

STATEMENT FROM BACP COMMISSIONER KENNETH J. MEYER

**2023 BUDGET PROPOSAL TO THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
BUDGET AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

OCTOBER 19, 2022

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Dowell, and members of the Chicago City Council.

My name is Ken Meyer, and I am the Commissioner for the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, also known as BACP. I am joined by members of my team.

I would like to thank Mayor Lightfoot for her leadership and support throughout this budget process and for confronting challenges facing our city and charting a new path forward. I would also like to thank all of you for your advocacy on behalf of your communities and your hard work passing momentous legislation to support Chicago businesses, workers, and consumers.

BACP continues to work towards an equitable and sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. BACP is investing in Chicago's business owners and workers to drive Chicago's economic engine, expanding and adapting essential City services to reach Chicagoans in every community, and working with key partners to address public safety. Together, we will create a stable and growing economy for all Chicagoans.

The Department's core functions include licensing businesses, supporting small business growth, regulating the public passenger vehicle industry, and protecting the rights of workers. Every BACP program and service is designed with the consideration of investment in Chicago's entrepreneurs and workers. The Office of Labor Standards, housed within BACP, promotes and enforces labor laws to help Chicagoans secure sustainable employment, build wealth, and address racial economic disparities. On July 1st, the Fair Workweek Ordinance enhancements went into effect, and we settled our first Fair Workweek case with \$250,000 in backpay to workers and a \$50,000 fine to the City. Additionally, since its creation in 2019, the Office of Labor Standards secured over \$1.7 million in restitution for over 5,000 workers under Chicago's Labor Laws.

BACP's recovery portfolio supports small business and commercial corridor revitalization, nonprofit capacity building, and urban agriculture. This year, we launched the Vacant Storefront Activation Program and Commercial Corridor Recovery Program. The programs help revitalize commercial corridors to increase foot-traffic for storefront businesses. BACP is extending its footprint by assisting nonprofits. The Nonprofit Capacity Building Program will fund established community organizations to provide training and support on grant-writing and grant-fund-management for other nonprofit organizations.

BACP also released the RFP for urban agriculture which will provide financial and technical assistance to urban growers; it will also support the creation of brand-new urban agriculture projects in vacant lots for urban farming to catalyze wealth building through support for food businesses. BACP is providing targeted economic relief and neighborhood development support through a holistic approach for an equitable recovery for Chicago's entrepreneurs.

To help support Chicago's small business ecosystem and promote economic development in every community, BACP oversees the Neighborhood Business Development Center program which provides hyper-local support to business owners and start-up entrepreneurs. To overcome opportunity gaps that exist for so many of our underserved entrepreneurs, BACP's eight Chicago Business Centers provide support in neighborhoods that have experienced historical disinvestment, including Roseland, Humboldt Park, and Albany Park. Since 2021, the CBCs have supported almost 2,000 entrepreneurs.

Small businesses are vital to the economic health of our communities. As the City's one-stop-shop for businesses, we provide entrepreneurs with the support they need to open and grow their business. We have issued over 4,700 new licenses so far this year – that's licenses to new business entities looking to get their start in Chicago. The license renewal rate of 84.6% is comparable to pre-pandemic levels.

Through our long-standing business education programming we are connecting members of the small business community to a diverse suite of resources and tools. Since January, we have hosted over 100 webinars and reached over 9,000 attendees. Additionally, we hosted two in-person small business expos and one remote expo, with over 800 attendees. With our strong digital presence, we can share critical information via e-mail and on social media to effectively promote City initiatives such as the Home and Business Security Camera Rebate Program.

BACP is dedicated to creating thriving and safe communities. We are one component of a whole-city, community-driven approach to violence prevention and reduction. BACP preserves the quality of life in our communities by ensuring that businesses comply with Chicago's Municipal Code. While the majority of businesses go above and beyond to comply, we do not hesitate to implement enforcement measures to protect Chicago. Since January, BACP issued over 11,000 citations to over 3,000 businesses. Additionally, this year, the Active Compliance Program resumed its focus on education and conducted over 700 Active Compliance investigations, a proactive effort that helps business owners keep their consumers, employees, and neighbors safe through non-disciplinary consultations. Also, BACP leads the Business Compliance Task Force, a coordinated, multi-agency Task Force in collaboration with the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Department of Buildings to prevent egregious and dangerous violations.

I am incredibly proud of the work the BACP team has done to fulfill our core mission and achieve goals for moving the Department forward. Remember, we began the year with the Chicago Vaccine Requirement, part of the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. BACP worked closely with the Chicago Department of Public Health, industry and community organizations, and businesses to ensure the Vaccine Requirement and Mask Mandate were implemented effectively and efficiently for the business community. The business community's dedication to compliance and spirit of service has not gone unnoticed, and I applaud our businesses for doing what was necessary to save lives.

I want to thank the Chicago City Council for your continued collaboration and hard work to make Chicago a welcoming and vibrant city for businesses, consumers, and workers.

Thank you for your time. My staff and I are happy to answer your questions.

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