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**MAYOR EMANUEL AND THRIVE CHICAGO ANNOUNCE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH SUMMIT TO
DRIVE CITYWIDE ACTION**

Summit will help inform a citywide plan for putting disengaged youth 16-24 in connection with jobs and education; Mayor to highlight urgent need for increased investment by both federal and state governments

Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), and Thrive Chicago have announced an Opportunity Youth Summit to release recommendations by a joint working group to systemically reconnect Opportunity Youth to work and school. The working group's recommendations will be finalized and presented at the Opportunity Youth Summit held on March 14.

The Summit will build upon the City's recent efforts to engage opportunity youth with jobs and services, including employing nearly 1,000 opportunity youth last summer through the One Summer Chicago program. In the weeks ahead of the Summit, Mayor Emanuel is urging federal and state governments to join the City of Chicago in addressing the urgent need to engage tens of thousands of disengaged "Opportunity Youth" with opportunities to work and go to school.

"Over the past five years the City of Chicago has invested to ensure every young person is prepared with an education that will earn them meaningful employment and a ticket to the middle class," said Mayor Emanuel. "But at the same time we have increased our efforts, support by federal and state partners has diminished. The city can do a lot, but we can't do it alone. The state and the federal governments need to do their part, it can mean the difference between a life of poverty and a life of prosperity."

The Summit will deliver the working group's recommendations for a citywide strategy after 7 months of work, and following a review of the latest research in the field. To deliver recommendations, the working group convened key leaders, elected officials, practitioners and policy makers to begin implementing the recommendations of the working group.

"The City is proud of our work to expand youth employment and mentoring opportunities in our

most at-risk neighborhoods, but we know there is more to be done to reach the thousands of youth without a plan for school completion or employment,” said DFSS Commissioner Lisa Morrison Butler, who serves as a co-chair on the Opportunity Youth working group. “Under Mayor Emanuel’s leadership, we have taken many pivotal steps forward to engage youth and increase youth employment across our neighborhoods, which is why we look forward to launching a citywide action plan for Opportunity Youth so that each of our young people will have a plan for success.”

Led by the City of Chicago and Thrive Chicago, a citywide collective impact initiative, the Opportunity Youth Working Group first convened in July 2016 and is a cross-sector collaborative of Community Based Organizations, government agencies, researchers and foundations. The Opportunity Youth Working Group first gave name to the Opportunity Youth target population as 16-24 year olds who are out of work and out of school. Ultimately, the recommendations of the group will help form a plan for citywide action to reconnect Opportunity Youth to work and school in neighborhoods across Chicago.

“We’re proud to serve the community based organizations, city agencies, researchers and funders that are all a part of this citywide effort to reconnect Opportunity Youth to work and school,” said Sandra Abrevaya, President of Thrive Chicago. “The collaborative task is to identify the best path forward to turning the tide for nearly tens of thousands of young people who are not connected to school or work —putting them at greater risk for a life in poverty.”

As part of its work over the last 7 months, the Opportunity Youth Working Group partnered with local research institutions to conduct a segmentation analysis to better understand the population uncovering several insights, including that Chicago’s Opportunity Youth are racially and gender diverse and include young adults who have already received their high school diploma and just looking for employment.

“The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership proudly joins Thrive in its efforts to provide solutions to the challenges facing Chicagoland’s Opportunity Youth,” said Karin Norington-Reaves, CEO of the Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership. “As the City’s and Thrive’s employer partner we continue to connect employers to young adults while placing youth on meaningful career paths. The Summit will undoubtedly assist in highlighting the role employers can play in changing young people’s lives.”

Federal support of youth and employment programs has declined in recent years while local investment by the City of Chicago has increased to make up for the decline. For example, in 2009 the federal government provided the City with nearly \$20 million to support summer jobs. Today, that support level has dropped to zero. While it is clear that the federal government must do more, the Summit will seek to coordinate local efforts and municipal government to implement re-engagement programming and systems of support for at-risk youth.

The Youth Employment Hearing hosted by the Chicago Urban League on Monday will highlight a new report by the University of Illinois Chicago on Opportunity Youth. UIC’s latest findings underscore the urgency of reaching these target youth through meaningful employment and education pathways, which the Opportunity Youth Working Group has been working on developing recommendations around for the past several months.

While research on this subset of youth is still in its infancy, the UIC report acknowledges progress in the City of Chicago toward improving employment for African American youths ages 16-19, for

example, who are among the single most disproportionately impacted by unemployment. Investments by the Emanuel Administration and the City of Chicago in recent years--including the more than doubling of the Mayor's One Summer Chicago youth employment program from 14,500 in 2011 to more than 31,000 this past summer-- have targeted youth in this age group, suggesting that this work is paying off. Additionally, investments in public education have realized improvements to the graduation rate at Chicago Public Schools by one-third, from just over half graduating in 2011 to 73.5 percent in 2016.

More details on the Opportunity Youth Summit will be released by Thrive Chicago in the coming weeks.

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