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 ACCESS LIVING

 DISABILITY CANDIDATES FORUM

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 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Good afternoon and welcome everyone. We have

 five minutes before we start. Five minutes.

 >> KAREN TAMLEY: We'll be starting momentarily, everyone please take

 their seats.

 Okay. Good afternoon everybody.

 >> ALL: Good afternoon.

 >> KAREN TAMLEY: I don't know if you can see me way in the back, but

 I'm Karen Tamley. I'm President and CEO of Access Living. And I want

 to welcome all of you to today's candidate's forum for the office of

 Chicago's mayor, covering issues of importance to our disability

 community.

 Today we have over 300 people attending, whether you're here in

 person or those of you who are watching online, virtually. And I want

 to welcome all of you for being here today.

 A little bit about Access Living. We're a nonprofit, nonresidential

 independent living center that's run and led by disabled people. We

 support our disabilities community by providing critical independent

 living services, educating on disability issues, and leading policy

 initiatives that will make our city, state and nation more just,

 inclusive and accessible.

 With over 61 million disabled people across the United States, we

 represent one of the most diverse and fastest growing segments of the

 population.

 I'd like to welcome and thank the candidates who have taken the time

 to be with us here today.

 And to share how they will or are addressing or plan to address key

 issues of importance to Chicagoans with disabilities and their

 families. The mayor of our city undoubtedly has a tremendous impact on

 many aspects of our life and liveability of our city as disabled

 people. Having you all here will help inform our community as we

 prepare to vote in the Chicago municipal election on February 28th.

 The questions that will be asked of these seven candidates will come

 directly from the disability community. And touch on some of the most

 pressing issues and barriers we face.

 Please know that Access Living's website as more extensive written

 responses from the candidates, on a disability -- disability issues

 questionnaire, which was a prerequisite for participating in today's

 forum. So be sure to check that out at AccessLiving.org. You can find

 there the candidates's campaign websites and soon you can also find a

 recording of today's forum.

 Before we get started, I'd like to take a moment to thank our

 sponsors and partners for their support of today's forum and elevating

 issues in their own work. Our sponsors are, Active Transportation

 Alliance, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Disability Lead, Equip for

 Equality, the Illinois Network for Centers for Independents Living and

 the Statewide Living Center of Illinois. The Ark of Illinois, Better

 Street Chicago, the Chicago Fair Housing Alliance, the League of Women

 Voters, Legal Action Chicago and the Legal Council for Health Justice.

 I'd like to take a moment to thank the many Access Living staff who

 have worked tirelessly over the past several months to put today's

 forum on.

 With that, I'd like to now introduce our moderator, who is behind me.

 Andrés Gallegos. Andrés is a former board chair of Access Living.

 Andrés is a staunch advocate for the rights of disabled people on the

 local and federal level. He serves as a partner at the law firm of

 Hughes Socol Piers Resick & Dym. And in 2020 on inauguration day

 appointed by president Biden to chair the local council on disability,

 an independent federal agency advising the president and Congress on

 disability issues. Andrés, welcome and thank you for serving as

 today's moderator, I will now turn it over to you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Great. Thank you. The most important office

 and the one which all of us can and should fill is that of private

 citizen. Words U. state Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis. The

 most important office of that of private citizen, the most important

 duty of a private citizen is to participate in the electoral process,

 and to vote.

 Good afternoon.

 Welcome to all of you here in person and online.

 Today we engage in a critical forum with seven of the candidates

 running in next month's election for the Mayor of Chicago. All

 candidates were invited, Mr. Willie Wilson and Alderman Roderick Sawyer

 could not join us. They have promised to fill our preform

 questionnaire and when received we will post them on the Access Living

 website. Our forum with focus on disabilities and people with

 disabilities to better inform our community on who is most deserving of

 their votes. The format for this forum is as follows. First each

 candidate will be asked to provide a two minute opening statement.

 Then I will be asking the candidates five issue based questions on a

 rotating basis by last name.

 If time permits there may be one or more bonus questions. Finally,

 each candidate will have an opportunity to provide a two-minute closing

 statement. Unfortunately we will not be able to field questions from

 the audience directly to the candidates.

 Candidates in the audience, with all due respect to each of you, the

 most important person here this afternoon is Mr. Ken Walden.

 Mr. Walden is Access Living's managing attorney. Mr. Walden you see

 is our official time-keeper. He will deliberately interrupt you, not

 to be rude, but to prompt you regarding your permitted time. Ken,

 please identify yourself for the candidates.

 In addition to visual cues, for your two-minute opening and closing

 comments, Mr. Walden will shout out when there's 30 seconds remaining

 and when your time is up.

 For your 75 second responses, he will shout out when your time is up

 but will also give you a 15-second notice of your time.

 As this format has been agreed to by each of the candidates and their

 respective campaigns in advance, we trust that each of you will honor

 and respect the time limits imposed. As a preliminary softball

 question, to all candidates, by show of raised hands, do you promise to

 behave and adhere to our time constraints? And adhere to our time

 constraints?

 (Laughter)

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Raise hands, please. Excellent. We're off to a

 great start.

 We're mindful that one measure of a good mayor is to live up to their

 promises. So we shall see.

 (Chuckling)

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: To the audience, we recognize that you may have

 a favorite candidate on stage and you may want to show your enthusiasm

 and support for them. So as not to interrupt the flow and to keep us

 on time, I ask that you refrain from verbally cheering or clapping

 until the very end of the forum. That said, if you cannot control your

 enthusiasm, as your candidate speaks, I encourage you to do so using

 the deaf applause, which are sign language interpreters will

 demonstrate.

 Perfect.

 On Access Living's website, AccessLiving.org you can find the

 biographies and responses to preforum questionnaire. With all that

 behind us we are pleased to welcome, Incumbent Mayor, Lori Lightfoot,

 Illinois State Representative Kam Buckner, United States Congressman,

 Chuy Garcia, neighborhood advocate and entrepreneur, Mr. Ja'Mal Green.

 Cook County Commissioner, Brandon Johnson, Alderman Sophia King, and

 former CEO of Chicago and Philadelphia Public Schools, Mr. Paul Vallas.

 Now let's begin.

 Candidates, I invite each of you to make your two-minute opening

 statement. Please include in your statement what should our disability

 audience know about you, and why you're running for Mayor. And if you

 happen to identify as a person with a disability as well, we'd love to

 know.

 We'll start with representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Good afternoon everyone. Andrés thank you for the

 introduction and thank you everybody for taking the time to be here

 today for this important set of issues and topics to us and to our city

 and to Access Living thank you not just for today but for your 40 years

 of advocacy for the disability community.

 My name is Kam Buckner, I'm a state representative, I am a son of

 Chicago, born and raised in this Chicago, father and husband. I have

 advocated for Chicagoans with disabilities, whether as my six years I

 spent on the staff of U.S. Senator Durbin in Washington, D.C., working

 with the veterans committee or my time of world sport Chicago where we

 brought adaptive sports to young people around Chicago, created an

 adaptive sports curriculum and hosted games at three-day event for

 thousands of service connected disabled veterans in Chicago. The first

 bill I passed in the General Assembly, HB 3437 created the development

 with disabilities awareness fund. Chicago has a golden opportunity to

 be the most accessible city in the entire country.

 I will tell you that I'm the only person on stage who has presented a

 comprehensive stand alone plan for inclusion and adaptability and

 accessible for every single Chicagoan no matter what their status is.

 My mother is here today, and before she became a Chicago Public School

 education teacher, she worked at a school called Esperanza, this work

 is very important to me, and this city deserves a mayor who will take

 it seriously and go above and beyond to make this is the most

 accessible city in the nation. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Congressman Garcia.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: Thank you. I want to thank Access Living and

 the partner organizations, the members and the larger audience out

 there. Delighted to be here today. And congratulations on your work,

 the recent gift from McKenzie Scott is a testament to your decades of

 championing the cause of this community. My family is a part of this

 community. And that's why this conversation is so important to me. I

 thank you for hosting this event.

 My wife, who is living with MS, and two grandchildren who are special

 education students in Chicago are my direct connection to the

 community.

 Throughout my career whether in local government or currently in

 Congress, advancing this community and its rights have been a part of

 my work in the Illinois senate I championed the Illinois language

 assistance act which also assists and affects people with disabilities,

 especially people with speech or hearing impediments as it relates to

 emergency room air care or long-term care as well. I think the saying:

 Nothing for us without us, encapsulates what this movement is all

 about. I identify with it because I think that it's important that the

 struggle be about home living arrangements, access to transportation,

 public accommodations, recreation, and public safety. If we're going

 to be true to the idea that all of us are graded equal, we cannot leave

 anyone behind. Thus implementation of ADA and other advances for this

 community is critical and that's why I'm glad to participate in this

 forum today. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Congressman, if you need coffee this afternoon,

 it's quite understandable. Just ask.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: I'm running on fumes. I just got in from

 D.C.

 >> MR. GREEN: My name is Ja'Mal Green, I'm delighted to be here

 today. Shout out to Access Living and all of the partners who put

 together this forum to really get a discussion going about how the next

 mayor will make -- ensure that the ADA is compliant all across this

 city and departments. I'm from Englewood and Gresham as well as in

 North Lawndale. I was raised by my grandmother and grandfather who

 just happen to be deaf. And my grandmother who every time I came home

 from school set me in front of different letters and words so she can

 teach me sign language. I think that she's a little disappointed at

 how much I've taken from her since then.

 And it is so important that we have a mayor today that really keeps

 their promises. I'm running for mayor because I've heard candidate

 forums before, I've heard mayoral candidates talk about what they're

 going to do for communities, what they're going to do from all types of

 different groups in our city. And I've also seen, year after year, how

 they have not fulfilled those promises, we need a mayor who is in touch

 with the people, who has a connection to the neighborhoods, who is

 going to have the backbone to make sure that everything that they say

 that they're going to do in the campaign is what they're going to do

 when they're in office.

 This is the time that we can have a movement, a movement of all

 people throughout the City of Chicago, and make sure that we can create

 a future that we can all believe in. And we're also today opening up

 our second office at 3411 West North Avenue that is fully accessible as

 well. So you can join us there as well.

 Thank you so much for having me. And I look forward to answering the

 questions today.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Commissioner Johnson.

 >> COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Good afternoon and thank you Access Living

 to all partners and individuals here today. My name is Brandon

 Johnson, I've had the honor and privilege of serving as Cook County

 commissioner representing the west side of Chicago and western suburbs.

 The best job I've had is that of a public school teacher, teaching at

 Cabrini Green and teaching a year of high school at Westinghouse on the

 west side of Chicago. My wife and I are raising our three children in

 Austin. Was in Cabrini Green where my politics sharpened. My families

 could see the wealth, hear it and see it. But out of their windows

 they saw bulldozers preparing to destroy their housing. For too many

 years the city has been chasing an economy behind us while everything

 in front of us has been crumbling. Cabrini Green has been the

 epicenter where promises and inequality collides. That's why I'm

 running for Mayor of Chicago. I believe it can be different. It's

 personal. Like many of us on this stage today. I have two brothers

 who have suffered from mental health challenges, and one brother who

 died unhoused and addicted. I wonder if his life would have been

 spared had we had services.

 But the truth of the matter is that city government has failed over

 and over again. To deliver -- 32 years ago of course we all know the

 passage of the ADA was there to bring civil rights for all.

 As Mayor of Chicago, I'm committed to making sure that the

 marginalized communities in which I'm raising my family in, where

 individuals with disabilities overwhelmingly make up these communities,

 that you have a mayor that is committed to bringing real justice to

 every single family throughout the City of Chicago. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Alderman King.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Thank you. Thank you for putting this together.

 I appreciate being part of this. I'm running for mayor because I love

 this city. But we are at a pivotal point in our city. There's so much

 dissension between this administration and the police, between this

 administration and our teachers, between this administration and our

 colleagues who are speaking with their feet.

 We need somebody who can lead with collaboration and not

 confrontation. I've been able to show this over the last six years as

 Alderman. Where we've led the Fight for $15 minimum wage, which

 brought 400,000 people a liveable wage and 100,000, an even better

 wage. It also brought people with disabilities a hike as well. We're

 also leading the former Michael Reese development, which is being

 heralded as one of the most equitable developments in the country.

 Where we brought $25 million commitment to schools, we have a

 commitment to 20% affordable housing on site. Which is also good for

 people with disabilities because we know that they are

 disproportionately more likely to need affordable housing. We also

 need a mayor that understands how to bring people together.

 How to represent the entire city and not just segregated portions of

 it.

 We've been able to show this. I represent from downtown to Hyde

 Park, with Bronzeville in the middle, the number one request I get

 because of the unwieldy crime is for more police presence. We know

 police aren't the only solution but they're part of the solution. So

 we also know that an accessible Chicago is a strong Chicago. That an

 equitable Chicago is a strong Chicago.

 And a strong Chicago is a safe Chicago. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mayor Lightfoot.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to be

 here with you today. Let me talk to you about why it is from day one

 of my administration, we have worked tirelessly to make Chicago the

 most accessible city in the country. For me it's very personal. Many

 of you know that my father was a deaf man. He lost his hearing when he

 was in his early 20s. And I saw with my own eyes up close and personal

 what it meant to be a person in this country living with disability.

 Lack of job opportunities, lack of opportunities to be a part of a

 larger community and the road blocks and hurdles that consistently

 stood in his way. I made a commitment to myself watching my father's

 struggles, that I would do everything I can to make sure that we

 created a better community, a better society for people living with

 disabilities. I brought with me today a notebook. One of many that

 I've kept over the years. These are the notes that I wrote back and

 forth so that my father and I could communicate. This book happens to

 go back to 2002. My father's been gone now for about 12 years. But

 the lessons that I learned watching him and his challenges and

 struggles, they are part of the value system that I bring to this job.

 But folks I don't have to just talk to you about a value system. I

 can talk to you about concrete tangible things that we have done.

 Whether eliminating the disgraceful subminimum wage, whether standing

 up a career center that has now serviced over 100 clients and gotten

 quarter of them full time jobs. Whether it's a way in which we

 deployed economic resources to build housing for the visually impaired

 and otherwise. The streetscapes that we have put in to make sure

 they're accessible. It's a long list of which I am very proud. And we

 are going to continue to move forward. Thank you, sir. And thank you

 so much for the opportunity.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: Thank you for having me. Four years ago I came here

 before you and we debated these issues and I offer my prescription on

 what we need to do to take responsibility for our inaction for so many

 decades in not serving the disability community. My tenure involved me

 working with individuals, learning from individuals who made an

 extraordinary commitment to the disability community.

 As city budget director working with Laurie Gorski in the first

 mayor's office of disabilities, expanding an office, expanding the

 services, identifying what the needs were and obviously advocating for

 it. And then later on as a school superintendent working with Marca

 Bristo and this great organization when we did our $3.2 billion capital

 plan. And we renovated 350 buildings to make them ADA accessible. And

 opened 78 new buildings that were fully in compliance. So those

 formative years have influenced the way I've approached this issue.

 And my approach to this issue is to look at the community as a part

 of the larger community and not a one-off community and not a special

 community, but the community. Because questions about accessible,

 questions about equal opportunities, questions about housing, questions

 about income equality need to be ingrained into our thinking, whether

 it's our budgets, our programs, our staffing, our hiring, contracting.

 That is ultimately our responsibility. I have no question about the

 motivations or the commitments of everyone on this table. For

 individuals who have struggled and individuals who have challenges.

 Rhetoric is not results. And I'll be defined by my results. Thank

 you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Thank you. Our first issue based question foe

 focuses on housing. People with disabilities and the elderly have a

 right to receive long term community services instead of in an

 institution. Throughout the country a major persistent barrier to

 community integration is the absence of accessible and affordable

 housing. Chicago unfortunately is no different.

 Those are questions, candidates, is this. What specific actions will

 you take to increase the availability of affordable and accessible

 housing for people with disabilities throughout the city? Especially

 in decades long disinvested neighborhoods like Woodlawn, Hyde Park and

 South Shore and Pullman among the 16 city neighborhoods which according

 to the U.S. census burrow's American Community Survey Data data.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: The city is facing a severe housing crisis.

 My priorities as mayor would be to engage and bring about comprehensive

 community development which links housing, transportation, access to

 healthcare and shopping services. I would use federal funds and local

 funds including TIF funds to increase funding with grants and

 subsidized loans to help homeowners remain in their homes in areas that

 are rapidly gentrifying by making them accessible, energy efficient,

 and Internet connected. At the same time I would streamline the

 process that nonprofit and other low income housing developers want to

 undertake to build housing on Chicago's south side, West Side and other

 places.

 Lastly, I introduced legislation bid the name of equitable transit

 oriented development to create incentives for building affordable

 housing near transit hubs across Chicagoland. The planning process

 required is that of including organizations like Access Living, that's

 my commitment. That's the community that I come from. That's how I

 would act as mayor. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Green.

 >> MR. GREEN: We must make sure we're increasing our affordable

 housing supply. They promised thousands of units to be built since

 many years even after they knocked down the project buildings. They

 have not made good on those promises. We must increase our affordable

 housing supply in record numbers. A few of the things that we would do

 is we will incentivizes whether it be grocery stores, whether it be

 banks, single floor buildings to be able to build a floor above and

 make it fully accessible and incentivizes them to do so. We would also

 create a public bank. Right?

 So we can have an economic engine that can invest in income-based

 housing, that's fully accessible, in which the bank would be able to

 invest back into the community and all of the profit that comes back

 from the bank goes back into city services. And we talk about the

 bank, one of the things is home ownership. And we must make sure that

 we're moving those barriers, that the banks have put in place. And

 that's one thing the bank would do. We must hold accountable the

 current developers who are not keeping up with their properties. I've

 got senior facilities who have elevators that aren't working. We must

 make sure that the mayor's office has a bully pulpit and hold

 accountable every developer in the city.

 >> Housing is a human right. We grew up with one bathroom. I have

 learned to negotiate especially with my sisters, having a mother with a

 chronic illness it was important that my father think a pastor,

 thinking about the pressure I was under. To build a bathroom on the

 first floor. This is why I'm a supporter of the real estate transfer

 tax, to make sure we're dealing with the unhoused. 65,000 families,

 many have been criminalized because of their disability. And so making

 sure that those resources are available to not only create more

 affordable housing but make sure we have a revenue stream to do that.

 Do everything in our power to continue to decriminalize many of the

 policies that have made it hard for families to access housing. That's

 why I was the chief sponsor of the just housing amendment that

 eliminated discrimination against those who were formerly incarcerated

 seeking housing. And Access Living was a part of that coalition that

 testified to make sure that there were reasonable accommodations for

 those families. And so as Mayor of Chicago I'm committed to making

 sure that housing is a human right. Finally I believe there should be

 a moratorium on land where public housing used to be occupied. That we

 do not build on that land. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Alderman King.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Thank you. I know that all Chicagoans are more

 than frustrated by the rising costs of housing that's outpaced incomes

 and that's more exacerbated for Chicagoans with disabilities.

 Listen, affordable housing is the responsibility of the entire city

 and not just segregated portions of it.

 So it happened intentionally, and so we have to be equally measured

 about our intention to get out of that.

 Equity just doesn't happen in a vacuum. What I've been able to show

 as Alderman of the 4th ward is to intentionally bring affordable

 housing to the projects that we've had, whether downtown, on Michigan

 Avenue, on Wabash, whether it's in Hyde Park, or whether it's in

 Bronzeville. Like I talked about the Michael Reese development. Where

 we encourage the developer to have affordable housing on site. Which

 is unheard of. In terms of a development. So again, we have to be

 very intentional about making sure that we have affordable housing,

 which disproportionately impacts people with disabilities.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: I'm going to build in a slight delay between

 speakers. For the benefit of the audience.

 Mayor Lightfoot.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: One of the things that I'm proud of is that

 despite the fact that we inherited about 120,000 unit deficit in

 affordable housing, we've taken big bold strides to make sure that

 we're righting that historic wrong. And every housing project that we

 invest in, particularly the ones that are affordable, are also

 accessible. We made a commitment in December of 2021 to $1 billion in

 affordable housing, projects all across our city that when built will

 take the first big strides in breaking down segregation across our

 city. The other thing that's important related to housing and access

 for people with disabilities is making sure that they are empowered to

 be able to live and rent and own those units. So our center for

 disability careers has serviced over 100 clients since it opened back

 in the summer. Over a quarter of those people have gotten full-time

 jobs. And we are doing more and more to make sure that housing

 everywhere is accessible as well as transportation. And we just got

 118 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to

 continue the work to make sure that our stations are accessible.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: Thank you. Look, first let's start enforcing the

 ordinances and mandates that are on the books right now. We're

 constantly imposing new mandates, new ordinances. What are the

 outcomes? Secondly we've got to look at exploring expanding benefits.

 And we have to understand ultimately in our families, particularly as

 our parents or as we grow older there will be someone in our families

 who are individuals who will have to live with disabilities. And we've

 got to recognize that in our building codes and we have to recognize

 that in our housing projects and type of supports and incentives we

 provide for new housing.

 Third, let's remove the obstacles to building new housing. Let's

 remove the obstacles to allowing individuals who have -- who are

 landlords who have garden units to convert those unimproved space to

 garden units. There are hundreds of thousands of spaces. Normally the

 first floor accessible spaces. The third thing is we have 15 ,000

 vacant buildings, buildings in some phase of housing court et cetera,

 why couldn't we not secure those buildings, turn them over to

 community-based organizations and housing advocates to provide housing

 for people with disabilities, to homeless, domestic violence. And

 finally, we need toe cap individual homeowners' property taxes to fight

 against gentrification. Those are five things I think we can do.

 Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Housing is a human right. Housing is a human

 right. One of the first things we've got to do is look at the real

 estate transfer tax the not just being able to work with Springfield

 which I can do on day one, to make sure we can increase it in a

 reasonable way and earmark dollars for homelessness issue here. Use

 the money that's coming into the RETT for our homelessness problem.

 Currently no money from the real estate transfer tax goes to homeless

 issues. We need to pass a city ordinance that requires all new housing

 affordable housing built in Chicago is accessible. We need to provide

 grants to make sure that we can convert residential units that are not

 accessible today. We have to also establish a cabinet level position

 in City Hall who will work on this alone. Affordable housing and

 accessibility to make sure every member of our society can benefit from

 that. We have a real data problem. We need to make sure and mandate

 the CHA is providing the right data. So we know where the accessible

 housing exists and where it doesn't. We also need to expand housing by

 allowing more ADUs and looking at single family zoning ordinances make

 sure we can bring more folks into neighborhoods who need to be there.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Thank you all.

 Next question folk focuses on mental health supports. According to

 the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, adults with disabilities

 report experiencing frequent mental health distress, almost five times

 as often as our nondisabled counterparts. The pandemic shone a light

 on issue of mental health and need for services. The impacts of the

 COVID-19 pandemic affected all of us. The isolation, disconnect,

 disrupted routines and diminished health services greatly impacted the

 lives and mental well being of people with disabilities.

 While the city's budget for mental health services has increased

 since 2019, several community based mental health services have closed.

 So candidates, our question is this.

 What will you do to make long-term community-based mental health

 services and supports available and accessible to people with

 disabilities in the city?

 You each will have 75 seconds. And in 10 seconds we'll start with

 Mr. Green.

 Mr. Green.

 >> MR. GREEN: We must pass treatment, not trauma. And reopen the

 mental health clinics that were closed many years ago. Those mental

 health clinics, in our view are, we would create more innovative

 institutions, called healing houses where we can tackle mental health

 holistically and people want to attend so they can wind down or get the

 mental health services they need. Those institutions will have mobile

 units for those folks who cannot leave their home, to go to them

 throughout the City of Chicago. We must also make sure that we're

 investing in those community organizations who are doing the work

 throughout the city. They're not getting the support that they

 deserve. And the City needs to be a partner to make sure that those

 services continue reaching outside of the institutions that we invest

 in. We must also make sure that we have the correct ratios in our

 school buildings for young people who are experiencing mental health,

 who also have disabilities. And we are going to invest in making sure

 that we have counselors throughout the schools all throughout the City

 of Chicago. So those are some of the few things that we would do to

 address our mental health crisis.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Commissioner Johnson.

 >> COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Alderwoman king got excited during Jamal's

 answers. Her and Lori are collaborating over here. Anything is

 possible y'all. We good? All right.

 You know, as I indicated earlier, my older brother, who's my hero,

 Leon, was a very talented, good looking fellow too, Jerry curl back in

 the day. Untreated trauma, he had, he didn't have the language for it

 or facilities for it. He died unhoused and he had died addicted. And

 so you know, the movement that pushed back against the previous

 administration for closing down mental health clinics, I was a part of

 that movement. I'm also part of the movement that is pushing back

 against this administration for refusing to reopen them.

 And so absolutely we need to pass treatment not trauma ordinance,

 which the movement that is behind my candidacy, supports. And I

 support it whole-heartedly. Because many of you in this room we

 struggle together with it. We also have to recognize that we have to

 make it more accessible. I'm sure our alderpersons and county

 commissioner, the type of trauma we are see in district offices. The

 fact many calls are coming from 911 right now, are related to the

 trauma that people are experiencing. So it's a matter of investing, a

 matter of prioritizing, making sure that the personal agenda that we

 all have collectively to make sure that we're treating people, not

 reinforcing trauma, that as Mayor of Chicago I'm committed to that.

 Thank you.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Thank you. Apologies. I hope I didn't throw you

 off. That was not my intention.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: In a second. Alderman King.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Thank you. While we don't know the exact numbers

 for people with disabilities with mental health, insecurities, or

 people with mental health insecurities in general, so we need to do a

 better job of data and transparency around that. I think that's the

 first thing in order to figure out how we can grow, we need to figure

 out where we are right now. That being said, there are a number of

 things that we can do right now. We had the opportunity to reopen

 mental health clinics. That was something that I fought to do. Almost

 singularly when mayor Rahm Emanuel. It is a missed opportunity that we

 haven't opened up clinics but we haven't funded the ones we have here

 appropriately.

 I was happy to be a part of a group as leader of the progressive

 caucus to make sure that we had and funded clinicians for this current

 budget. But I don't think that that's been allocated yet as well. So

 we really have to make sure, again, that we're strategic about what

 we're doing and that we implement the things that are important to our

 city. Like this.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mayor Lightfoot.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: In talking about mental health services I'm very

 proud of the work we have done. We ended the year of 2022 servicing

 over 60,000 Chicago residents, and we have opened up community-based

 culturally relevant mental health services for free in all of our 77

 neighborhoods. For the first time in the history of Chicago.

 When I entered office, there was a lot of conversation about

 reopening mental health clinics. And I thought about that too and

 argued for it. But then when I heard from the experts, and when I

 heard from patients is that they didn't want a clinician care that our

 clinics offered. What they wanted was to be able to go to culturally

 relevant services in their neighborhood, and that's precisely what

 we've done. We have increased the mental health budget 7-fold since I

 went into office. We're now providing those services in all 77

 neighborhoods for free, regardless of your ability to pay, regardless

 of your citizenship status. For the first time ever we are now serving

 children and adolescents. That is a record that we all should be proud

 of because we're helping Chicagoans. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Vallas, if you would please hold.

 >> Slow down.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Please proceed Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: Addressing the mental health needs in the community

 really requires that you not only reopen the mental health clinics,

 that need to be community run and owned and operated in the clinic, you

 but you literally need to have one in every police station. If you're

 seeking the federal and state reimbursements as well as from private

 insurance providers, those -- those facilities can be funded. God

 knows why they went from 19 mental health facilities to 12 when Rahm

 Emanuel came in. And eliminated the 12. The savings was miniscule.

 It's important. The reopening of mental health facilities have got to

 be part of the need too reestablish the community infrastructure. I

 lost a son to long term addictions, opioid intervention, community

 centers, family counseling. At the end of the day rebuilding the

 social service infrastructure that's so critical to addressing the

 needs of people in the community really begins by not only reopening

 the existing mental health clinics or the clinics that have been closed

 but really opening a community-based operated and managed mental health

 facility and in literally every police district. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Thank you. I believe I'm the only candidate in

 this race that has come forward with a specific mental health plan for

 Chicago. In that plan we talk about reopening 20 clinics around the

 city in the places they're needed the most. We talk about four of

 those clinics are institutions being anchor institutions that are 24

 hours a day, 365 days a week. One on the North Side, one on the West

 Side, and South Side, and near and around our downtown central business

 district. We hear a lot about we're here -- where care should come

 from. Making Chicagoans from choosing private mental healthcare and

 public mental healthcare is like saying we can't have libraries and

 book stores. It makes no sense.

 We called for investment in the peace book ordinance to make sure

 we're putting money into the community organizations. I want to talk

 about the work I have done in Springfield, a community emergency

 service and support act which we worked with Access Living to get

 passed to make sure we had mobile units to respond to people who were

 going through mental health crises.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: And Congressman Garcia.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: Thank you. The lack of access to healthcare

 and to public health services is rooted of course in inequities.

 Racial as well as economic. The pandemic exacerbated these inequities

 and of course there's a greater need for mental health services today.

 Specifically here's what I -- my priorities would be. Expand access to

 healthcare to ensure that mental health services are available to all

 communities, whether Chatham, Little Village or uptown. Hire more

 mental health clinicians in the city and county clinics to finally

 expand who we're serving, in collaboration with the County. That's

 critical.

 The City spends 89 million. The County around 80 million. We need

 to work together to get a bigger bang and services to people. We need

 to provide additional resources including mental health staff to

 community clinics as well and bring coordinated healthcare. We cannot

 continue to work in silos, collaboration is key. The people in our

 communities deserve it. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Thank you. Now let's talk about education with

 a real focus on shortages. In the area of special education there are

 teacher shortages which have persisted for years. With an estimated 14

 percent of students needing some type of special education service.

 Special education teachers play a key role in making sure all students

 have a chance to thrive academically. There are many factors that

 contribute to the shortage. Among them stressful working conditions,

 low pay, and insufficient support for special education teachers.

 Within the Chicago Public Schools there are currently over 600 vacant

 special education teacher positions.

 Candidates, share with us what your specific plans are to fill those

 vacancies and to ensure that those special education teachers are

 qualified and suitable for their positions. You each will have 75

 seconds, we'll start with Commissioner Johnson in 10 seconds.

 Commissioner Johnson.

 >> COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Thank you for the question. As a public

 school teacher I can tell you first hand what it looks like to have

 schools that have disinvested in. And as Mayor of Chicago, you'll

 finally actually have a mayor when you elect me who actually believes

 in public education. And you won't have to sue my summation to get

 special education to cooperate with state guidelines. That's why I'm

 been a strong proponent of making sure we're investing in programming

 like grow your own that provide opportunities from individuals from

 communities that are most impacted by the disinvestment to become

 public school teacher, I've been pushing hard for class size caps.

 Many of our schools have been disinvested in. We are raising our kids

 in Austin -- 30 percent in many schools, special education is the

 population.

 Again, expanding funding and making sure that we have not just

 special education teachers, but even paraprofessionals. I'm glad that

 Ms. Garcia is here who led a nice career in supporting our teachers.

 This is also an opportunity to create a pathway for teachers assistants

 to become special education teachers. Again, I don't know if there's

 anyone else often this platform that has more of an incentive for

 special education than someone who has sent all three of their kids to

 public schools. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Alderman King.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Yes, thank you.

 As an educator myself, I also understand the importance of education.

 More importantly, the importance of having a good teacher. I think

 we're talking about, you know, how do we retain good teachers. And I

 would say special education teachers are at the top of that list. What

 I would do is to create incentives to keep teachers and to incentivizes

 new teachers to come into Chicago.

 I would give them interest-free loans so that they could build homes

 in the communities where we most need them. We can do that. We can do

 that by bonding the credit for that. We can also sell them vacant

 lots, so we can build the communities as we also incentivizes teachers

 to come into our community. So that is something that I would do on

 day one to bring an incentive program to make sure that we keep

 teachers. Teachers are leaving now faster than we can keep them.

 They're the one profession where we throw everything at their feet that

 we're unable to resolve and ask them to do it. They need that

 incentive.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mayor Lightfoot.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: Ladies and gentlemen, there clearly is a

 nationwide shortage and lots of critical frontline workers, teachers

 and special ed teachers being top among them. What we have been doing

 through CPS is collaborating with the city colleges to build a pipeline

 of teachers into CPS. Making sure that we are collaborating with

 groups like teach for America, and other groups that bring just newly

 minted teachers into our system and making sure that we're fulfilling

 our contractual responsibilities negotiated with the Chicago teacher's

 union to also have a range of other supports for their families. Most

 importantly is listening to the students and their families and

 tailoring IEPs that meet the needs of individual students with a

 holistic way of wrap around services so that we are making sure that

 regardless of the ability to learn, that these children are set up for

 success. And that means putting our money where our mouth is, hiring

 the teachers, hiring the paraprofessionals and making sure that we

 continue to meet our lawful and contractual obligations. That is the

 track record that we have done and more to come. But we're proud of

 that record.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: I've run four of the largest school districts in four

 different states. All had major vacancy issues, all those issues were

 eliminated by doing the following: Establishing a relationship with

 all the teacher colleges and Universities by subsidizing student

 teachers to come in and teach in my schools. Not only doing their

 student teaching but also working as paid interns and teacher aides.

 Usually 50 percent of those teachers who would come and do the student

 teaching remained. 95 percent of them decided to stay past their first

 year.

 Secondly, by expanding alternative certifications. In New Orleans we

 worked with saint Xavier and Dillard University to allow graduate

 students to earn credits by teaching in our schools. Third, allowing

 individuals professions and medical professions and social services to

 become certified and teachers in their own right. The bottom line that

 somebody has to ask is when you look at the Chicago Public School own

 database, there's one teacher for every 17 employees. And there is --

 every 17 students, and one employee for every student. So the question

 is how are those resources being allocated.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Thank you. In 1968 Anita Shauntel was born. She

 was my mother's babysitter, born with disabled. She lived to the

 spring of 1970. My mother's experience with her is what drove her to a

 career in special education. As it did to my mother's sisters, Aunt

 Mary and Ola. They have a century of public school special education

 background experience and service.

 Listen, we know how to deal with a worker shortage. The first thing

 we have to do is realize we have to pay our special education teachers

 more. We have to acknowledge the fact that we have not put them in the

 best position to succeed in their work. They're working against tough

 odds. There needs to be remuneration that can help them. We have to

 give our teachers the tools they need to be successful. More planning

 time, more resources, that means the district never buying into a

 creative curriculum that is not accessible for every student in CPS.

 That's a problem. And thirdly, the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, 504

 requires a Free Appropriate Public Education for every young child with

 disability. We should work with the federal government and Congressman

 Garcia to do that.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Congressman Garcia.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: Thank you. I accept the challenge from my

 colleague in the Illinois House. One.

 Two, I've been working on building the teacher pipeline and focus

 emphasis on special education teachers. The grow your own program was

 one of the programs we had at a nonprofit that I founded and headed for

 ten years. Recently in Congress I introduced the diversify Act,

 similarly it seeks to provide incentives for teachers, college students

 in college to become teachers and focus on special education as well.

 So that we can diversify our teaching core. Also it provides

 incentives for them by increasing the teach grants that are there.

 But overall I would work to fully fund schools in our public

 education system in Chicago as with other school systems across

 Illinois, I would work with the legislature, return the favor,

 representative, by doubling the amount of funding from Springfield to

 $700 million, which is what CPS should be getting. And lastly, CPS

 should use incentives to recruit, to fund required course work. And

 yes, planning periods are critical so we don't burn people who are

 committed to this community and create a better environment. Thank

 you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: And Mr. Green.

 >> MR. GREEN: Where would we be without teachers? All of us in this

 room can all say that teachers helped make us who we are today.

 And we -- that's why we must make sure that every student in the City

 of Chicago, even those who experience disabilities, get a high quality

 education and gets their needs to be met. We must address our teaching

 shortages by making sure that community colleges -- by making sure that

 we can give the downpayment and closing costs, so they can own a home

 in the City of Chicago. But making sure that we're allocating the

 resources how they should be. Somehow there's all these billions of

 dollars, but somehow we're constantly talking about the same things

 over and over again. Of why our teachers aren't paid, why our teachers

 don't have the resources in their schools.

 We must make our schools an environment wherever one wants to also

 teach. And that's making sure that the leadership do what they're

 supposed to do, to work with the State and the federal government to

 increase funding for our public school system. We got to move away

 from the enrollment based formula and move to a needs based formula in

 the City of Chicago so all schools get the correct funding that they

 deserve.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Thank you. Transportation is the focus of our

 fourth question. State and local governments have an overarching legal

 obligation to ensure that people of all categories of disabilities can

 participate in all aspects of civic life. To do so, a city must ensure

 that it has and maintains a trance infrastructure. One that is

 accessible and available to all people with disabilities. When we

 refer to a transportation infrastructure, we are referring to

 combination of public rights of way, that is sidewalks and other

 pedestrian pathways, rail transit, fixed route bus transportation, on

 demand vehicular transportation, and ADA paratransit. And while owned

 by private entities, for our purposes here we're including taxis and

 ride sharing. As the city controls the licensing of those services and

 issues ordinances dictating the conditions under which they operate.

 So candidates, our question is this.

 What investment would you make to improve Chicago's transportation

 infrastructure and ensure it is more accessible for people with

 disabilities?

 And what regulatory changes would you make if any? You each will

 have 75 seconds, beginning in 10 seconds with Alderman King.

 Alderman King.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Yes. So as Alderman I've seen first hand how the

 inequities in transportation distribution has impacted not only people

 with disabilities but our elders who are also disproportionately in

 that category as well.

 I helped the elders in our community reestablish the 43rd street bus

 which this were trying to literally stop on Sundays. And a number of

 them said that they weren't able to access that or get to church on

 Sundays. So we fought hard to serve that. So I know that.

 But I think one thing is critical is collaboration here. Because we

 should be thinking about regional transportation so that we can use

 those economies of scale of savings. So the RTA governs us. We should

 bring the Metra, RTA, the Pace, all of those things together under one

 umbrella. But that would take collaboration with the County, with the

 State, and with the Feds. But if we do that, we could come together

 and have a world class transportation system which would then make it

 more accessible and of course then more accessible to people with

 disabilities.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mayor Lightfoot.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: I think the question was about accessibility of

 our transportation systems for people with disabilities. Good news

 that came in December of 2002, we applied for and won 118 million

 dollars grant from USDOT, to continue the work of making all of our CTA

 stations accessible. We started that program in Chicago. Modelled and

 scaled it up, working with Senator Duckworth. It has now become

 federal policy. And we are getting those federal dollars back to

 continue that work.

 All of the modernization that we're doing across our system has a

 disability man date in all of it. The red, purple line modernization

 on the North Side and now we're finally going to see the extension of

 the Red Line down to 138th Street. All of those stations will be

 accessible. In addition to that, all of the hundreds of miles of

 streetscape that we have put in, in the last four years, we have done

 it with an eye towards making sure that the sidewalks and roads are

 also accessible and protective of people with disabilities. Including

 traffic signals that reflect the needs of the visually impaired. So we

 are very focussed on our transportation system being accessible.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: Look, our goal -- our overriding goal should be 100

 percent sent. And it needs to be comprehensive. It's just not the

 stations and trains and platforms and vehicles. But as the mayor

 pointed out, the sidewalks, roads, et cetera. Where are they going to

 make it as a goal and it needs to be comprehensive and we need to

 pursue it. We also have to deal with another issue of accessibility.

 What is adversely impacting the CTA is violence. Their ridership is

 down -- still about 500,000 a day.

 What I would do is I would eliminate the privatized security and hire

 additional police officers so that the platforms can be covered. So

 that the train stations can be covered. So that like they do in

 New York, you can have officers from time to time riding trains both

 undercover and in uniform. Because at the end of the day, all too

 often -- we're all victimized, but people with disabilities are often

 victimized the most. So we got to recognize if we're going to

 revitalize our public trance sit system, a system that is now -- that

 is -- has now lost so much in the fare box only 18 percent of its

 operating costs are coming from the fare box. We're going to need to

 make the system safe.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Thank you. Accept the CTA here today. I'm a CTA

 rider. And I know -- I see first hand that this system is very

 inaccessibility. We've got work to do, 148 L stations, 103 of those

 have elevators. The other 42, they haven't been upgraded in decades.

 We've got to be serious about that and be aggressive about those

 upgrades. There are people like Mike Irvin and the Chicago ADAPT and

 Access Living who have been fighting these fights for a long time.

 Chaining themselves to buses for 40 years to create accessibility in

 the city. We still have not done enough. I will make the CTA 100

 percent accessible as mayor. Period. We also make our paratransit

 services better, easier to book online, visually for folks who need

 them.

 We also need a munis pill program for people who try to maneuver

 through the city when we have snow fall. We have not been kind or fair

 to them. Every time we do a bike lane or sidewalk or any streetscape

 in this city, I will have a safety and accessible score through CDOT,

 has to happen before we begin the project. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Congressman Garcia.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: Thank you. When I was elected to Congress, I

 identified the committee I wanted to be on, my number one priority,

 transportation and infrastructure. Why? Because I knew there would be

 an opportunity to deliver for infrastructure across the country and

 certainly for Chicago. And deliver it we have. The mayor has made

 reference to the 118 million. But the infrastructure law will continue

 to bring resources to Chicago over a ten-year period. Two, what I've

 already done is secure the funding that was mentioned to make Metra

 stops ADA accessible through the all-station accessible program. ASAP.

 And do it ASAP.

 In addition to that, we need to integrate more closely the CTA,

 Metra, Pace, and the RTA to ensure that communities grow. We need real

 collaboration between them, and the departments of housing, planning

 and transportation.

 My plan is this: In the next year there will be new funding and a

 potential reorganization for the RTA partners. We need to have

 commuter rail lines, better serve all of Chicago neighborhoods, and

 above all, we need on-time performance, that must be the metric. And

 buses and trains must be made safer.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Green.

 >> MR. GREEN: I'm sorry, I was pushed by my son over here. He was

 snoring. He's supposed to be watching his father.

 (Laughter)

 >> MR. GREEN: It's so important that the transportation

 infrastructure is invested in. I agree with some of the ideas here

 today. And we share some of the same sentiments. Making sure that,

 you know, CTA is 100 percent accessible in this city. And that there's

 a pathway to doing so. We focus a lot on building new stations. But

 we have so many stations that need investment and need elevators and

 need updates. And we must make that a priority in this city.

 We also need a municipal snow removal program. That is so important

 during the winter. CTA right now is a huge issue. We must make it

 safe, clean, and fast. And address the staffing shortages there as

 well.

 And then at some point, you know, CTA, you know, we need to be

 piloting a program right now to make sure that folks in underserved

 communities can get access to it for free as well. So those are some

 of the ideas that we have. We need to make transportation a right in

 this city. And it needs to be fully accessible. And we're going to

 look towards doing that.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: I'm grading you, Mr. Walden. A -so far. And

 commissioner Johnson.

 >> COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Thank you for the question. We have to

 address the staffing issue right away. The fact that we have folks who

 are committed to more policing, where there is well documentation where

 those who are most likely to experience brutality are those with

 disabilities. That's a failed approach. And we can't go back down

 that direction.

 One of the things that we can do is to make sure that we reinstitute

 what was referred to as the ambassador program where we actually have

 other adults available on transportation lines to not only provide

 support for individuals with disabilities, but just to be support for

 those riders.

 Look, my family, we rely upon public transportation, children who are

 going to school in opposite directions because we are fully funded in

 our neighborhoods, this is something that definitely has to be a right.

 The last thing is we have to not only look at but fully fund a

 municipal program that actually plows sidewalks and make it accessible.

 I don't think we should continue to tippy toe around these issues.

 Justice is deserved. It's been denied. As Mayor of Chicago I will

 deliver justice. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Thank you all for our 5th question we'll focus

 on stopping the revolving door of the criminal justice system.

 Including the school to prison pipeline.

 Studies have shown that up to 85 percent of youth in juvenile

 detention facilities have disabilities. That make them eligible for

 special education services. Yet only 37 percent receive these services

 while in school. A disproportionate percentage of these detained youth

 are youth of color. In addition, according to the Chicago reentry

 report, a June 2020 study conducted by University of Illinois in

 Chicago, approximately 97 percent of those incarcerated will eventually

 be released and returned to their communities. The process of reentry,

 however, is one with many challenges and an often difficult one to

 navigate.

 Studies suggest that those reentering the community will again be

 incarcerated at fairly high rates. In 2019 Chicago was home to 35

 percent of turning prisoners from released from Illinois state prisons.

 They returned to only 6 of the city's 77 community areas: Austin,

 North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, west Englewood, Humboldt Park, and

 Englewood. Candidates, our question to you is this: What would you do

 to strengthen diversion and reentry opportunities for Chicagoans with

 disabilities who are impacted by the criminal justice system? Starting

 with Mayor Lightfoot in ten seconds.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: This is -- I'm eager to go.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: I appreciate your enthusiasm.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: As I started to say this is an issue near and

 dear to me. I am a sister of a brother who spent most of his adult

 life incarcerated, the last stent was 17 years in federal prison. So I

 have seen first hand how devastating incarceration can be for families.

 And what I also know is that we have spent virtually no support for

 returning residents in this city, where literally thousands are coming

 back every month from IDOC or Cook County. What do we do to address

 that issue? We hired and empowered the first ever director of reentry,

 a mayor's office position. Willette Benford, a returning resident,

 spent 20 plus years incarcerated. We convened a working group still in

 existence of all the stakeholders at the State, County, and municipal

 level who are working on supports for returning residents. I believe

 that you cannot talk about public safety without making sure that you

 have a way in which people who have served their time have a way to

 come back into community and be productive members of society. We are

 also going to be rolling out to you shortly a new plan. Which I'll

 tell you about in my closing.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: I had the privilege of working with Sally Yates on

 the reform of criminal justice system. We used the same team to

 evaluate the state systems. Number one there are no education

 occupational training for -- not occupational and educational training

 alternatives. Point number two, there are no reentry programs.

 Reentry in this state and city is an absolute joke. Hiring somebody to

 lead an office is not going to change it. Number three, we have to

 remove the obstacles to providing the -- and -- when I met with a

 reentry group the other day, they referred to themselves as returning

 citizens. The opportunity to secure loans, housing, grants, et cetera.

 One of the things that we did in this -- Sally Yates project was we

 inventory programmed, over 40 programs, all focussing on this

 population. But the programs had three things in common. No one takes

 ownership of these programs overall. No one tries to coordinate.

 They're delivery of services. And they don't have access to regular

 and sustainable funding. We have the pieces to have a great program.

 I'm going to implement it.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Speaking to a group of young men just a few days

 after Christmas who have been in and out of our penal system. And one

 of them told me that the reason for his recidivism is because it is

 easier to be dead or to go back to prison than it is to live freely.

 That's problematic. It means that our priorities are skewed. We

 can't continue down this road. Reentry is hard for everyone. For our

 sisters and brothers who have disabilities, it becomes even harder.

 And we with talk about providing wrap around services, which we should

 do, but we know one size fits all does not work. And so what my

 campaign has called on is creating individualized reentry plans for

 folks with disabilities who are coming back after being involved in the

 criminal legal system. What does that mean? It means if you need a

 job, we'll help you find a job. If you need a Ventra card, we'll help

 you. If you need an I.D., we'll help you do that. Expungement help to

 clear out your record, we'll help you with that as well. We got to be

 serious about how we move people forward.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Congressman Garcia.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: Thank you. The Illinois alliance for reentry

 and justice guidelines provide a robust framework for integrating a set

 of wrap around services with people with disabilities exiting the

 criminal justice system.

 My plan is to, one, look to address the health impacts of

 incarceration. Programs that take a holistic look to the challenges

 that are encountered by returning citizens. A focus on housing,

 health, employment, and others. This leads to lower rates of

 recidivism. We know.

 I will pilot the use of reentry navigators in partnership with

 employment pathways, using proven strategies by the safer foundation,

 the revolution workshop, and similar, training programs that have

 demonstrated successes in facilitating the transition of returning

 citizens to families sustaining jobs. The utilization of

 preapprenticeships and apprenticeships is a vehicle to do that. These

 are organizations that need to be supported. They're modelling the way

 for successful returning home for many citizens.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Green.

 >> MR. GREEN: I'm utterly tired of politicians using those returning

 home for political gain. It's not enough to just say I appoint

 somebody to lead an office, it's not enough to make them feel that the

 only way that they can get any type of revenue is to put together a

 community program that makes you look good politically.

 Folks returning home should make sure that we -- we should make sure

 that they have a pathway to living a middle class life. To be able to

 get access to real job opportunities. And we need to give them that

 foundation.

 So one of the things we push forward is our prosperity push pilot.

 We would give $1,000 a month to 10,000 Chicagoans living in poverty.

 And that is also going to be for folks who return home. We're going to

 move forward a single family mortgage bond to back 10,000 home loans

 each year and that's going to apply to those who return home. We are

 going to make sure that they have mental -- the mental health services

 in a they need. When they come home, we need to make sure they have

 temporary housing that the City will pay for until they are given a job

 opportunity and have the foundation they need to live on their own.

 We must start giving guarantees and tangibles. Enough with the

 political rhetoric and the offices. We need tangibles.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Commissioner Johnson.

 >> COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Thank you. The justice for black lives and

 the -- hundreds of millions of dollars to go into areas of need just

 like this.

 One of the first pieces of legislation that I passed was the just

 housing amendment, which Access Living was a part of. Instituting

 that. And look, all the communities that you named, those are the

 communities that I represent. That's the community that I live in.

 And so I don't know if there's anyone else on this stage that has

 more of an incentive for this to work than me.

 Quite frankly, I think what we really have to do is get over our

 addiction around jails and incarceration. We spend more money locking

 up individuals with disabilities than investing in public schools. The

 folks on this stage are not going to be as clear as I am. We spend too

 much on jails and incarceration and over utilize policing and a

 strategy. And it's failed. That's why not only the just housing

 amendment eliminated barriers, I've done that, we need to make sure

 we're creating job opportunities through the millions of dollars that

 I've made available through both of those pieces of legislation.

 We cannot be afraid to call out these systems that have been

 oppressive and damaging to communities throughout the City of Chicago.

 As Mayor of Chicago you'll have a champion and someone who's committed

 to justice. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: And Alderman King.

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Yes. So listen, we need to bring true resources

 and priorities to this problem. Violence intervention is probably one

 of the things that we could do well in Chicago. If we had the priority

 and the inclination to do it. We should be spending hundreds of

 millions of dollars on violence intervention so we're not here in 2015,

 talking -- 15 years talking about this again. This administration was

 allocated $85 million for violence intervention and only spent 5

 million dollars this last year. That's a shame. We should be spending

 hundreds of millions. We have a plan that incentivizes people and

 returning citizens to come off the streets. $600 a week. We should be

 giving them. $600 a week, that comes with job training, with

 trauma-informed care. With wrap around services for their families.

 We haven't -- we've been here before. We did this in the '40s with

 the Italians with the Irish, when they were fighting each other over

 alcohol. We called it the new deal. We put resources toward it. We

 called it the 30-year mortgage. We have to put resources towards this

 so we're not back here in 20 and 10 years. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Thank you candidates. At this time I'd like to

 invite all the candidates to make a two minute closing statement on why

 disability voters should choose you for our next mayor.

 Mr. Vallas, in ten seconds we're going to start with you.

 Mr. Vallas.

 >> MR. VALLAS: Let me answer that question by responding to a

 question that you put to us in your questionnaire. You said if you

 have one big idea to make Chicago the most accessible city, what would

 be it?

 My idea would be to create a real empowered committee on disability.

 Represented by people within the disability community. That would have

 the resources to audit, to assess, to evaluate. And to recommend

 programs that could advance the needs of the disability community. I'm

 talking about an entity that could hold us all accountable. Because

 there is lack of accountability. We talk a good game, and yet we don't

 deliver.

 And there should be a corresponding committee within the city council

 that would specifically focus exclusively on the

 disability/accessibility issue that could hold hearings, that could

 provide public input. Ultimately we need to set up a system of

 accountability. And you don't have accountability if you don't have

 transparency. You don't have accountability if you don't have a

 database that provides you the data. You don't have accountability if

 you can't assess and evaluate the quality of the programs, which we

 have never done. And you don't have accountability unless you give the

 public an opportunity to have the information they need to make

 informed judgments. So I will create such an entity.

 And I will create and support such an entity in the city council so

 the city council is a full partner in the process.

 And two, we have that entity -- until we have that entity, we'll

 continue to fall far short, maybe not short on the rhetoric, but

 certainly short on the substance, when it comes to addressing the

 critical issues. Because the disability community is the community.

 It's not a one-off community. It's a part of the community. And once

 we recognize that, and act accordingly, we'll continue to fail all

 Chicagoans. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Representative Buckner.

 >> REP. BUCKNER: Thank you. So I want to thank everybody for coming

 out here tonight for this. I am a son of Chicago, as I said a few

 times. I was born here. I was raised here. I'm raising my family

 here. I'm a Chicago Public School graduate. I went to law school

 here. And the General Assembly, I currently represent 10 of the 50

 aldermanic wards, 20 percent of Chicago in Springfield. And growing up

 here I remember Chicago being called the city that works.

 The city is not working today. But I also know that when the city

 that works did work, it didn't work for everybody. And so as we look

 at what we're going to do next, and how we move our city along, we need

 strong leadership who can collaborate, who can bring people together.

 And who will find a way to yes, instead of getting stuck at no. That's

 the Chicago we are and that's the Chicago that we deserve. We heard a

 lot tonight -- today about the ADA and making sure that we're

 accessible. The ADA has to be our floor, not our ceiling.

 We got so much more work we can do. And this is the city of big

 shoulders, we're bold, brave, creative. We can do it with the right

 leadership. I hope to be your next mayor. Thank you.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Congressman Garcia.

 >> CONGRESSMAN GARCIA: Thank you to all the partners at Access

 Living for the opportunity to have this very personal and meaningful

 conversation with you about the present and the future. My commitment

 to the civil rights of everyone is in alignment with the people who

 believe in the movement for independent living. Which is committed to

 the fundamental principle that people with disabilities are entitled to

 all of the civil rights, options and control of their choices in their

 own lives as for people who do not have disabilities.

 That's why I'm here today. Because disability rights are also human

 rights. And Chicago can only progress if we leave no one behind.

 Thus, equity is critical for all of us to move forward.

 I'm ready to fight for better access to transportation, public

 accommodations, and public safety on our streets. These are the issues

 that Chicagoans care about. I, with my experience, can navigate City

 Hall and the Chicago City Council. Springfield, and Washington. I

 want to put that experience and those relationships to work for all

 Chicagoans. My history as a coalition-builder is unequalled by anyone

 running for mayor. That is what I offer Chicago. And that's why I ask

 for your support.

 Lastly, if you believe in the things that I have articulated, I only

 ask for one thing: Be mine and punch 9.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Mr. Green.

 >> MR. GREEN: Chicago, you got a task on your hands. You got a task

 on your hands that in the next 50-plus days you go to the polls to

 elect the next mayor of the City of Chicago. Let me just first say

 that you spent millions of dollars and taxpayer dollars on all the

 people here except me. I am the youngest candidate to ever run without

 the political experience and the political baggage of some of the

 people at this table today.

 And that's why I'm running for Mayor of Chicago, because there needs

 to be a champion of all people. There needs to be someone who is

 connected to the neighborhoods, connected to this generation, which is

 so hopeless. Innovative enough to bring forward new ideas to how city

 government should be ran in our city. We have a real opportunity to

 elect a collaborator, to elect somebody that you can respond to. A lot

 of political ideas have been shared today. Who's actually going to

 respond to you when they're in office? Who actually is going to do

 what they say they're going to do?

 My track record is clear: Been a community organizer and

 entrepreneur over 12 years now. I've fought on behalf of all people,

 stood next to many of you in this room when you were fighting. Led the

 Laquan McDonald movement. The movement against Chase Bank and forced

 them to give a billion dollars to the south and west side when they

 were redlining communities. No one on this stage was with me during

 that movement. I want you to understand that it's time to address the

 needs of the people. We can't continue to look at community organizing

 and activists as the one continue fighting, fighting government each

 day. It's time to elect an organizer to the top seat in the city.

 Who's going to respond to you. I have three young boys. All in public

 school. And I am going to make sure that in this city that we have a

 future that we can all believe in. Folks who have disabilities, and

 everyone else. This is my promise, is that I will be responsive, I

 will collaborate you, I will listen to you and work with every

 organization in this city to make this a city we can all believe in.

 Punch No. 1. The first name that you see.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Commission Johnson.

 >> COMMISSIONER JOHNSON: Thank you very much to Access Living, to

 all the advocates here I have stood alongside of for the last decade

 plus, pushing back against administrations that have ignored our

 demands.

 Look, I'm living in those disenfranchised communities that we spoke

 of today.

 That they're the greatest concentration of individuals with

 disabilities, they're not just family members, they're neighbors. As a

 teacher, I advocated strong for special education students who have

 been ignored and denied. Even when lawsuits have been put forth

 against this administration because of its failures.

 I'm glad that Ja'Mal agrees we should elect an organizer because

 that's who I am and what I am. As an organizer that we fought together

 collectively to make sure that rights for individuals with disabilities

 are at the forefront. That's why we fought the previous administration

 for shutting down mental health clinics and why we're still fighting

 this administration for refusing to open them. As Cook County

 commissioner, I'm the only one on this platform that has intentionally

 put together an entire budget for hundreds of millions of dollars to go

 towards mental health, transportation -- we brought together Metra and

 Pace, CTA refuses to cooperate. Millions of dollars for violence

 prevention. We have the largest pilot program in the history of the

 world for universal basic income. That's a part of our fight.

 Look, if we're going to transform this city -- and I believe we

 can -- we got to revive the individuals who can make this city work.

 And those are the folks in this room. It's why if you look at all the

 candidates, look at who the movement is getting around. From labor,

 from independent political organizations, to progressive leaders, to

 everyday rank and file people who see justice and equity as possible.

 The politics of old have left us behind. It's time for us to build a

 better Chicago. And that's with me. Thank you very much.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: Alderman King?

 >> ALDERMAN KING: Thank you. And again thank you for providing this

 forum. It's very informative. I'm running for mayor because it's a

 pivotal time in our city, and we truly need somebody who can bring us

 together, who can lead by collaboration.

 We also need somebody who can get things done.

 We also need somebody who has done this, who's tried and trued. Over

 the last six and a half years I've shown and I've led by a lot of the

 things that we've talked about today, whether it's affordable

 housing -- I've done that. Been a leader in that. Whether it's

 housing downtown that we have affordable housing in, that we

 encouraged, on Michigan Avenue, on Wabash, whether it's in Bronzeville,

 in the heart of where some of the most senior buildings are and run by

 the CHA or in Hyde Park. We've been leading in doing that. We need

 somebody who can represent the entire city and double down in these

 disenfranchised areas. I've shown that I've been able to do that.

 I'm going to invoke leader Hakeem Jeffries, our diversity makes us

 stronger, we need somebody who believes that and leans into it and is

 strategic about how we get there. An accessible Chicago is a strong

 Chicago. And a strong Chicago is a safe Chicago.

 Punch 2.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: And Mayor Lightfoot.

 >> MAYOR LIGHTFOOT: Thank you all for being here and thank you for

 the opportunity. I think what you've heard this afternoon is a lot of

 alignment on some core issues. The difference is who's actually gotten

 things done.

 In three plus years we have worked hard to make sure that equity and

 inclusion includes the disability community. Financial empowerment,

 eliminating the substandard minimum wage that was disgraceful and held

 people back. Creating a career center that has served over 100 people

 and created real full-time job opportunities. Making sure that we have

 empowered I think one of the greatest disability rights commissioners

 in the country, and by the way, that person is the Commissioner of the

 Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, been in existence, sir,

 for about 25-plus years. We are getting it done because we believe

 that the city has to be one that is the most accessible in the country.

 Concrete, tangible things done on behalf of and with and united with

 this community. I'm very proud of our record. There's more to be

 done. More that we can build on. On housing, accessibility to

 transportation. But we are headed in the right direction. And I urge

 you to vote for me for reelection so we continue the work that needs to

 be done.

 Thank you, thank you. And don't forget to vote. I'm not going to

 tell you just to vote for me. I want you to come out and vote. We've

 got to lift Chicago's turnout above 30 percent. Everybody needs to

 vote. Vote early, make sure you vote by mail, whatever it takes. But

 do show up. And do vote. Claim our power as Americans in our

 democracy. Vote, vote, vote.

 Thank you all.

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: And now ladies and gentlemen, you may applaud

 for everybody.

 (Applause)

 >> ANDRES GALLEGOS: In closing, thank you all for joining us here.

 These candidate -- to hear these candidates share their disability

 perspective and thank you candidates for the work in completing

 questionnaires and participating in the forum. There are serious

 issues affecting the health, safety, security and economic advantage

 and prosperity of Chicagoans with disabilities beyond those which we

 discussed here this afternoon. The mayoral office of the City of

 Chicago has the ability to address those issues in a meaningful manner

 if the person holding that office has the resolve to do so. As a

 reminder to Chicago voters, election day is February 28 and online

 voter registration is now open. We wish all the candidates the best of

 luck with your campaign. Access Living will be reporting this event to

 the website in the coming days. I urge each and every disability voter

 in Chicago to consider what you heard today and get out and vote like

 your life depends on it because it very well might. We encourage all

 the candidates to hang out and meet the voters that are here. To all

 the candidates and our friends in the media, Access Living encourages

 to use and say the word "disability" when discussing us as a community.

 Thank you again. This concludes our forum.

 (Applause)

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