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**MAYOR EMANUEL CALLS ON STATE LEGISLATURE TO REFORM SENTENCING
FOR LOW-LEVEL DRUG OFFENSES**

*Proposal Would Make All Drug Arrests Under One Gram a Misdemeanor Instead of a Felony,
Would Also Make Cannabis Possession Under 15 Grams a Ticketable Offense Statewide*

Mayor Emanuel today called on the Illinois State Legislature to reform sentencing laws for low-level drug offenses, keeping non-violent offenders from a lifetime in the criminal justice system, saving taxpayer dollars, and allowing police to focus on more serious crimes. The Mayor's proposal calls for a new state law that would reduce possession of one gram or less of any controlled substance in Illinois from a Class Four Felony to a Class A Misdemeanor. The proposal would also expand Chicago's municipal ordinance, passed in 2012, making possession of 15 grams or less of cannabis a ticketable offense statewide.

"It is time to put our sentencing policies in line with our values, reduce penalties for non-violent, low-level drug offenses so we don't put people in prison who need drug treatment," said Mayor Emanuel. "It doesn't make sense that one arrest for a very small amount of a controlled substance can lead to a lifetime of struggles, sending people in and out of prison and putting up barriers to getting a job or finding a place to live. We need action from Springfield."

Current state law regarding drug possession of less than one gram has a significant effect on the individuals charged with this crime, despite the fact that they are at low risk of committing future, violent crimes. A felony conviction can prevent them from obtaining employment, entering college, getting scholarships, or accessing public housing. Decreasing the penalty for these non-violent crimes from a felony to a misdemeanor will allow potentially thousands more people to have access to a successful future.

Changing the state law related to sentencing for possession of small amounts of drugs would also allow police to focus on serious, violent crimes. In Chicago alone, approximately 7,000 people are arrested every year for possession of one gram or less of drugs. Over the past five years, low-level narcotics arrests resulted in nearly 275,000 hours of work for Chicago police officers.

The proposal would also save taxpayer dollars. Despite the money and time spent on enforcing low-level narcotics cases, less than 10 percent of the arrests for our most common drug charges result in guilty verdicts. For those that do result in a conviction, each person held at the Cook County jail costs taxpayers about \$143 a day.

Mayor Emanuel is committed to criminal justice reform that reduces reliance on the criminal justice system to solve social problems, lowers violent crime, and promotes reentry by removing barriers to employment, education, and housing for returning citizens. The Emanuel administration has been instrumental in passing legislation and implementing policy advancing these goals, including decriminalizing low-level cannabis possession, ensuring automatic expungement of certain juvenile arrest records, creating tax incentive for businesses to hire formerly incarcerated people, creating new reentry centers, quadrupling Chicago Transit Authority's "Second Chance Program," and developing a pilot program to reunify families and allow rehabilitated formerly incarcerated individuals to move into CHA housing.

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