



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES WILLETTE BENFORD TO SERVE AS CITY OF CHICAGO'S DIRECTOR OF RE-ENTRY

Benford to shepherd newly created initiative to serve formerly incarcerated individuals

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot announced today that Willette Benford will serve as Director of Re-Entry for the City of Chicago, a newly created role that sits at the center of a \$13 million initiative launched during the 2022 budget process that will transform Chicago into a national leader in supporting returning residents.

“I want the Second City to be the Second Chance City,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “As a former federal prosecutor, and as a sister to a Black man who endured a 17-year prison sentence, this goal is deeply personal to me. That's why I am excited to welcome Willette to the team to help our city do better for returning residents who have paid their debt to society and are ready to be productive members of their communities.”

The 2022 budget signed by Mayor Lightfoot last fall earmarked \$13 million for re-entry services, including legal assistance and workforce development. In 2021, Mayor Lightfoot also [signed an Executive Order](#) creating an Interagency Reentry Council to be led by Benford that will advance wide-ranging recommendations made by the Returning Residents Working Group, which were [detailed in “A Roadmap for a Second Chance City” report](#). This working group was comprised of people with direct experience in the criminal legal system and public advocates for reform.

The group suggested more than a dozen ways the City can give returning residents the second chance they deserve. These include revising municipal ordinances to remove restrictions on those with records — from owning businesses and coordinating with the jail and prison system to create a one-stop shop connecting individuals with housing, workforce resources, healthcare, and other tools upon release.



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Benford is a mother, minister, social justice advocate, and a survivor of the criminal justice system. Prior to this role, Benford led the decarceration work for Live Free Illinois, a grassroots organization dedicated to ending gun violence and mass incarceration.

Her new role allows her to build and expand relationships across various sectors and City departments and agencies to improve the lives of returning residents citywide. The Interagency Re-Entry Council's goal is to eradicate policies and procedures that exclude and create barriers to successful reentry.

"I am honored to serve in this post and will work tirelessly every day to improve the re-entry process for formerly incarcerated Chicagoans," said Benford. "To all returning citizens who feel the challenges they face are insurmountable, let me be clear: With Mayor Lightfoot at the helm, you are not alone in this struggle."

"In the past ten years, more than 100,000 people came back to Chicago neighborhoods after serving time in the state and local jail and prison systems," said Ald. Walter Burnett (27th Ward). "All too often, they struggle to find stable housing and decent employment. Willette and the team she builds around her will organize a whole of government approach in reversing this seemingly unreversible trend."

Benford will ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals are afforded the opportunity to reenter society with dignity and equity and receive the right resources. She is a fierce advocate and champion for change, and she resides on the City's South Side. Her appointment began on May 31, 2022.

Watch: [Mayor Lightfoot Sits Down with Willette Benford, New Director of Re-Entry for the Office of the Mayor](#)

Photo: [Willette Benford Official Photo](#)

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