thomas will assume day-to-day management of the department as acting Chief beginning Sept. 6.

Division Chief Thomas joined DPD in 1989, continuing a family tradition of public service to the Denver community. Division Chief Thomas has held numerous assignments in Patrol, Investigations, Special Operations and Administration within the department, including assignments as Commander of Police District 2, Police District 5 and the Denver Police Internal Affairs Division prior to his appointment as Division Chief of Patrol. As a District Commander, Division Chief Thomas established a reputation as a collaborative leader, developing and sustaining lasting partnerships with neighborhood organizations, community leaders and other city agencies. While Commander of the Internal Affairs Division, Division Chief Thomas spearheaded the creation of the Denver Police Wellness and Resiliency Program.

Division Chief Thomas will be tasked by Mayor Hancock with creating and implementing new strategies and tactics to reduce rising crime, as well as aggressively recruiting the next generation of police officers in significant enough numbers to return the Denver Police Department back to authorized strength. Division Chief Thomas will also be charged with continuing to reestablish and bolster relationships and trust within the community, and particularly communities of color; improving collaboration with external city partners; and addressing transparency, accountability and communication within the police department and with the public.

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