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MAYOR EMANUEL, ALDERMAN O'SHEA INTRODUCE ORDINANCE STRENGTHENING THE CITY'S SUPPORT OF EMPLOYEES AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

This ordinance reaffirms the City's commitment to supporting employees who are survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and calls on City's Department of Human Resources to take action to advance that mission.

In recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Alderman Matthew O'Shea today introduced an ordinance that reaffirms the City of Chicago's commitment to protecting and supporting its employees who are survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The city will also provide up to one month of paid leave for City employees who qualify for the Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act ("VESSA"). An Illinois state law, VESSA requires employers to provide survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault with three months of unpaid leave.

"Domestic violence and sexual assault have no place in our society and it is critical that survivors know they are not alone," Mayor Emanuel said. "We recognize the challenges survivors face and believe this ordinance is a significant step in expanding our support and reaffirming the City's continued commitment to providing accessible resources for those affected."

Under the ordinance, the Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources is charged to develop a policy and implement training to improve employees' awareness of existing resources, their ability to recognize warning signs of abuse and act responsively in furtherance of this goal.

"Our goal is to ensure that City employees affected by domestic violence and sexual abuse know that they have their employer's support through accessible information, resources and employee assistance programs," Alderman O'Shea said.

The ordinance was developed in coordination with Chicago Says No More, a coalition of 20 businesses, civic and philanthropic leaders collaborating with 25 executive directors of not-for-profit organizations with a mission to serve those affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. Their Workplace EAP Task Force collaborated with Legal Momentum, the nation's oldest legal advocacy organization dedicated to advancing the rights of women and girls, to create a model policy for employers. Legal Momentum was instrumental in drafting and helping pass the Violence Against Women Act, the landmark federal law created to address the treatment of the crimes

associated with domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Information about the model policy is available at www.ChicagoSaysNoMore.org.

“Domestic violence and sexual assault are difficult topics to breach, and because of longstanding stigmas, victims and survivors are often reluctant to seek help at a time when they are extremely vulnerable and likely very isolated,” said Kristie Paskvan, CFO of Mesirow Financial and founder of Chicago Says No More. “The new ordinance works to help ensure that the City’s workplace is a safe environment for all employees who are experiencing abuse and creates a means to provide immediate assistance to employees who have been subjected to such violence.”

The City of Chicago currently offers a number of services and resources to domestic violence survivors. DHR employs a clinical therapist who is able to provide confidential consultation and assistance, offers a residency waiver if an employee needs to quickly relocate and provides reasonable accommodations such as changing work phone numbers or modifying a work schedule or location.

“The case with many employers is that they offer numerous services, but the information about them is scattered, so employees have to conduct their own research and, as a result, may not know about everything that is available,” DHR Commissioner Soo Choi said. “An easily accessible document centralizing this information, together with training to increase awareness, ensures that our employees can easily access that assistance and know that we support them and encourage them to seek our help.”

According to the Center for Disease Control, one in three women and one in four men are victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence can co-occur in the forms of physical abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse and stalking. It is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States, more than car accidents, muggings, and sexual assault combined. Unfortunately, only 14 percent of employers offer assistance for those employees affected by domestic violence and sexual assault when the abuser is not a co-worker.

For confidential information or resources on domestic violence, please call or text the City's Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-877-TOENDDV (1-877-863-6338).

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