



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 29, 2021

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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES ERIN HARKEY TO SERVE AS ACTING
COMMISSIONER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND SPECIAL
EVENTS**

*Appointment follows the retirement of Commissioner Mark Kelly after five years of
public service*

CHICAGO—Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today announced the appointment of Erin Harkey to serve as Acting Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) beginning Saturday, October 30, following the retirement of Mark Kelly after five years of public service.

“I want to thank Commissioner Kelly for his years of dedication to and leadership of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Chicago is indebted to him for launching a multitude of programs and initiatives that strengthened the artistic presence in our city, and we are especially grateful for his work on COVID recovery for the arts. I wish him and his family all the best on this well-earned retirement and exciting new chapter of life.”

“Additionally, I am excited to announce Erin Harkey will carry the torch and serve as the department’s Acting Commissioner. Her years of experience working in creative fields and advocating for them at DCASE have provided her the skillsets and knowledge needed for the role, and she’s demonstrated proven dedication to Chicago’s arts and cultural landscape. I am very grateful to her for stepping in as we continue to identify the next Commissioner for the department.”

Harkey has served the City of Chicago for five years as Projects Administrator, then Deputy Commissioner for Programming and most recently as First Deputy Commissioner at DCASE since March 2021. In her dual role as Senior Policy Advisor for Arts in Culture in the Mayor’s Office, she advises on cultural policy and arts strategy across all City departments and agencies. She previously managed public art programs at Los Angeles County Arts Commission and the Arts Council for Long Beach. Harkey holds two master’s degrees in Public Art Administration and Urban



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Planning from the University of Southern California (USC) and a bachelor's degree in Marketing from Howard University.

“It is an honor to have the opportunity to lead the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and to continue to serve the residents of Chicago,” said Acting Commissioner Erin Harkey. “Following a tumultuous 19 months battling the pandemic and five years advocating for Chicago’s cultural community, Commissioner Kelly’s leadership has set the stage for a strong arts recovery. I look forward to continuing this important work, and more.”

Commissioner Kelly was appointed to his post by Mayor Rahm Emanuel in July 2016 after more than 40 years of experience working as an academic administrator for various post-secondary institutions including Columbia College Chicago, Wayne State University, and City Colleges of Chicago.

As Commissioner, Kelly worked tirelessly to advance, support, and collaborate with the local arts and culture sector through “Year of...” initiatives for public art, creative youth, Chicago theatre and Chicago music; major commissions and numerous neighborhood investments that have positioned public art as a defining characteristic of Chicago; the resurgence of Chicago’s vital TV and film industry; and unprecedented arts funding. Just last month, Mayor Lightfoot and Kelly announced a transformational increase in the department’s Cultural Grants budget from \$2.7 million to \$20.7 million. This year, the City provided \$100 million in funds to support the arts landscape including “Arts77,” a recovery plan that leverages over \$60 million in initial funding to support local artists and creative industries. Additionally, as part of the 2022 budget, the City has committed to \$26 million in new arts and culture investments — all told making Chicago one of the top major U.S. cities in government support for arts recovery and artist relief.

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Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events

The Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) is dedicated to enriching Chicago’s artistic vitality and cultural vibrancy. This includes fostering the development of Chicago’s non-profit arts sector, independent working artists and for-profit arts businesses; providing a framework to guide the City’s future cultural and economic growth, via the Chicago Cultural Plan; marketing the City’s cultural assets to a worldwide audience; and presenting high-quality, free, and affordable cultural programs for residents and visitors. For more information, visit chicago.gov/dccase.