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CITY COUNCIL APPROVES INNOVATIVE RELIEF PACKAGE TO PROVIDE TENANT PROTECTIONS AND MINIMIZE COVID-19 RELATED EVICTIONS

CHICAGO – The Chicago City Council today approved an innovative relief package that will provide substantive protections for tenants and minimize the number of evictions across the city due to the unprecedented COVID-19 health and economic crisis. The COVID-19 Eviction Protection Ordinance requires landlords to make good faith efforts towards resolutions with tenants before moving ahead with an eviction filing, including offering repayment plans and third-party mediation. The COVID-19 Eviction Protection Ordinance, which also includes an extended “cooling-off” period and other measures to prevent an expected wave of pandemic-related evictions, is part of the City’s larger relief efforts to address housing issues across Chicago, especially during the pandemic.

“The impact of COVID-19 has been felt across our city, but it’s been especially devastating to our many residents and communities who were already struggling every month to pay their rent and stay in their homes,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “This important ordinance will not only provide critical support to our tenants struggling as a result of this unprecedented crisis, it will also strengthen protections long-needed before COVID-19 to promote true housing stability and allow every Chicago family a chance to build, grow, and thrive.”

The ordinance requires landlords filing evictions, due to nonpayment of rent against tenants who have coronavirus-related financial hardships, to wait for a seven-day “cooling-off” period in addition to the regular five-day notice period. After the “cooling-off” period, landlords must show the court that they have engaged in good faith efforts to reach a reasonable alternative to eviction, including mediation, payment plans or other options before an eviction can proceed.

“If someone is stably housed, we want to keep them in their home if at all possible,” said Department of Housing (DOH) Commissioner Marisa Novara. “With this ordinance, we provide guidance to landlords about what constitutes a good faith effort to avoid eviction and the legal framework to require it.”



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Evictions were a significant issue in Chicago and across the country even before the economic fallout of COVID-19. According to a Lawyers Committee for Better Housing report, between 2010 and 2017, Chicago saw on average more than 23,000 eviction filings per year. Approximately 60% of those filings ended in eviction orders, which can often hinder a tenant's ability to find new housing. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent job losses and decreased work hours, evictions and further displacement have the potential to become an even more serious issue.

"Our most important duty as civil servants is to protect residents, especially during these unsettling times," said Ald. Osterman (48th Ward) Chair, Committee on Housing and Real Estate. "With the passage of this ordinance, we will help keep people safely housed during this immediate crisis, while we work to strengthen protections for people for long-term housing stability for all."

"Housing providers are in the business of providing safe homes for Chicagoans, not evictions," said Michael Glasser, President of the Neighborhood Building Owners Alliance (NBOA). "Most housing providers in Chicago are already working with their tenants as they deal with this crisis, and this ordinance requires residents to communicate with their housing provider to negotiate a long-term payment agreement, which is a vital part of coming to an agreement that keeps people in their homes."

Karen Freeman-Wilson, President and CEO of the Chicago Urban League, said, "We have seen a rise in housing insecurity that is directly attributable to the rise in unemployment associated with COVID-19. The legislation provides a thoughtful solution to a complex problem. More often than not, a concerted effort to reach a solution will result in an agreement that serves tenants and landlords. All parties win when you remove the instability and uncertainty created by eviction."

The City of Chicago is partnering with the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) to help minimize the number of post-pandemic evictions. For the past 40 years, CCR has been providing free mediation services to parents, families, youth, schools, landlords, tenants, religious institutions, and others. Each year, CCR conducts nearly 1,600 mediations across the City and County, including over 200 eviction-related mediations largely referred by the courts. In the last 10 years, 63% of CCR eviction mediations have resulted in settlements between landlords and tenants.

"If we have an opportunity to get the parties in the door before an eviction notice has been filed, we think we can prevent far more evictions," said Cassandra Lively, CCR Executive Director. "We want all tenants and landlords to know that mediation



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is a free option available to them, and we are grateful to the City for thinking proactively and creatively in partnering with us to help address this crisis.”

The COVID-19 Eviction Protection Ordinance is part of Mayor Lightfoot’s ongoing commitment to eliminating poverty and expanding tenant protections, housing affordability, and stability. Last month, Mayor Lightfoot introduced the Fair Notice Act to City Council, extending the notice period required for the non-renewal of leases from 30 days to 90 days. Once passed, Chicago will have one of the longest notice periods in the country, requiring landlords to give their tenants 90 days’ notice before non-renewing or terminating a lease.

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About CCR

The Center for Conflict Resolution is an equal opportunity service provider that values the richness of Chicagoland’s diverse communities and emphasizes inclusiveness. The Center provides its client base with quality mediation services, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class or socioeconomic status, age, religion, national origin, disability, professional background, or other characteristics. For more information about CCR’s mediation services please visit www.ccrchicago.org or call 312-922-6464, ext. 22.