

March 23, 2021

Dear Commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady,

Thank you for your March 17 response to our open letter signed by 500+ health and social justice workers and 70+ organizations demanding that both you and Mayor Lighthfoot fulfill your public health duties and deny the permit for the polluter General Iron's/RMG's move to Chicago's Southeast Side.

Your letter reaffirmed your commitments to environmental justice and clean air, including those made in *Healthy Chicago 2025* and the City of Chicago's *Air Quality and Health Report*. Demonstrating that your and the Chicago Department of Public Health's (CDPH) commitment is real requires that you deny the permit to General Iron/RMG. While there is some relief that a permit has not been issued at this point, we think that CDPH already has sufficient information to deny the permit and expect CDPH to lead with environmental justice and health equity. We support the demands of the Southeast Side community members that CDPH deny the permit to General Iron/RMG.

Additionally, we are sending feedback about remaining concerns. We agree that the health department should raise and use its public health voice. What is profoundly disappointing is that you have stepped back from that duty here. To our knowledge, you have neither publicly noted your support of the hunger strikers' demands nor clearly communicated how the Southeast Side community's demands for environmental justice align with the public health plans that the City of Chicago has published, including alignment with its environmental justice, health equity, and antiracist public health commitments.

Southeast Side community members are demanding environmental justice, a basic value of public health. CDPH and its leadership need to decide which side of history you are going to be on—and speak up and act forcefully for environmental justice regarding the proposed General Iron relocation. The eventual decision on the issue before you will tell Chicagoans a great deal about whether or not the City and CDPH are serious about their commitments to health equity, environmental justice, and antiracism in its plans.

As stated during our March 9, 2021 press conference, the workers in the Southeast Side community have for over a century toiled in foundries, steel mills, oil refineries, and other industries to produce wealth for our region. This community already experiences some of the worst pollution and relevant health inequities in the city. The proposed move—and thus far, the City of Chicago's facilitation of that move—from predominantly wealthy and White Lincoln Park to the predominantly Latinx and working class Southeast Side is a textbook case of environmental racism. This racism and class inequity is compounded further by the development of Lincoln Yards using Tax Increment Financing for the benefit

of Lincoln Park while pushing a polluter to the Southeast Side; the Lincoln Yards is adjacent to the old General Iron/RMG site.

In your reply, you highlight both recent plans and near-future activities. Do not overlook the decision before you now. Looking toward potential future actions and highlighting past plans cannot obfuscate your current responsibility and authority on this General Iron/RMG permitting decision. The City of Chicago's *Air Quality and Health Report* states, along with mapped data, that the Southeast Side is one of the "neighborhoods (that) must be prioritized for efforts to mitigate and reduce air pollution."

CDPH cannot on the one hand state commitments to health equity and anti-racism, noting that "racism is a public health crisis," and on the other, betray those very commitments by exacerbating structural racism and inequitable health risks. Failing to deny the permit to General Iron would be such a betrayal. If CDPH does fail in this regard, you cannot expect that people will take your department's or the City's health equity commitments and plans seriously. We know this decision is under consideration with more information being gathered. Your public health plans and antiracism, environmental justice, and health equity commitments should serve as your guide for this review.

We object to the language in your response that says that the Southeast Side is a "vulnerable community," without a statement of the critical context in which the City itself has for decades made and allowed structurally racist decisions to concentrate pollution and other health risks in communities of color, including the Southeast Side as one such concentration of pollution. We object also because it misstates our position. We explicitly stated that failure to deny the permit would exacerbate environmental racism. CDPH has repeatedly noted—and we agree—that structural racism is a primary driver, a root cause, of health inequities. CDPH's own data and plans reflect that health risks are based upon choices and decisions that structure risks in Chicago. Historically, and currently, these risks are structured in a racist manner. Again, if it fails to deny the permit, CDPH will worsen this racist structure that causes health inequities.

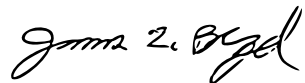
In contrast, were CDPH to deny the permit, the department would be acting in accordance with its health equity and antiracist commitments and take an important step toward making environmental justice and public health key measures of progress in government decisions. People everywhere value health. This is a time for public health authority to be used for the public's benefit and to set Chicago on the course toward environmental justice, and government driven by health equity and antiracism.

The proposed General Iron/RMG move to the Southeast Side is antithetical to the public health guidance of your department and the vision for health equity CDPH has helped establish in *Healthy Chicago 2025*. The proposed move prioritizes the profits of this company and its owners over the health and lives of Southeast Side residents. Given that it was deemed to be objectionable for the wealthy, White Lincoln Park community, allowing this polluter to move to a working class community of color in the Southeast Side—one already overburdened with pollution—would be a racist decision. Structural racism is one of the forms of oppression that the *Healthy Chicago 2025* vision says CDPH is committed to opposing.

We are glad you reaffirmed CDPH's commitment to the *Healthy Chicago 2025* vision in your letter. CDPH has specific public health responsibility and authority and we expect that you will use this to the fullest degree in service of this strong public health and health equity vision regarding this permit. Southeast Side community members have communicated forcefully that they understand the environmental

racism and health risks at play here and that this additional polluter and assault on their health is unwelcome in their community. The general public in Chicago broadly understands the environmental racism and health risk posed here. We believe that you understand this as well. The choice is clear: Deny the permit.

Sincerely,



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