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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT INTRODUCES VICTIMS JUSTICE ORDINANCE

Proposal will strengthen and support crime prevention tools by allowing the City to file civil claims against streetgangs and their members

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today introduced the Victims Justice Ordinance, which will create a civil remedy against streetgangs, their leadership, and members who profit from illegal and violent acts in communities across Chicago. The measure will allow the City to file a civil claim against those who engage in a pattern of criminal activity and permit the City to recover compensatory and punitive damages, forfeiture of property, abatement, and injunctive relief when the defendant is found to have engaged in criminal gang activity.

“Today we are taking steps to expand the fight against violent streetgangs by creating additional civil tools that will directly impact the profit motive used by these perpetrators who terrorize our communities,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Criminal gang activity imposes substantial costs on the City, residents, and the neighborhoods where they operate. If we are successful, we will seize their assets and disrupt the financial lifelines that support this criminal activity and fuels their dominance in our city.”

The Victims Justice Ordinance, modeled after the 1993 Illinois Streetgang Terrorism Omnibus Prevention Act, would allow the City to file a civil complaint against streetgang members who knowingly engaged in two or more gang-related criminal offenses within five years of each other. At least one criminal act must involve a violent or predatory act motivated by gang-related profit and defined as a felony or forcible felony. The ordinance authorizes the City to work with the Illinois Attorney General, Cook County State’s Attorney, Cook County Sheriff, Illinois State Police Department, and other law enforcement agencies and officials to gather and share information relevant to an action under this ordinance.

The ordinance would authorize courts to hold a defendant liable for compensatory and punitive damages or enter a fine up to \$10,000 for each offense. The proposal also stipulates that a minimum of 50 percent of any monetary fines recovered will be dedicated to supporting victims of, and witnesses to, gang-related activity. Additionally, courts will



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have the discretion to order seizure and forfeiture of any property that is directly or indirectly used to facilitate streetgang-related activity and any property derived from gross profits or other proceeds obtained from gang-related criminal conduct.

“Streetgangs take a devastating toll on our communities. Residents suffer trauma and mental health consequences while the City incurs substantial police and other costs and resources in addressing unlawful gang-related activity,” said Deputy Mayor of Public Safety John O’Malley. “We are going to deploy every tool at our disposal to help address these issues while promoting community safety and supporting victims, witnesses, and survivors.”

"I am proud to support the Victims Justice Ordinance in an effort to bring peace to our streets and serve justice to our residents most affected by this violence," Alderman Ervin, 28th Ward. "The profits that gangs make is at the expense of our security, and it is only right to recoup those profits and return them to our neighborhoods."

“This ordinance will make major progress in the City’s efforts to reduce violence caused by streetgangs,” said Alderman Taliaferro, 29th Ward. “I am happy to be working on this with Mayor Lightfoot on this initiative and this will be an important tool to cut streetgangs off at the source and making the city safe for our residents again.”

This strategic new approach builds upon the Mayor’s ongoing efforts to create opportunities that help steer Chicago’s youth away from gang membership and the violence that it perpetrates. Since taking office in 2019, Mayor Lightfoot has increased funding by 1400% for community approaches to violence reduction, including investing nearly \$25 million in 2020 and 2021 to build out the City’s street outreach and victim services provider network. Those services not only support efforts to prevent individuals who are at the highest risk of committing and becoming victims of gang violence but provide trauma-informed services to victims of that violence and their families.

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