

## **STATEMENT FROM BACP ACTING COMMISSIONER KENNETH J. MEYER**

### **2022 BUDGET PROPOSAL TO THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON BUDGET AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

**OCTOBER 5, 2021**

Good morning, Chairwoman Dowell, Vice Chairwoman Silverstein, and members of the Chicago City Council.

My name is Ken Meyer, and I am Acting Commissioner for the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, also known as BACP. I am joined by members of my team.

I would like to thank Mayor Lightfoot for her leadership and support, both throughout this budget process and as we continue to address the many challenges facing this city. I would also like to thank all of you for your advocacy on behalf of your communities and your hard work passing important legislation to support Chicago businesses, workers, and consumers.

BACP is directly involved in some of the most pressing issues facing our city. The Department's core functions include licensing businesses, supporting small business growth, regulating the public passenger vehicle industry, and protecting the rights of workers. In addition, BACP continues to support the City's response to COVID-19 and protect public safety. We are the chief advocate for Chicago businesses, consumers, and workers and partner closely with community organizations that support these groups.

At last month's public budget forums, whether on the South, West, or North sides, I heard residents asking the City to address their community concerns. To do so, we must lay the groundwork for inclusive economic development that will empower historically disenfranchised communities and support our small businesses across the city. We must invest not only in Chicago, but in all Chicagoans.

That is why the Chicago Recovery Plan, which leverages federal American Rescue Plan funding, is so important. The Chicago Recovery Plan lays the foundation for long-term growth and investment through use of ARP funding to support small business needs. It will provide targeted economic relief and neighborhood development support through a holistic approach for an equitable recovery for Chicago's entrepreneurs.

Contracting opportunities is one of many tools available to grow and scale businesses, specifically Black- and Hispanic-owned small businesses. We are delighted to partner with the new Office of Contracting Equity in the Department of Procurement Services to help serve as an advocate for MBEs and WBEs to increase access to contracts for minority- and women-owned businesses. Our Small Business Advocacy team will do so by providing targeted technical assistance and capacity building for MBEs and WBEs.

As the City's one-stop shop for businesses, we provide businesses the support they need to open and grow their business. We have issued over 4,500 new licenses so far this year – that's licenses to new business entities looking to get their start in Chicago – with nearly 17,000 on-line license transactions from January to July of this year.

Five years ago, BACP launched Chicago Business Direct, an easy and business friendly online licensing portal. As part of our ongoing commitment to serve businesses through the pandemic, this platform

enabled BACP to process new and renewing business licenses. We have also held well over 100 community meetings through our first-of-its-kind remote adjudication process since March 2020 and rolled out a new online permitting system for Public Way Use.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have conducted over 35,000 outreach calls to businesses as part of the BACP Active Compliance Program, a proactive educational effort that helps business owners keep their consumers, employees, and neighbors safe through non-disciplinary consultations.

We have conducted over 10,000 COVID-19 related investigations and issued over 1,000 citations since the beginning of the pandemic. The business community's dedication to compliance and spirit of service has not gone unnoticed, and I applaud our businesses for doing what has been necessary to save lives.

This summer, the Chi Biz Strong Initiative passed and has been steering our business recovery efforts. The bold plan rises to the occasion demanded by an unprecedented crisis to jumpstart growth and build a recovery that is rapid, equitable, and enduring. I thank you all for your support on these critical measures and I look forward to their continued implementation as part of our recovery.

The Chi Biz Strong Initiative also involved historic reforms for Chicago's workers – including Chicago's first ever wage theft law. We also have launched the City's first outreach and education pilot, partnering with Arise Chicago and the Chicago Foundation for Women to reach domestic workers and inform them of their rights. We have continued to protect workers through the City's existing labor protections. In two recent settlements for Paid Sick Leave violations, the BACP Office of Labor Standards won \$935,000 in restitution for almost 3,000 Chicago workers.

This year we launched eight Chicago Business Centers, which will bring much needed licensing support to the neighborhoods that have experienced historical disinvestment and to historically underserved entrepreneurs. Since their launch in March, the Chicago Business Centers have already served over 1,000 entrepreneurs.

When COVID-19 began, we quickly adapted our outreach and education efforts to keep Chicagoans informed. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have held over 250 webinars on everything from financial support programs to COVID-19 mitigation measures and worker protections, reaching over 28,000 individuals. We have also sent over 500 email communications to Chicago's business community, worker advocates, and consumers. The CHIBIZ text alert system, with over 9,500 numbers registered, has helped get real-time information to Chicagoans during emergencies. We will continue our strong outreach tactics as we implement programs under the Chicago Recovery Plan.

I am proud of the BACP team and the work we have done, and I want to thank Mayor Lightfoot for her steady leadership and the Chicago City Council for your tireless work during our recovery. We must continue to do everything we can to support our struggling businesses and workers, and I look forward to working collaboratively with all of you to accomplish that.

Thank you for your time. My staff and I are happy to answer your questions.

###