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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 25, 2016

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**MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES INITIATIVE TO INCREASE SUPPORT FOR
NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES THROUGHOUT CHICAGO**

*Pilot Program Will Increase Support for Disadvantaged, Minority- and Women-Owned
Businesses at Chicago's Small Business Center*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced a city initiative to support disadvantaged, minority- and women-owned businesses in neighborhoods across Chicago. The new initiative adds M/WBE Certification Assistance to the services offered at the city of Chicago's Small Business Center (SBC), which will provide critical support and assistance for neighborhood businesses looking to compete for city work.

"Small businesses are the economic backbone of Chicago, providing jobs for residents and helping to make our neighborhoods stronger. So by helping to level the playing field so that everyone has an opportunity to grow their business, we will make our neighborhoods stronger and all of Chicago stronger," Mayor Emanuel said. "The real success of this new service will be when we see the stories of even more people throughout Chicago whose businesses are now thriving thanks to important initiatives like this."

This pilot program is a partnership between the Department of Business Affairs (BACP) and the Department of Procurement Services (DPS), and is part of Mayor Emanuel's mission to provide a one-stop-shop for businesses in Chicago. The SBC is located at City Hall, 121 N. LaSalle St., Room 800.

The DPS Certification Intake Consultant will provide this additional service to the already streamlined operation of the SBC. Through the initiative all business consultants at the SBC will be trained to direct their customers with questions about City certification to take advantage of the DPS Certification Intake Consultant. The Certification Intake Consultant will provide information about the certification program to interested businesses, assist small business owners with completing online applications as well as scanning and uploading supporting documents.

"We have implemented other pilot programs at the SBC, such as the Permit Intake Center, which has proved to be a huge success and time saver for our small businesses," BACP Commissioner Maria Guerra Lapacek said. "Adding effective resources for the business community helps us stay in touch with their needs as well provide top notch customer service."

There are five different certifications that a business can apply for with the City of Chicago: Minority Business Enterprise (MBE), Women Business Enterprise (WBE), Business Enterprises Owned by People with Disabilities (BEPD), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concessions Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (ACDBE).

The DPS Certification Intake Consultant will conduct an intake review of the application and documents submitted to ensure that correct forms are utilized and complete, minimum eligibility requirements are met and the necessary minimum supporting documents are attached to applications. All of these measures are designed to help small businesses with the application process, reducing application processing times.

“As the Certification arm for the City of Chicago, we are continuously expanding the resources and programs that empower our diverse vendor community to become involved in the opportunities available throughout the City,” said Chief Procurement Officer Jamie Rhee, “this pilot program is another way to reach this community.”

Since 2011, Mayor Emanuel has instituted a number of reforms to help support small business growth in the City of Chicago including reducing the time it takes to start up and grow a business. Since opening in April 2013, the SBC has reduced overall wait times by fifty percent and 25 percent of all customers are in and out of the Center within 15 minutes.

Learn more about the Small Business Center and the Certification Assistance Pilot Program at www.cityofchicago.org/sbc.

The Mayor made the announcement during the third Small Business Expo, at the South Shore Cultural Center. During the expo, business owners and entrepreneurs had the opportunity to consult, network and gather information from more than 40 government and non-profit agencies including the Chicago Department of Procurement Services, the Illinois Secretary of State, and the U.S. Department of Labor. The goal of the expo series is to provide free, expert advice to all entrepreneurs on topics such as licensing, financing and business planning.

The Certification Assistance Pilot Program is the latest in a series of efforts made by Mayor Emanuel to increase opportunities for local residents and MBEs/WBEs. Additional announcements have included the Project Area Subcontractor Bid Incentive, Veteran/Small Business Joint Venture Bid Incentive, MBE/WBE Mentorship Program, Diversity Business Initiative, the Small Business Initiative, and the Graduation Phase-out Program for MBEs/WBEs.

To further communication and transparency, DPS sends regular email newsletter (DPS Alerts). Registration is available on the DPS website (www.cityofchicago.org/dps). For more information, follow DPS on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ChicagoDPS) Twitter (www.twitter.com/ChicagoDPS) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/ChicagoDPS).

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