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ACCESS LIVING

DISABILITY CANDIDATES FORUM

JANUARY 7, 2023

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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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