

Budget Statement by Rachel Arfa, Commissioner

Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

Good morning, Chairman Ervin and the Honorable members of the Committee on Budget and Government Operations and the full City Council. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) budget request for the fiscal year 2024.

MOPD's vision is to make the City of Chicago the most accessible and inclusive city in the world. MOPD strives to ensure full participation and equal opportunities in all aspects of life for people with disabilities. We advocate for and directly support programs that improve quality of life and open pathways for innovation and partnership. With a goal of inspiring positive change in Chicago, we work to ensure the rights of the disability community are equitably represented across City services, initiatives, and policies.

People with disabilities live in every single one of our 77 community areas. Disability is the only group that anyone can become a member of at any time. Disability is both visible and invisible. Many people are born with a disability, or may acquire a disability through age, or as a victim of gun/community violence. Our data partners at the Chicago Department of Public Health collected disability data for the first time starting in 2021, and demonstrate the impact of disability on Chicago residents and allows us to make data-driven decisions in order to meet our community's needs. According to our data, 26.8% (570,045) of adults reported at least one disability citywide, and in 33 of Chicago's 77 community areas, adults report a higher prevalence of disability. In some neighborhoods, more than 50% of residents report living with disability. The highest percentage of disability is in Burnside (56%) and South Deering (50.1), while Austin has the largest number of residents with disabilities at nearly 28,000 residents with disabilities.

41% of people in Chicago who identify as having a disability are over age 65, which is expected, given age-related disabilities. What we did not expect to learn is that the second largest group of people with disabilities by age is 18-24 year olds, at 39%. This proves that anyone can become disabled at any age, including our elderly and young adults. Further, adults living with disabilities in Chicago were found to experience significantly lower rates of community connection, have lower perceptions of neighborhood safety, and less access to resources including food, internet, and transportation.

Our work focuses on addressing these critical disparities and remedying access barriers. I'm proud to share with you the impact that our services have on meeting these barriers along with our commitment to building on this work in 2024:

Increasing Job and Career Opportunities for Job Seekers with Disabilities:

The MOPD Career Center assists job seekers with disabilities who reside in Chicago and are at least 16 years old in finding employment, and opened on July 26, 2022. The MOPD Career Center provides assistance including: help with resume writing, job applications and practice interviews. From January 1, 2023 through August 31, 2023, the MOPD Career Center served 209 job seekers, who reside in 47 wards,

providing a variety of career readiness services. 53 individuals obtained employment in food services, hospitality, tourism and customer service. Nationwide, the average time that a person with or without a disability spends looking for a job is six months. Our Career Center model has achieved remarkable results in that on average, a job seeker with a disability is placed in employment after starting services with us, in just 81 days.

The Career Center is committed to serving job seekers of any age including youth with disabilities who may enter the workforce, and ensure they have information about tools and resources available including their civil rights as individuals with disabilities.

Accessibility Compliance Unit

The Accessibility Compliance Unit works collaboratively to improve the City's built environment, using a cross-disciplinary team comprised of project managers, architects, and accessibility inspectors. Services include assessments of City of Chicago buildings, providing technical assistance on accessibility regulations, and conducting pre-permit reviews for developers and architects. ACU also completed 44 assessments of 34 public-facing City of Chicago facilities (multiple departments are often located in one building), under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II guidelines. From January 1, ^t to September 30th, ACU worked at a rapid pace, conducting 221 pre-permit plan reviews and 419 permit plan reviews submitted by developers and architects. Continuing a new initiative and priority focus, MOPD completed 39 site inspections and evaluations for City Funded Multifamily Residential Units during multiple stages of the construction process, to ensure that affordable and accessible housing is built, and assistance is also provided to accessible housing seekers. The ACU team also responded to 243 Requests for technical assistance and completed 25 BACP-Public Way Permit Reviews (e.g. sidewalk and A-frame permits, outdoor restaurant permits).

Making More Homes Accessible through the Home Modification Program

The MOPD Home Modification (HomeMod) Program makes accessibility modifications to all types of housing for Chicago residents with disabilities, who require modifications so they can continue to live in their home independently. From January 1, 2023 to August 31, 2023, 75 home modifications have been completed, and, and weather depending, we are on track to complete approximately 190 modifications by the end of 2023. This program previously only served individuals with disabilities up to age 59, and senior citizens were served through the Department of Housing ramp program. The most common type of modification is vertical lifts, which removes barriers for individuals with disabilities in entering and leaving their homes.

In late 2022, for efficiency purposes the vertical lift at DOH was consolidated at MOPD, which allows MOPD to serve individuals with disabilities of any age and senior citizens who acquire disabilities. In 2023, \$3,598,632 was allocated for this program, a record investment, and in 2024, we are increasing this amount by \$47,368, for a total new record investment of \$3,646,000. This funding is from several resources including: CDBG, corporate, CHA, and DOH. MOPD also provides services to Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) residents in making accessible modifications.

Addressing Barriers Because of Disability:

The Disability Resource Unit provides personal assistance services, assistive tools and technology and home delivered meals to people with disabilities. Personal Assistants provide up to six hours of help per

week, and includes tasks such as food shopping, meal preparation and housekeeping. From January 1st to August 31st, 2023, through MOPD's funding, 7552 hours of services were provided to over 100 individuals with disabilities. Information and referral services were provided to 1,594 callers with disabilities. From January 1-August 31 of this year. 177 clients received 2,175 home delivered meals through a partnership with Meals on Wheels.

MOPD has been working to address the disproportionately high rate of food insecurity in the disability community and has launched two initiatives. One is a pilot program with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) serving 16 individuals with disabilities who identify as being food insecure who reside on the south and west sides of Chicago.

A second pilot program, that addresses both food insecurity along with travel and accessible food pantries was launched to provide home delivery of food pantry boxes. This innovative program, was launched with the Thierry Foundation, Vivery, along with the Community Safety Coordination Committee (CSCC), and four local pantries based in the Austin community and 2 produce partners. 100 individuals with disabilities received services, and a six month extension was made possible through much appreciated financial support from CGFD. Current funding ends in December 2023 and efforts are underway to identify ongoing external city funding. This initiative is unexpectedly a job creator, creating at least 38 jobs filled by residents of Austin and Garfield Park communities.

MOPD is also hiring a project coordinator position to serve victims of gun/community violence who acquire disability – this position is made possible through an earmark supported by Senator Duckworth. Once the position is filled, we will be able to expand services for this important priority. MOPD is also working on solutions to address gaps in public safety services. MOPD's budget includes \$250,000 in funding to increase accessible transportation options for wheelchair and power chair users who experience medical and other emergencies, which will be distributed to a delegate agency that will be selected in a future RFP process. We will collaborate with our public safety and transportation agencies and stakeholders to build out this new model.

Access Officer Program

The Access Officer program, launched in 2021, is an inter-agency collaborative, designing a member of each Commissioner's leadership team (at the Deputy Commissioner level or equivalent) as their department's point person on disability access, including public-facing services. Quarterly trainings are held on topics including Title II facility assessments, providing accessible meetings and services, and disability awareness training. Through the Access Officer program, MOPD staff trained 404 City departments including such as Civilian Office of Police Accountability, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Administrative Hearings, Chicago Fire Department and Department of Family and Support Services. MOPD also provides disability awareness training to community organizations and in 2023 provided 14 trainings to 491 individuals.

Diverse Learners Cash Assistance Program

MOPD will be giving \$500 grants to students with disabilities who meet income guidelines and are enrolled in school in Chicago, funded through \$5 million dollars in CRP. We have completed our RFP and selected a delegate agency; applications to apply for funding will begin in the first quarter of 2024. This will also allow MOPD to expand our connections with students with disabilities long-term.

Communication Access Team – American Sign Language Interpretation

This year, MOPD hired 2 American Sign Language interpreters, for a total of 4 ASL interpreters on staff, who identify as Black and Latino, representing the diversity of the City. This has resulted in an effective model in providing information about City programs and services available in ASL, in partnership with the Mayor's Office and City departments. This year, MOPD provided 822 hours of interpretation.

Finally, I thank Mayor Brandon Johnson, and the staff of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities for their hard work on behalf of our City. My deepest gratitude for all of your support of MOPD today and every day.