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To: Mayor-Elect Lori Lightfoot

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If we are serious about ending sexual violence, then we should abandon failed policies

For too long, advocates for survivors of sexual assault and advocates for people with criminal records have watched as policies claiming to advance public safety in fact have the opposite effect. Public conviction registries and housing banishment laws do not prevent future violence, do not benefit survivors, and present a dangerously skewed understanding of sexual violence and how to build safe communities. Instead, these laws target and scapegoat those who have already been held accountable for their actions and create such significant barriers to jobs and housing that about 1 in 5 people on the registry in Chicago are homeless.

We must shift our City's response to sexual violence and focus on community services and investment

The registry system creates a false sense that the state is protecting residents from sexual violence. It also siphons resources and attention from community-based approaches and robust supportive services that would truly prevent future harm. The Chicago Police Department allocates significant resources monitoring people on registries. Yet, only 1%-3% of all reported sex offenses are committed by people on registries and the vast majority remain unreported.

Many Chicago communities experience high rates of both victimization and incarceration, which creates cycles of harm. As advocates for crime survivors and people with criminal records, we see firsthand the overwhelming and life-shattering impact of violence. We also see how laws that lead to economic distress, homelessness, and social isolation weaken the resilience of families and communities in moving forward after trauma. Sexual harm, like all violence, must be addressed and prevented where it happens—in our families and communities. We are inspired by the Lightfoot *Plan to Help Returning Citizens Succeed*, which offers an evidence-based approach to reducing recidivism and strengthening communities.

INITIATIVE TO REFORM CHICAGO POLICE PROTOCOLS FOR REGISTRY LAWS

The Lightfoot Administration should assess the efficacy of the sex offense registry and the procedures used to enforce registry laws in the City of Chicago—and engage victim, housing, and criminal justice advocates in developing policies to swiftly and responsibly address reports of sexual assault and eliminate policies that are damaging or counter-productive for people with convictions.

EQUITY – Assess and address the impact of registry and housing banishment laws on poor men of color

The rates of people on registries are astonishing and disproportionately black. One of every 227 men in Illinois has a duty to register as a sex offender, and 1 of every 100 African-American men. Of those who register as homeless in Chicago, 78% are African-American men; 56% of those who are homeless have been re-incarcerated for technical violations of reporting requirements. We need to assess how the implementation of registry-related policies in the City of Chicago is contributing to this disproportionate minority impact and to ongoing re-incarceration.

TRANSPARENCY – Examine current policies intended to reduce sexual violence

Advocates, attorneys, and people on the registry struggle to find clear, accessible information about how the registry and housing banishment laws work in Chicago. The City should conduct an audit of resources and protocols used by CPD to process, investigate, and surveil people who listed on public conviction registries and/or subject to laws about where people on the registry can live. This evaluation would include:

- the process of weekly, quarterly, and yearly re-registration, including location, time, staffing;
- how 10-year extensions of registration time for technical violations are issued and appealed;
- police surveillance of employment and housing;
- the resources expended on these procedures;
- data on re-incarceration, recidivism, disproportionate minority impact; and
- how current processes lead to ongoing system involvement for people with past convictions.

ACCOUNTABILITY – People need fair and reasonable policies that are possible to navigate

Chicago Police administer five different public registries that require people in Chicago with past convictions to report personal data in person, causing daily backlogs. People without homes must register weekly, yet they are required to register last after everyone else, causing them to miss work or lose job opportunities. People registering as homeless spend 3-10 hours in line, including camping overnight at the police station. And if a homeless person on the registry cannot register due to hospitalization or other emergency, there is no way for them to remain in compliance.

Police detectives also conduct “compliance checks” at work and residential addresses, which has a chilling effect on employers and landlords causing people to lose existing jobs and housing. Yet most people targeted by police protocols have convictions from years or decades ago and are past the “statistical redemption point.” Thus, their probability of committing a sex crime is likely no higher than someone with no past sex offense.

An evaluation of the Chicago’s policies and protocols regarding registries and housing banishment laws will bring accountability to the registry system, which is currently stripping people who have already been punished of the most basic of human needs, blocking their efforts to build positive and productive lives, and wasting resources that could be used to improve responses to victims of crime.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION – To transform the system, we must bring diverse perspectives into dialogue

Violence prevention should be a community strategy, and it must include multiple voices from a diverse group of stakeholders. People who experience these systems (as victims and/or as people coming to police to re-register) know them best and must be at the table as valued stakeholders. The City should engage a broad table of advocates, directly impacted people, and decision-makers in identifying next steps to improve the registry system in Chicago.

TRANSFORMATION – Sexual violence prevention requires a public health approach

Sexual violence prevention experts encourage a public health approach, which means providing the resources and support to prevent harm in schools, workplaces, and community settings, and delivering wrap-around services for individuals and families affected by violence and/or incarceration. Likewise, as outlined in the Lightfoot *Plan to Help Returning Citizens Succeed*, the City must give people the opportunity to build a stable life after a conviction.

WHAT CHICAGO IS DOING WELL

Chicago is on the leading edge of criminal justice reform, with engaged leaders and advocacy groups focusing on police accountability and developing restorative responses to violence. In this era of #metoo consciousness-raising, justice and victim advocates are committed to working together on sexual violence prevention and are ready to move beyond carceral responses that fail to reduce harm and misdirect attention and resources.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN FIRST 100 DAYS

- Initiate a convening of sexual assault advocates, homeless services advocates, criminal justice advocates, Chicago Police Department officials, Mayor’s Office officials, survivors of sexual assault, and people directly impacted by registration and housing banishment protocols.
- Make housing banishment laws a priority for the Office of Returning Citizens Affairs. These laws cause permanent housing instability and ongoing re-incarceration for thousands of people in Chicago.
- Begin an evaluation of the sex offense registry and housing banishment laws and how those laws are implemented in Chicago.

WHAT WE CAN DO LONG-TERM

- Establish a work group in the Office of Returning Citizens Affairs with victim, housing, and criminal justice advocates that meets regularly to develop priorities and protocols to more efficiently use CPD resources to prevent sexual assault and end policies that are damaging and counter-productive for people with convictions.
- Synthesize and release the information gathered in the evaluation to the public.
- Identify and implement policy recommendations resulting from the evaluation.

WHAT CHALLENGES WE MIGHT ENCOUNTER IN EXECUTING THIS INITIATIVE

- There is misinformation about the efficacy of the sex offense registry and its consequences on the lives of individuals and their families, so there will be a learning curve as the evaluation and workgroup are initiated.
- The largest problems with the registry and banishment policies stem from state law, so there are areas where the City does not have the flexibility to implement new approaches but may be a voice in improving state law.