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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER EXPANDING ACCESS TO U/T
VISA CERTIFICATION**

The Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, Department of Administrative Hearings, and Civilian Office of Police Accountability to begin certifying U/T Visas

CHICAGO — Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot signed an Executive Order, expanding access to U/T Visa certification for immigrant survivors of crimes. Chicago is home to nearly 170,000 undocumented immigrants, many of whom unfortunately have become, or are vulnerable to becoming, victims of crime. Those who survive certain criminal activity can file a petition for U Nonimmigrant Status (U visa) with the United States Citizens and Immigration Services (USCIS) if they cooperate in the detection, investigation, prosecution, or sentencing of a qualifying criminal activity.

If approved, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services grants U visa recipients with work authorization, social security numbers, protection against deportation, and they may be eligible to apply for Lawful Permanent Residence after three years of maintaining U visa status. Victims of severe forms of human trafficking are provided relief under U.S. immigration law by the Victims of Trafficking in Persons (T) nonimmigrant visa. This status allows victims of human trafficking to remain in the United States to assist in investigations or prosecutions of human trafficking violators and grants them similar benefits of relief.

Today, Mayor Lightfoot took an important step to expand access by directing The Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP), Department of Administrative Hearings, and Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) to establish protocols to sign U/T visa certifications and encourage sister agencies with investigation authority to create similar policies. The City remains committed to the needs of its communities through the development of a system of policies that increase fairness, effectiveness, and inclusion for a particularly marginalized population.

“By directing additional departments to establish protocols and designate certification officials, we further the City’s commitment to justice and inclusion of



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undocumented immigrants,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Expanding access to the U visa could benefit the City in multiple ways, including by empowering residents to file good-faith criminal reports or civil complaints while increasing forms of legal relief outside of the criminal justice system.”

“The National Immigrant Justice Center supports this Executive Order as an opportunity to expand access to U visa certifications for immigrants who are victims of qualifying criminal activity and assist in the investigation of those crimes. Expanding the roster of authorized agencies who can sign U visa certifications will allow immigrant community members to safely report crimes, without fear of deportation,” said Mary Meg McCarthy, Executive Director at the National Immigrant Justice Center. “We welcome these new avenues to protection for immigrant Chicagoans, even as we continue to call on the Chicago Police Department to improve its own U visa certification processes in order to be compliant with state and federal law.”

“Immigrant survivors face isolation, fear, restrictive immigration laws, and language barriers that often prevent them from seeking help. We are grateful to Mayor Lightfoot for expanding the number of departments that can support the U and T visa certification process in order to provide stability and safety to survivors,” said Neha Gill, Executive Director at Apna Ghar.

“It’s imperative that survivors of labor and sex trafficking have options for relief and justice,” said Catherine Longkumer, Managing Attorney at Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services. “I commend Mayor Lightfoot for providing police alternatives to trafficking survivors. Expanding City departments that sign certifications will create additional systems of support that allow immigrant survivors to build stable lives.”

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