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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND THE RACIAL EQUITY RAPID RESPONSE TEAM  
ANNOUNCE LATEST EFFORTS TO ADDRESS RACIAL AND HEALTH  
DISPARITIES AMONG MINORITY COMMUNITIES**

*Three tele-town halls, community PPE distribution, and neighborhood canvassing mark initial steps to reach vulnerable populations most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic*

**CHICAGO** – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the City's Racial Equity Rapid Response Team (RERRT) today announced rapid steps being taken to address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on African-American communities. Three communities have been identified for initial engagement, based on local COVID-19 data that indicated a need for action – Austin, Auburn Gresham, and South Shore.

The Racial Equity Rapid Response Team led by Candace Moore, the City's first Chief Equity Officer, Dr. Sybil Madison, the City's Deputy Mayor for Education and Human Services, and West Side United, will partner with three anchor community organizations, Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation, Austin Coming Together, and South Shore Works to develop hyperlocal, data-informed strategies to slow the spread of the COVID-19 and improve health outcomes among communities that have been most heavily impacted.

“We are all in this crisis together, but we haven't experienced it in the same way,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “In response to the shockingly disproportionate impact this disease has had on our communities, RERRT is working aggressively and in close collaboration with local leaders and partners to mount a public health response that addresses the specific and contextualized needs of our residents and families. While we continue to focus on the immediate challenges related to COVID-19, this crisis has also doubled-down our longer mission to fight poverty, end racial inequality, and ensure every Chicagoan has access to a bright future we all deserve.”

Organized around four pillars prioritized by the Racial Equity Rapid Response Team, the coordinating structure comprises a steering committee and working groups focused on Education, Prevention, Testing & Treatment, and Supportive Services, each to include targeted ways to engage directly with residents in the impacted communities. Each leading community organization is also creating community-specific steering committees



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and working groups, which will galvanize current leadership for greater concentrated outreach toward the goal of slowing the further spread of COVID-19.

“The work of the newly formed Racial Equity Rapid Response team is central to West Side United’s mission which identifies structural racism and historical disinvestment in black and brown communities as pillars of disparity and inequity. The immediate investments needed to address the COVID-19 mortality and infection rates in high-risk communities also warrants a long-term commitment that this initiative can deliver by building the capacity of communities and residents to arm themselves with the tools and resources to stay informed and healthy,” said Ayesha Jaco, Executive Director, West Side United.

Other elements of the RERRT include:

- An Operations Team integrated into the City’s Emergency Operations Center to enable coordination and resourcing of strategies developed through local partnerships and collaboration to identify gaps and solve problems faster.
- The Education/Communication Working Group, which is tailoring messaging to speak directly to the realities that people in these communities face, including protecting loved ones, and guidance for essential workers and multigenerational households. This information is being delivered to people in their homes, including 80,000 door hangers placed over the last week, and 150,000 mailed postcards.
- A Providers Working Group that is developing strategies to proactively reach patients with underlying health conditions that increase the risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Community leadership networks that are coordinating the distribution of masks and protective resources to local residents in their communities, including distributing 60,000 face masks donated from Dr. Willie Wilson in partnership with Sinai Health System.

“COVID-19 has brought the economic and health disparities in our cities into sharp focus. Structural racism, systemic inequities, and poor public policy have all played a role in creating this disastrous outcome,” said Anton Seals of South Shore Works. “It will require attention to all these factors coupled with an appreciation for the strengths and culture of Black communities in our to reverse this trend. Not just an engagement, but a commitment to transform the systems that produce these kinds of outcomes”

To provide targeted information and receive direct input from residents in each neighborhood, the RERRT is hosting three tele-town halls, one for each of the priority communities. The town halls will be streamed live through each organization’s social media platforms:

Thursday, April 23:



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- 5:30-7pm: South Shore Works (@southshoreworks)
- Saturday, April 25:
- 10:30am-12pm: Greater Auburn Gresham DC (@gagdcchicago)
  - 1-2:30pm: Austin Coming Together (@act.chicago)

“With the recent reports of how COVID-19 is taking the greatest toll on the Black community, the importance of addressing the disparities that exist in Chicago is paramount as it is also a well-known fact that the social determinants of good health are not in our favor,” said Darnell Shields, Executive Director, Austin Coming Together. “I’m honored to serve on Mayor Lightfoot’s newly formed Racial Equity Rapid Response Team, to increase the city’s collective impact to develop and implement strategies that meet the need in Austin and other communities hit hardest by this pandemic.”

To target the disparities in communities of color, last week the University of Chicago Medicine, a RERRT partner, announced expanded testing capacity in Hyde Park and at the UChicago Medicine Ingalls Memorial in Harvey of up to 1,000 tests per day per location for COVID-19. These tests will be available at no out-of-pocket cost to patients. Both locations will test patients by appointment with hours varying based on demand.

"Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation along with our Neighborhood Network partners are working diligently to save AND sustain lives of those impacted by COVID-19 in our south side community through direct rental/mortgage assistance, mask distribution, information sharing and virtual instruction, wellness checks and food delivery services to our most vulnerable residents," said Carlos Nelson, CEO, Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City launched the Stay Home, Save Lives and ‘We Are Not Playing’ campaigns to inform residents about how they can stay healthy and do their part to flatten the curve of the virus. For more information and updates on COVID-19, text COVID19 to 78015, email [coronavirus@chicago.gov](mailto:coronavirus@chicago.gov) or visit [Chicago.gov/coronavirus](https://chicago.gov/coronavirus).

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