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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 26, 2021

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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES CHI BIZ STRONG INITIATIVE TO JUMPSTART RECOVERY FOR CHICAGO'S BUSINESSES, WORKERS AND CONSUMERS

Bold plan will deliver the financial relief and regulatory reform Chicago's businesses and workers need to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic

CHICAGO – Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot will join Commissioner of the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection Rosa Escareno along with business and worker groups to introduce the Chi Biz Strong Initiative. A package of ordinances that are being introduced to City Council today, Chi Biz Strong will provide much needed financial relief to thousands of businesses, cut red tape across numerous City processes and deliver new protections for workers and consumers—to both jumpstart Chicago's recovery, and address barriers to equitable economic growth that pre-date the pandemic. The Chi Biz Strong Initiative is being introduced with the broad support of businesses, workers, and advocacy groups following extensive engagement with stakeholders and Aldermanic Working Groups.

"In order to recover from this pandemic quickly and holistically, we must take bold action and reimagine how we do business here in Chicago," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Over the last fourteen months, we have learned so much—including that the way we typically do business does not work for all entrepreneurs and workers. Now is our opportunity to address the structural inequities that have held us back for so long and create a post-pandemic world that fully supports small businesses across the city, protects workers, and above all, roots equity and inclusion within our city's economy. Thanks to this package, we will be able to do just that and set our residents, communities, and businesses up for long-term success."

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, under Mayor Lightfoot's leadership, the City has delivered a series of emergency measures to provide critical financial relief, remove unnecessary burdens and keep workers safe through a once-in-a-century crisis. Now, as we near the end of the pandemic, the City's focus must shift from survival to recovery. The Chi Biz Strong Initiative will deliver that recovery in a rapid, equitable, and enduring way through financial relief, a massive overhaul of City business processes to reduce red tape, and the creation of new worker protections.



“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our business community and our workers have stepped up to keep this city running safely and effectively,” said Commissioner Escareno. “Now, it is time for us to take action to support our businesses and workers by addressing the impacts of the pandemic and the structural inequities and burdensome processes that have plagued our great city for too long. Mayor Lightfoot’s Chi Biz Strong Initiative is the visionary plan we need to build back stronger than ever before.”

FINANCIAL RELIEF

In order to ensure that our businesses would survive the pandemic, Mayor Lightfoot delivered over \$100 million in emergency financial relief, more than any other city in the United States. Now, while we are preparing for the return of normal operations at our businesses, small businesses are still in need of financial relief in order to recover quickly and permanently. Mayor Lightfoot’s Chi Biz Strong Initiative will deliver the immediate financial relief that businesses need through the following initiatives:

- **Licensee Relief Program:** Over \$10 million in targeted grants will be provided to businesses that have been particularly impacted by the pandemic.
- **Cap on Third-Party Delivery Fees:** The 15% cap on fees that third-party delivery companies can charge restaurants will be extended until after the City recovers from the pandemic.
- **Debt Relief Program:** One in ten businesses currently has City debt, which makes it so they cannot renew their licenses. Under this initiative, businesses will now be able to enter into a discounted payment plan in order to renew their licenses and continue operating.

OVERHAUL OF CITY PROCESSES

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that some City processes create unnecessary red tape and undue burdens on businesses. During the pandemic, Mayor Lightfoot has relaxed a number of regulations to make it easier for businesses to operate, including by creating the Expanded Outdoor Dining Program, instituting reforms to the Sidewalk Café Permit process, and legalizing cocktails to-go. Through these temporary regulatory changes, the City gained important lessons in how to remove red tape and make it easier for businesses to operate in the City. Mayor Lightfoot’s Chi Biz Strong Package will build on this effort through a massive overhaul of City processes to reduce red tape while protecting consumers, including the following initiatives:

- **Expedited Restaurant Licensing:** New restaurants in previously closed restaurant spaces will benefit from an expedited license issuance process,



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helping fill our empty restaurant spaces quickly and enable new restaurants to open 2-3 weeks sooner.

- **Legalization of Sidewalk Signs:** Tens of thousands of street-front retail businesses will now be able to use A-Frame signs and advertise their business safely and effectively from the sidewalk.
- **Expedited Permit Process:** Currently, businesses have to wait up to 150 days to get a permit for signs, awnings, and other critical business infrastructure. This initiative will shave one to two months off of this process by removing the requirement to pass a unique ordinance for each Public Way Use Permit, building upon temporary Sidewalk Café Permit reforms enacted during the pandemic
- **Hospitality Reforms:** The hospitality industry will benefit from a series of reforms to cut red tape, including the alignment of City and State license terms, allowing cocktails-to-go and refining security requirements on charter buses to enhance public safety and make it easier to operate.
- **Taxicab Reforms:** The taxicab industry will receive a lifeline through the broad cutting of red tape and cost savings. This initiative will allow existing cars to stay on the road longer while maintaining safety standards and streamlining regulations – expanding the pool of eligible taxicabs by 20% and saving the industry up to \$20M in 2021 alone.
- **Expanded Workforce Opportunities:** Thousands of returning residents will now be eligible to join the public vehicles and hospitality industries through a lowering of employment barriers for non-violent offenders and new pathways to rehabilitation.
- **Consumer Protection:** This initiative will address public safety and nuisance issues by limiting the nighttime sale of package goods and clarifying regulations to ensure flavored tobacco products are prohibited.

WORKER PROTECTIONS

Mayor Lightfoot has ensured that workers and consumers receive the protections they deserve throughout the pandemic, especially the essential workers like domestic workers that have kept our city running. In addition to implementing and enforcing COVID-19 regulations that keep workers and customers safe, the two anti-retaliation Ordinances passed in 2020 and 2021 respectively granted critical protections to allow workers to take time off to adhere to public health orders or to receive the COVID-19 vaccine without fear of retaliation. The Chi Biz Strong Initiative will build upon these efforts by delivering additional protections to ensure that workers are included in the city's recovery, including the following initiatives:

- **Wage Theft Protections:** An estimated \$400 million in wages are stolen from Chicagoland workers by bad-faith employers every year. This initiative will create Chicago's first wage theft ordinance and grant the City greater authority to protect its workers and recoup stolen wages for those workers.



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- **Chain Business Worker Support:** Ensure a fair minimum wage for chain business workers by preventing employers within a single unitary business group from undercounting their employees.
- **Domestic Worker Support:** Care workers have been hard-hit by the pandemic and face high rates of exploitation. This package would support domestic workers with a written contract requirement for employers and place 8,000 domestic workers on the path to a \$15 minimum wage in 2021.
- **Paid Sick Leave Enhancements:** Chicago's Paid Sick Leave law will be renamed and enhanced to include caring for a family member with a closed place of care, classroom, or school; uses for mental and behavioral health; and compliance with future public health orders, among other uses.

Mayor Lightfoot's Chi Biz Strong Package was developed with the broad support of business owners, workers, industry groups, and advocacy organizations following months of engagement in order to understand the most important needs facing businesses and workers. Additionally, BACP convened multiple Working Groups with the support of Chairwomen Garza and Mitts in the leadup to this announcement. The Chi Biz Strong Initiative aligns with the vision of Chicago's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, the nation's first recovery plan, to expand economic opportunity, quality employment, and financial security.

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