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# LGBTQ+ Policy

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Like anyone else, my identity and experiences have helped shape how I see the world. As an out and proud black lesbian, I understand the importance of safeguarding the civil rights of the LGBTQ+ community, and I recognize that while significant progress has been made, more important work must be done. Although all members of the LGBTQ+ community continue to face struggles in today's society, the challenges are especially acute for our youth, members of the trans community and LGBTQ+ people of color. Our collective lived experience and acknowledgement of the continuing challenges we face will inform my administration's efforts to serve and protect the LGBTQ+ community.

People of color experience LGBTQ+ discrimination differently than our white counterparts, and this shows up in employment, the wage gap, access to health care, and interactions with the government and criminal justice system. This lived awareness will inform my administration's efforts to serve the LGBTQ+ community.

Based on my own personal experiences and those shared with me by friends, colleagues, and leaders within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans communities, I know that we need to address an array of issues. What follows are some immediate priorities:

1. Guarantee **visibility and participation** in city government
2. Bolster **safety and justice for the trans community**
3. Protect and support **LGBTQ+ youth**
4. Promote **wellness and health**
5. Address the needs of **LGBTQ+ seniors**
6. Ensure **LGBTQ+ veterans** get a fair deal

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## 1. Guarantee Visibility and Participation in City Government

Increasing visibility for the LGBTQ+ community is one of our strongest tools to create safe and welcoming spaces and to increase acceptance in our communities. In order to further the cause of equality I will actively recruit LGBTQ+ staff to serve in my administration, including the appointment of three mayoral LGBTQ+ liaisons who will work directly with communities on the South, West, and North Sides to ensure that a broad base of perspectives inform the development of policy affecting members of the LGBTQ+ communities. As part of this work, the liaisons will hold regular meetings with community members and LGBTQ+ groups in their neighborhoods. Importantly, the liaisons will coordinate with city departments — including the Chicago Police Department (“CPD”) and the Chicago Department of Public Health (“CDPH”) — to improve outcomes for LGBTQ+ Chicagoans and help to heal the deep scars that so many feel from years of oppression under the law.

By increasing LGBTQ+ visibility and participation in city government, I hope to remind all Chicagoans that they can turn to the city if they experience discrimination. Although Chicago has strong anti-discrimination laws on the books, not everyone is aware of their rights. The Chicago Commission on Human Relations will be held to task to continue the important work of educating Chicagoans about their rights and aggressively investigate allegations of discrimination. The city will offset the costs associated with this work through the collection of fines as permitted under existing anti-discriminatory ordinances. If necessary, my administration will encourage City Council to increase the fines associated with each transgression and repeat offenders.<sup>1</sup> Any city vendor found to purposefully and systematically violate the City’s Human Rights Ordinance will be barred from future contracts for at least five years.

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## 2. Bolster Safety and Justice for the Transgender Community

While awareness and respect for the transgender community has grown, trans individuals, especially transwomen of color, continue to face unique challenges. For example, 2017 was the deadliest year for trans and gender non-conforming people nationwide.<sup>2</sup> 22 transgender people have been murdered this year, and we know that members of the transgender community experience unacceptable rates of harassment and violence. According to one survey, 46% of trans respondents had experienced harassment and 9% had been attacked physically in the last year.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Justice’s 2017 report on the CPD revealed that trans people regularly receive subpar, and humiliating, responses from the very city departments tasked with protecting all our citizens, including those who are trans and gender non-conforming.<sup>4</sup> This cannot continue. The CPD serves all Chicagoans, and I will set high standards for how police officers treat members of the trans community. Police need to have the right training to understand and help trans people when they are in distress, and I will work with organizations like the Center on Halsted and Chicago House to ensure that this training is thorough and meets the needs of the trans community that the CPD serves.

Additionally, my administration will institute safeguards to ensure that each hate crime incident and complaint is fully and properly investigated. My mayoral LGBTQ liaisons will be actively involved in ensuring that each case is properly tracked and victims and witnesses receive the

support and resources they need. Liaisons will coordinate with the appropriate CPD district commander to ensure that properly trained detectives investigate each incident and complaint. In instances where a police officer is suspected of a hate crime, the Mayoral Liaisons will ensure that the Bureau of Internal Affairs or Civilian Office of Police Accountability (“COPA”) conducts a thorough investigation.

I am calling for the creation of a Task Force to investigate the recent murders of two transwomen of color, Dejanay Stanton and Ciara Minaj Carter. We need to devote resources and police personnel to this issue so that Chicagoans of all gender identities, races, and income levels feel safe. Transwomen of color are being targeted, and my administration will work with organizations already doing much work to make sure that needs are being met and that concerns are being listened to and addressed.

As I laid out in my plan Strategy for Public Safety in Every Neighborhood, to increase public safety in Chicago, my administration’s approach to crime recognizes violence as the public health crisis that it is. Working within this framework, my administration will ensure coordination between CPD, the Chicago Department of Public Health, and the Department of Family and Support Services (“DFSS”) to see that trans victims of crime receive the comprehensive support they deserve.

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### 3. Protect and Support LGBTQ+ Youth

While overall, as a community we have made progress in safeguarding the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and families, it is certainly not easy being an LGBTQ+ youth, even in 2018. From online bullying to homelessness, my administration will start by tackling some of the biggest challenges facing LGBTQ youth in Chicago. Central to my administration’s strategy, we will empower youth to identify the resources they need to address the issues they face.

#### A. Launch Anti-Bullying Campaigns

According to a 2013 survey by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (“GLSEN”), over 74% of LGBTQ+ students experienced verbal harassment in the prior year due to their sexual orientation, and over 55% due to their gender expression. According to the same survey, 49% of LGBTQ+ students were victims of cyberbullying.<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this treatment can severely affect the education and mental health of LGBTQ+ youth.<sup>6</sup>

Research demonstrates that LGBTQ+ students feel safer in schools that offer an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum.<sup>7</sup> In order to help end bullying in schools, I support an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum in Chicago Public Schools, such as the Inclusive Curriculum Bill being championed by Equality Illinois and the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance in Springfield. CPS students should have the opportunity to learn about the LGBTQ+ people who shaped Chicago and world history — and about the first gay rights organization in the United States, the Society for Human Rights, which was located in what is now the Old Town neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

## B. Work to Establish 24-hour Drop-in Centers and Support Innovative Solutions for LGBTQ+ Youth

As a city, we need to do more to provide support and services to LGBTQ+ teenagers because, tragically, even today, many of them do not receive the love and respect they deserve at home. Family rejection is one reason LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in national homeless youth statistics.<sup>9</sup> According to a recent study from the University of Chicago, LGBTQ+ youth (ages 13-25) face a 120% increased risk of experiencing homelessness compared to those youth who identify as heterosexual or cisgender.<sup>10</sup> When I am mayor, these young people will have places to turn for support and comfort.

Working with CPS in conjunction with community and non-profits like the Night Ministry, the Broadway Youth Center, and Stand Up for Kids, we will create 24-hour drop-in centers on the South, West, and North Sides.<sup>11</sup> These centers will provide youth a place to sleep, lockers to store their belongings, and access to social services. Working with the CDPH, DFSS and other city agencies, my liaisons will help secure and direct funding to equip each selected center with the resources needed to effectively serve local LGBTQ+ youth. Early in the process, liaisons will conduct outreach with area LGBTQ+ youth to help identify needs and will involve youth of all sexual and gender identities in the design, fundraising, and marketing of each center. I will aggressively pursue creative funding models to make these centers a reality — a mix of City, State, Federal, and private funds will help cover the costs. We must support and utilize innovative solutions, such as Pride Action Tank's Tiny Homes Summit and the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative, so that we have an array of solutions for an array of personal circumstances.

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## 4. Promote Wellness and Health

### A. Rebuild Community Relations

We have come a long way since the height of the AIDS epidemic, but we should not rest until we eliminate the health disparities between LGBTQ+ people and heterosexuals. For example, we know that LGBTQ+ individuals have higher rates of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; gay men have a higher risk of getting HIV and other STDs (gay men of color even more so); and trans individuals are left uninsured at higher rates than either heterosexuals or members of the LGBTQ+ communities.<sup>12</sup> Our people are at risk, and we must do more to ensure that their healthcare needs are met. Despite many LGBTQ+ women (84%) believing their risk for HIV transmission is “zero,” studies show that black LGBTQ+ women make up between 20-40% of new HIV diagnoses among women.<sup>13</sup> As mayor, I will address this frightening statistic and work with organizations that represent and serve women of color, such as Affinity Community Services.

I will ensure that the CDPH will partner with local institutions to complete a detailed study of healthcare outcomes for LGBTQ+ Chicagoans as compared to heterosexual Chicagoans. The analysis will include breakdowns in health outcomes across sexual orientation, gender identity, race, age, immigration status, income and other relevant factors. The analysis will also consider health-related behaviors, such as smoking, drug use, physical exercise, and insurance rates. CDPH will incorporate the study's findings into a strategy to improve and safeguard the health of all Chicagoans. The CDPH will collaborate with other departments and agencies to develop a step-by-step plan for reducing, and when possible eliminating, each uncovered disparity.

In an effort to reduce health disparities, the city will ramp up its efforts to effectively eliminate new HIV infections by 2027.<sup>14</sup> To be honest, black and brown communities in Chicago will not see a new infection rate of “zero” unless we address head-on the stigma that still exists around HIV/AIDS. Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (“PrEP”) is an important part of a multipronged approach to stop the spread of HIV, and everyone across the city needs to be aware of it and have affordable access to it. Starting immediately, the city will coordinate closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health and local partners, including the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and Howard Brown Health, to evaluate Chicagoans’ access to PrEP. Building on the PrEP4Love campaign, the city will coordinate with all levels of government, local organizations, and insurers to increase access to PrEP, regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

We need innovative solutions to the challenges facing our community in 2019. CHA and partner organizations like Chicago House provide HIV+ clients with housing, but we need to be getting ahead of the curve and providing housing and supportive services to individuals at high-risk of contracting the virus. If we can move people from the “high-risk” to “average risk” column, we will improve lives, save money, and ultimately create a more equitable Chicago.

My administration will proactively track health trends to identify and mitigate emerging health threats before they pose a bigger threat to our community. The city will increase its collaboration with local healthcare providers, community groups, and state and federal health agencies to maximize communication and rapid responses to new health concerns, such as HPV-related cancers and drug-resistant STIs.

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## 5. Address the Needs of LGBTQ+ Seniors

The needs of the LGBTQ+ senior community are also unique and differ from their heterosexual counterparts. Too many from our communities lack familial support or experience gender and sexual identity discrimination in senior care facilities. According to one survey, 78% of seniors living in long-term care facilities do not feel comfortable being out about their sexual orientation or gender identification with staff.<sup>15</sup> Discrimination, along with the financial constraints that many seniors endure, makes the issue of affordable housing especially salient for LGBTQ+ seniors.

To start, I will ensure that city staff and vendors providing services to LGBTQ+ seniors receive specialized training. Drawing on expertise from within Chicago’s LGBTQ+ community, this training will prepare caretakers and administrators to address the unique challenges LGBTQ+ seniors face.

In an effort to eliminate discrimination in nursing home facilities across Chicago, the mayoral LGBTQ+ liaisons, working in collaboration with the Commission on Human Relations and DFSS, will conduct outreach and trainings at senior care facilities in their area to ensure that facility managers, staff, and residents understand all applicable anti-discrimination regulations. Through this outreach, seniors will learn how to file a discrimination complaint with the proper city agency so complaints can be thoroughly investigated.

At the end of the day, Chicago needs more housing options for low-income LGBTQ+ seniors. Full stop. Building upon the work of Heartland Alliance, the Center on Halsted, and the city that led to construction of the Town Hall Apartments in Boystown, my administration will work with

community groups across Chicago to identify and create more affordable housing options for LGBTQ+ seniors. Furthermore, as will be discussed in my housing policy, my administration will seek to change the city's zoning codes and building requirements to allow for the use of innovative types of housing, construction materials and construction methods to build housing that is truly affordable in all parts of the city.

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## 6. Ensure LGBTQ+ Veterans Get a Fair Deal

The LGBTQ+ community is large and diverse, and my administration will represent all members. This includes ensuring that LGBTQ+ veterans receive the support and benefits they have earned.

Under my administration, the Chicago Office of Veterans Affairs will provide culturally appropriate services and accurate information for LGBTQ+ veterans, including information about benefits, social support programs, legal resources, and mental health counseling. To raise awareness of the city's efforts, I will increase access to information for LGBTQ+ veterans at partner organizations in the LGBTQ+ and veteran communities.

The city will connect veterans who were discharged under the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy to resources to upgrade their separation paperwork. This process can seem daunting, but is required for unjustly discharged veterans and their loved ones to receive all the rights and privileges afforded to them. Drawing from Chicago's extensive and experienced legal community, I will work with non-profit groups to establish pro-bono assistance to help veterans complete the necessary processes to get their fair deal.

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### A final note:

We are a diverse LGBTQ+ community and my experiences do not speak for all who count themselves as members. I've listened to and will continue to listen to LGBTQ+ leaders and grassroots organizers from across Chicago, and I hope that this policy framework provides a launching point for more discussions on how to achieve our shared goals. The LGBTQ+ community will always be a priority for my administration, and as mayor, I will continue look to those who are already doing so much good in our communities to guide policy on issues of importance for LGBTQ+ Chicagoans.

<sup>1</sup> Violators of Chicago's Human Rights Ordinance (MCC 2-160) currently face fines ranging from \$100 to \$1000 for each offense.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2018>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Executive-Summary-Dec17.pdf> (p. 3)

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/925846/download> (p. 15)

<sup>5</sup> See [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report_0.pdf) (p. xvii)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.glsen.org/article/glsen-releases-new-national-school-climate-survey>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.chicagotribune.com/bluesky/originals/chi-top-20-countdown-innovation-07-bis-htm1story.html>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://projectfiercechicago.org/problem-statement/>

<sup>10</sup> *Voices of Youth Count*, Nov. 2017, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago at p.13. [http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall\\_VoYC\\_NationalReport\\_Final.pdf](http://voicesofyouthcount.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/11/ChapinHall_VoYC_NationalReport_Final.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> To leverage the impact, my administration will explore how these centers can serve other local needs. When feasible, the creation of new centers will entail increasing the size and scope of the City's existing Community Service Centers (see [https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/fss/provdrs/serv/svcs/community\\_servicecenterlocations.html](https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/fss/provdrs/serv/svcs/community_servicecenterlocations.html))

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-health>

<sup>13</sup> (Kaiser Network. (2001). "Lesbian and Bisexual Women May Practice Unsafe Sex, 84% Unaware of Risks". Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report: Science & Medicine. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Available at [http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily\\_reports/print\\_report.cfm?DR\\_ID=2538&dr\\_cat=1](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/print_report.cfm?DR_ID=2538&dr_cat=1))

<sup>14</sup> See [https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2017/september/GettingtoZero.html](https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2017/september/GettingtoZero.html)

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/How-Can-Legal-Services-Better-Meet-the-Needs-of-Low-Income-LGBT-Seniors.pdf> (p. 6)