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CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

CITY COUNCIL PASSES CHI BIZ STRONG INITIATIVE TO JUMPSTART RECOVERY FOR CHICAGO'S BUSINESSES, WORKERS, AND CONSUMERS

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

CHICAGO – The Chicago City Council today passed Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot's Chi Biz Strong Initiative, a bold legislative package that 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. This initiative, comprised of two ordinances that passed City Council today, will jumpstart Chicago's recovery while addressing barriers to equitable economic growth that pre-date the pandemic. The Chi Biz Strong Initiative was developed with the broad support of businesses, workers, and advocacy groups and is now becoming law 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 fifteen months, we have learned so much—including that the way we typically do business does not work for all entrepreneurs and workers. With this initiative, we are addressing the structural inequities that have held us back for so long and creating 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 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 this once-in-a-century crisis. Now, at the end of the pandemic, the City's focus has shifted from survival to recovery. The Chi Biz Strong Initiative will deliver that recovery in a rapid, equitable and enduring way through a legislative package that features two ordinances: one that delivers historic worker



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protections and another that completely overhauls City processes to be more business-friendly and to protect consumers and residents.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our business community and our workers have stepped up to keep this city running safely and effectively,” said BACP Commissioner Rosa 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. Thank you to City Council for passing Mayor Lightfoot’s Chi Biz Strong Initiative and delivering the visionary plan we need to build back stronger than ever before.”

WORKER PROTECTIONS

Mayor Lightfoot has ensured that workers receive the protections they deserve throughout the pandemic, especially the essential workers, that have never stopped working. 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 that passed today 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 creates Chicago’s first wage theft ordinance and grants the City greater authority to protect its workers and recoup stolen wages for those workers.
- **Chain Business Worker Support:** Employers within a single unitary business group cannot undercount their employees, ensuring that chain business workers are granted the full minimum wage.
- **Domestic Worker Support:** Care workers have been hard-hit by the pandemic and face high rates of exploitation. This package supports domestic workers with a written contract requirement for employers and places 8,000 domestic workers on the path to a \$15 minimum wage in 2021.
- **Paid Sick Leave Enhancements:** Chicago’s Paid Sick Leave law has been 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.



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“Chicago’s workers have kept this City running throughout the pandemic, and as we plan for a pandemic-free future we must continue to put workers first,” said Susan Sadlowski Garza, 10th Ward Alderwoman and Chair of the Committee on Workforce Development. “No one should have their wages stolen, especially during these difficult times, and I am thrilled to support Chicago’s first Wage Theft Ordinance. This piece and the entire Chi Biz Strong Initiative will ensure that workers are not just included in the recovery but front and center as we build a new and better Chicago.”

OVERHAUL OF CITY BUSINESS PROCESSES

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that some City processes create unnecessary red tape and place 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 builds on this effort through a massive overhaul of City processes to reduce red tape, provide immediate financial support and protect residents, including the following initiatives:

- **Expedited Restaurant Licensing:** New restaurants in previously closed restaurant spaces will now benefit from an expedited license issuance process, helping fill our empty restaurant spaces quickly and enabling new restaurants to open up to 14 days sooner.
- **Cap on Third-Party Delivery Fees:** The 15% cap on fees that third-party delivery companies can charge restaurants will be extended until December 8, 2021.
- **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.
- **Hospitality Reforms:** The hospitality industry benefits 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 \$20 million in 2021 alone.



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- **Expanded Workforce Opportunities:** Thousands of returning residents are now 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 and Resident Protection:** This initiative addresses public safety and nuisance issues by prohibiting the nighttime sale of package goods after midnight and clarifying regulations to ensure flavored tobacco products are prohibited.

“For the last fourteen months, we have worked tirelessly to help our businesses survive a once-in-a-century pandemic,” said Emma Mitts, 37th Ward Alderman and Chair of the Committee on License and Consumer Protection. “Now, as the pandemic wanes, we have an opportunity that we cannot waste to bring about transformative change that will kickstart our recovery and address long-standing issues that impede business growth. I am proud to co-sponsor this initiative and look forward to continuing to work with Mayor Lightfoot to support our critical small businesses.”

Mayor Lightfoot’s Chi Biz Strong Package was developed and passed 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 the introduction and passage. 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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