



CHICAGO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

2019 MAYORAL CANDIDATES VOTER GUIDE

A FIVE-QUESTION QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT TO ALL 2019 CHICAGO MAYORAL CANDIDATES. WE RECEIVED RESPONSES FROM SEVEN CANDIDATES:



BILL DALEY



AMARA ENYIA



LASHAWN FORD



LORI LIGHTFOOT



SUSANA MENDOZA



TONI PRECKWINKLE



WILLIE WILSON

The purpose of this voter guide is to educate voters impartially on a nonpartisan basis. As a 501(c)(3) organization, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless does not intend to advance the electoral interests of some candidates or to disparage others.

Over the course of a year, 80,000 Chicagoans experience homelessness. One in four of them is a child struggling to stay in school. Four out of five are African American or Latino. This number also includes people living “doubled-up” or staying temporarily with others because they lost their housing. If you become Mayor of Chicago, what would be your plan for addressing homelessness?



“We must do a better job of protecting Chicagoans from homelessness, especially our children who are the most vulnerable. The leading driver of homelessness is the gap between the cost of housing and household earnings. We must tackle the issue on both fronts. First, this means addressing housing affordability for our lowest-income families. The city must make it easier for developers to build affordable housing by helping them acquire land and secure the financing, tax credits and vouchers necessary to reach greater levels of affordability and keep units affordable for tenants. Second, it means growing the number of good jobs in Chicago and improving access to open positions through better job training, transportation and other supports. I’m committed to generating more good jobs through major investments in high-growth fields, such as advanced manufacturing.”



“Homelessness is a serious problem that embodies idea that in a wealthy city, no one should be too poor to survive. To combat homelessness, the Enyia mayoral administration will establish and train city residents in the management of housing cooperatives, so that renters are empowered to own, operate, and cultivate more affordable living spaces, and negotiate better terms for their stays. We will establish some rent control around large-scale development projects like the Obama Presidential Center, to ensure that residents are able to experience the benefits of new developments without being pushed out. We will implement “mixed housing” by not isolating public housing buildings from private residences, and will recruit engineers to redesign public housing units to improve the dignity of the space, and make them more family friendly. We must make sure that at least 30% of all future housing developments in the city agree to set aside affordable living spaces. We must prioritize developments in wards where affordable housing is underdeveloped and sparse, and remove the Affordable Requirements Ordinance’s provision that enables developers to “opt out” of setting aside affordable units, as long as they pay a fine. We must also scrutinize the pasts of all development agencies seeking to come into marginalized communities, so as to ensure that they both have and will maintain a high standard in building construction and maintenance. Unlike the past mayoral administration, we will not contract with developers known for their corrupt dealings at the local, state, federal, or international levels.”



“My Volunteer Health Adviser Dr. Thomas Huggett and his team have provided health care to those experiencing homelessness on the West Side for more than 20 years. I am running for mayor to work for racial healing between those who are homeless and our police on the West and South Sides. People need real jobs to support their families, and we will work to reverse the economic disinvestment on the West and South Sides. As a state representative for the last 12 years, I have passed laws that “Ban the Box”, seal certain records, and expunge other records to increase job opportunities. We will build trade schools leading to jobs with more than a living wage. I strongly support the \$15 minimum wage. Through the organizations like the West Side Heroin Task Force that I co-founded, we will continue to advocate for treatment and true supportive housing for those with substance use disorder and mental health issues, including trauma and/or domestic violence. Making Chicago the most insured city will increase access to medical and behavioral health services. We must strengthen emergency assistance to keep people in their homes before they become homeless, and we have to fight for affordable housing throughout Chicago.”



“HUD’s Continuum of Care program provides homeless assistance funding to communities across the country. In most communities, the Continuum closely adheres to HUD’s criteria, thus the agency’s priorities have shaped communities across the country. HUD prioritizes funding for those who are defined as the most vulnerable -- individuals who have been homeless the longest, have the most unmet needs and who have the highest risk of death. This heightened threshold ensures the most extreme cases of chronic homelessness are addressed, but limits assistance, and leaves out a significant number who are also homeless or are living with housing instability. As a city, we must increase our efforts to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity. My administration will allocate new funding created by a graduated real estate transfer tax to assist those who are at-risk of homelessness and people who are homeless but fall shy of HUD’s definition of chronic homelessness. Under the progressive real estate transfer tax, the first \$500,000 in property value would be taxed at the 0.35% rate and the incremental value beyond would be taxed according to the rate structure noted above. Under this structure, a transaction for a \$250,000 property would result in \$1,000 savings, while a transaction for a \$1 million property would result in approximately the same payment as under the current structure. Properties over \$5 million in value would see a further increased rate. The new funding will complement existing funding, allowing providers to meet the needs of individuals and families earlier. Flexible funding allows money to be spent on housing needs, and wraparound services like mental health services, family counseling and other resources to help address the root causes of issues that lead to homelessness. These and other services are vital to reducing homelessness. Access to short term rental subsidies, assistance with transportation costs, education or training are also tools that we must use to prevent displacement.”



“I am dedicated to ending the cycle of homelessness in Chicago. That is why I have pledged to support the real estate transfer tax increase which would generate at least \$150 million to build more affordable housing in Chicago and support programs to place homeless individuals in permanent housing. But I will not stop there. Besides building more affordable housing, we also need to address the problems that lead to homelessness in the first place. My plan to end homelessness includes expanding mental health services and job training services to ensure that the root causes of homelessness are addressed. I will also work to build partnerships and integration across the various city services as well as with community organizations like Covenant House Illinois that service the homeless population so that homeless individuals won’t have to navigate an alphabet soup of bureaucracy to get what they need to survive. I’ll also work on developing plans for targeted populations of homeless individuals, including homeless youth, homeless veterans, homeless families and homeless LGBTQ individuals. I’ll seek to tailor solutions to the unique needs of individual populations, because our strategy for addressing homelessness cannot be one-size-fits all.”



“I am committed to providing affordable housing options to reduce the homeless population. I support a real-estate transfer tax on properties sold over \$1 million, which would reduce the homeless population by 10,000 in its first year. Furthermore, I have committed to many proposals to generate economic development and opportunity in the communities where it is most needed. I have committed to increasing the minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2021 and reforming the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund. As a part of my plan for the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund, more jobs and hiring opportunities will be provided to individuals who may be struggling after involvement in the criminal justice system, and 16-24 year olds who are out of work and school.”



“My plan includes utilizing vacant city buildings and properties to help house the homeless. There is not a rhyme nor reason we should be heating and maintaining empty buildings when human beings are sleeping on cement in the snow and rain. I regularly walk along Lower Wacker Drive and many other Chicago streets to help those less fortunate with cash to buy a meal or get a bed for the night. My heart has always been turned towards the homeless. This cause has always been a priority to me.”

“Street homelessness” can be defined as living on the street or another place not meant for human habitation. “Tent Cities” or “Encampments” have been a common symbol of people experiencing street homelessness throughout Chicago and other major cities. If elected, how would you address street homelessness?



BILL DALEY

“We need to expand the availability of shelter beds, increase access to transitional housing units, and connect those who can work with career training and jobs that will lead to sustainable wages. I understand that not everyone who lives outside wants to enter the shelter system, and we need to address the underlying issues for that—whether it be the result of a mental health condition or unsafe, unsanitary conditions in emergency housing. In the cold conditions we need now, we also need to address accessibility for the city warming shelters as well. Through requirements outlined in the consent decree, our police will soon be better trained on how to recognize and respond to mental health-related incidents. I believe this will lead to better treatment of our homeless population. We cannot simply arrest and send homeless individuals to jail or seize and dispose of their belongings—we must work to prevent as many Chicagoans as possible from sleeping in dangerous conditions and contributing to public health and safety concerns. All people deserve to be treated with dignity. ”



AMARA ENYIA

“Street homelessness is a consequence of the high housing prices and the widening inequality across the city. We must therefore work to address homelessness by implementing policies that build a Chicago that is equity and growth forward, address the current housing crisis, and help Chicagoans who are at risk of becoming or are homeless. Our campaign has a plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and end the ban on rent control to ease the burden of rising housing costs on everyday Chicagoans and help prevent further displacement. The Enyia administration is also committed to restructuring the Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO) to prevent developers from buying out the affordable units and cutting access to affordable housing options throughout the city. We must develop more affordable housing with revenue generated through a public bank and the implementation of a Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT). To aid those most at risk on the streets, we will expand and restore access to the mental health and substance abuse services that were closed by the last mayor. We will also engage in a comprehensive auditing of both the Chicago Housing Authority and Department of Family & Support Services to gauge the effectiveness, efficiency and follow through of past government initiatives for the homeless.”



LASHAWN FORD

“We will give more support for street outreach teams dealing with severe mental illness and substance use disorder. More funding will come for programs like Franciscan Casa in Pilsen, where people living in encampments on Lower Wacker Drive or on Des Plaines are offered low-barrier, safe housing with 24/7 care management support with a harm reduction approach dealing with substance use disorders. We will incentivize the rehab of the many abandoned buildings on the West and South Sides to turn them into affordable, supportive housing. We will push for legislation like I introduced in the last GA that would create the Access to Affordable, Permanent, and Supportive Housing and Services Act, allowing Chicago to provide housing and supportive services to people experiencing homelessness in public spaces. Housing is also health care, and we with work with Illinois DHS, HFS and managed care organizations to direct money toward supportive housing for persons with severe medical/mental health issues. Working with experts employed by agencies who do this work every day, listening to people who experience homeless themselves, using evidence-based research, and modifying our response to the needs of those most in need will be our approach. ”



LORI LIGHTFOOT

“Helping people experiencing street homelessness begins with a vision for a more equitable Chicago. The way that Chicago treats our homeless is an absolute sin. In order to prevent and end street homelessness, there a number of things that must be done. First, to ensure an equitable future for housing in Chicago, we must commit to building affordable housing in every neighborhood in Chicago. By limiting aldermanic prerogative, and doubling the mandates in the Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO), we can ensure that more affordable housing is being built across the city. In addition, the dedicated funding stream from the proposed progressive Real Estate Transfer Tax will go directly to homelessness services, including social and mental health services. But to bring people out of street homelessness, we must provide low- and no-cost transitional housing, like what has been done with some Single Resident Occupancy developments. In order to preserve and expand our supply of SROs, we can develop a Qualified Allocation Plan, or QAP, for developer tax credits. Chicago, unlike the state of Illinois, does not use QAPs. This is problematic for several reasons. First, there is a lack of transparency over how housing proposals are selected. This means affordable housing developers who submit proposals to the city do not know how their proposals compare with the competition or why their proposals were not funded and competing ones were. Second, the failure to use an objective numerical scoring system opens the selection process to political influence. Third, not using QAPs prevents the city from awarding points to development activity that advances the city’s housing priorities, such as supportive housing, housing for people with special needs and/or disabilities, or which preserve single room occupancy buildings. I believe that with these plans, we can work to end street homelessness, and help bring all Chicagoans into a life with shelter, community, and dignity.”



SUSANA MENDOZA

“Street homelessness is dangerous for the safety and health of those that sleep on the street. It will be my priority to improve our street outreach efforts, and emergency shelter systems. A recent study shows that the access to homeless system is neither coordinated nor efficient. First responders and 311 operators did not provide referrals, and the outreach teams were often not informed about resources available for individuals they found on the street. As mayor, I will work to coordinate and expand outreach and engagement resources to create a universal approach and coverage throughout the city. I will also create system capacity for real-time bed management and the electronic transfer of client information for seamless continuity of care. We also need to earmark more dollars for targeted diversion efforts to intercept those who are most at risk of becoming homeless.”



TONI PRECKWINKLE

“Many of these same affordable housing and economic development proposals can help to address street homelessness and provide needed sustainable shelter and opportunity to the homeless population. Furthermore, law enforcement should be trained to recognize when individuals in tents or encampments are at risk of danger, from weather or other factors, and refer them to a shelter or safe place.”



WILLIE WILSON

“A tent is not a home. A box is not a home. A home is a place with a roof, windows, running water, a bathroom. I do not see any difference between people sleeping on the sidewalk and those sleeping in a tent. All of them are homeless. All of them need our helping hand. As I described above, we will begin by using vacant properties of the city and move on to construction of a facility (s) that makes sense. City owned SRO’s or similar options are possibilities.”

Different government agencies use different definitions of homelessness. The Department of Education includes households who are living temporarily with family or friends because they cannot afford their own place to stay, known as doubled-up, in addition to households staying on the street and in shelters. The HUD definition of homelessness only includes those living on the street and in shelters. What definition of homelessness would your administration utilize when distributing city-generated funds?



BILL DALEY

“It doesn’t matter if you are living in a car, on a friend’s couch or in a shelter—you are not living in your home. To me, that’s homelessness. I am open to using data from CPS, homeless advocacy groups, and other organizations that use alternative measures to gauge homelessness to inform how we deploy public dollars.”



AMARA ENYA

“The Enya administration will use a similar definition of homeless to the one used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Our definition of homelessness provides a broad scope for considering exactly who is in need: those who lack a roof over their heads, those about to lose the roof over their heads, unaccompanied youth and families considered homeless by the Federal government, and those who have left home to avoid threats to their life, and homeless residents who are undocumented. Using this definition will expand the reach and effectiveness of our policies. Amara understands that limiting the scope of any need-based policy only adds undo stress to those living on the margins, and makes it harder for people to seek the help they need. Additionally, this definition recognizes that not all homelessness is born of economic insecurity, and as such will require different resources to address in different circumstances.”



LASHAWN FORD

“We have to recognize that those who are doubled up with family, friends or just acquaintances without contributing to the rent may be even MORE vulnerable than those who stay at shelters, so we would use the Department of Education definition when distributing support and funds. I have experienced this situation in my own family, and I understand how stressful it can be for the whole family – the person who is experiencing homelessness, and the family that wants to help but often doesn’t have the resources to give what is really needed.”



LORI LIGHTFOOT

“I would adopt the Department of Education’s broader definition of homelessness.”



SUSANA MENDOZA

“I would prioritize funds for those living on the street and in shelters but would include those living doubled-up when distributing city-generated funds. Individuals living on the street face an increased risk of healthy and safety hazards. We must prioritize limited resources by first helping the most vulnerable. However, pretending as though those on the street and in shelters are the only ones facing homelessness is simply whitewashing the problem. As mayor, I commit to taking on homelessness in all its forms, and partnering with the Coalition to put us on the path to eradicating homelessness completely.”



TONI PRECKWINKLE

“I support the Department of Education’s definition of homeless that includes households that are doubled-up, in addition to families on the street and in shelters. Even if the doubled-up population has a roof over their heads, their living situation is temporary and they are still in need of city-generated funds to provide for their families.”



WILLIE WILSON

“We will need to work on this carefully so that we do not violate any of the rules as it pertains to the federal funding. We would not jeopardize that funding. This question is not as simple as it seems and does not lend itself to a short answer here. For now, we must agree that this is a very serious problem that requires a collaborative effort to make a measurable impact and lasting results. Every night these citizens sleep in the street, is one night too long.”



CPS has identified 4% of its total enrollment as homeless, with almost 18,000 homeless and doubled-up students identified this school year. It’s common for students experiencing homelessness to encounter a multitude of barriers that prevent them from being able to obtain the same education as their peers. How would you help students experiencing homelessness?



BILL DALEY

“My plan to cut CPS bureaucracy by merging it with the City Colleges will bring savings that can then be funneled down to individual schools. This means more counselors, nurses and social workers who can identify the needs of homeless students and work together to address them. I have also proposed to reform how our school councils operate, which I believe could contribute to a better assessment of neighborhood-level issues, such as homelessness. Under my proposal, local school councils would become neighborhood school councils, responsible for 8-10 schools instead of one. Neighborhoods will be better able to coordinate resources to address difficult neighborhood challenges like supporting homeless students that individual schools might not be able to handle.”



AMARA ENYIA

“Our campaign recognizes that our city needs to invest in ALL students, from all walks of life, and not leave anyone, especially our homeless population, behind. This means more mental health and addiction counseling resources in schools, increasing the number of pilot programs for family job training opportunities, continuing and expanding the paid mayoral summer internship program so that students can stay engaged and motivated, and reforming the Tax Increment Financing Fund program so that historically marginalized schools on the South and West Sides of the city are not starved of the resources they need to educate our kids. ”



LASHAWN FORD

“As a teacher in CPS for 6 years, I could tell when a student was struggling, and it was often not because of the academics but because of something going on outside of school. Both parents and students who are experiencing homelessness need social service support at their school, and before and after school in their community, and instead of cutting the social service support within CPS, we must enhance it so students can thrive. More supportive housing is needed for unaccompanied youth. I voted for and strongly supported legislation in the 98th General Assembly that allows unaccompanied minors ages 14 to 18 to be able to consent to their own routine medical care. Working with university students, in the 99th General Assembly I introduced and passed a House Resolution which urges the boards of trustees of every public university in Illinois to provide housing scholarships to college students who are registered as homeless. I also envision and will incentivize public-private partnerships where basic needs such as food, clothing and transportation are met for families and students experiencing homelessness. It is only by helping those most in need that our whole city will thrive.”



LORI LIGHTFOOT

“CPS must expand the Community Schools Initiative. In 2002, CPS adopted the Community Schools Model, where a school contracts with a non-profit to transform the school into a community center that meets many of the needs of students and adults in that community. Those agencies engage individual neighborhoods in a participatory manner to identify specific services and programs that a community lacks, such as health clinics, job training, English as a second language classes, nutrition services, day care, and before- and after-school programs. Next, the non-profit works with the city and social service providers to co-locate and operate these services within neighborhood school buildings. There are currently 200 community schools and 20 non-profit partners district wide. Community schools are open in the morning, afternoon, evening, and during the summer, and are able to provide for or connect family members to a range of services to support their well-being.

The Chicago Teachers Union built upon on the existing CPS community school model with the creation of the ‘sustainable community schools pilot initiative.’ This expanded model includes an infusion of needed supports during and after the school day such as medical and mental health services, peer mentor and home visitor programs, clinical services, trauma interventions, and expanded after school programs. As mayor, I will fund an evaluation of the two models to understand how best to replicate the model moving forward and I will ensure continued funding for all community schools, with the goal of transforming as many CPS schools as practical into community schools.

In addition, as set forth in my education plan, I would expand trauma-informed instruction and mental health services in CPS. Fifty percent of all mental illnesses start by age 14. In urban areas, between 50 and 96% of all students may be experiencing trauma. CPS is no exception. Given that students and teachers are living in and working in trauma, and mental illness often starts in middle school, we must equip our schools accordingly – by providing trauma-informed instruction, providing coaching, training and support to teachers, and by providing mental health instruction and services in schools.”



SUSANA MENDOZA

“The concept behind my 50NEW Initiative is a full commitment to the community school model, including wraparound services available to children and their families in the school. I will encourage the development of innovative solutions to closing student achievement gaps through the Initiative. For example, in recent years, some schools have found that installing washers and dryers at school can increase attendance by giving kids access to clean clothes.

Solutions like these that would be particularly impactful for students experiencing homelessness would be at the core of my 50NEW Initiative. I will also work to make sure that Chicago Public Schools increases support for homeless youth through its Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS) program, enhances training for school-based liaisons, and provides specialized resources for students in a housing crisis. I will follow closely the success of these programs to reduce student homelessness and retarget resources each year to address the areas where there is the most need.”



TONI PRECKWINKLE

“Chicago Public Schools need additional resources to ensure that every neighborhood has a well-resourced public school that can meet the needs of the students it serves. This includes children whose families are homeless and are more dependent on resources the school provides. We need to invest in critical support staff, like nurses, social workers, counselors and teachers aids, to better serve all students, especially students with physical or mental health needs. I have committed to a moratorium on school closings, which negatively impact the educational futures of students and reflect a withdrawal of public support in communities already sorely lacking in investment, which also affects the homeless population.

CPS has created a Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS) department to help service CPS students experiencing homelessness. I would work with this department and implement their recommendations so students in challenging situations can still rely on their neighborhood school as a safe place.”



WILLIE WILSON

“Homeless children are a heartbreaking problem that calls for a comprehensive plan that includes the resources of DCFS and our homeless team to come together to solve. We must make sure the children have a proper parental guardian, not just a place to sleep.”

What would you do to increase preschool enrollment for homeless students?



BILL DALEY

“I know the importance of early childhood education. For homeless students, it’s even more critical since school is a safe place where kids can get a hot meal. As we expand access to universal preschool across the city, we will need to have a robust outreach strategy to inform and connect parents to high-quality early-learning opportunities. Many families in shelters have young children eligible for preschool. We need to have outreach workers connecting with those families and helping them enroll and adequate promotional materials available in locations homeless families frequent for services—libraries, public clinics, emergency rooms, and public assistance offices.”



AMARA ENYIA

“Pre-school enrollment lays the foundation for a child’s educational future. Disparities can snowball very quickly, meaning that the next Mayor must have pre-school enrollment at the forefront of their educational outcome improvement plan. The Enyia administration will increase the number of information sessions in communities when parents are less likely to send kids to pre-school, allocate more funding for after-care programs to enable parents to find and maintain stable employment without worrying about having to always leave before close of business. Since housing insecurity makes it harder for parents to send children to school, we will work to build more affordable family units closer to schools to shorten walking distances, and to allow for greater access to quality education. Amara will also increase the number of full day pre-school programs in the city, something which many educational experts agree is better for the long-term growth and development of children than half-day programs. ”



LASHAWN FORD

“I have introduced legislation in the current General Assembly that provides that, beginning July 1, 2020, a family eligible for child care services whose income is at or below 185% of the most recent United States Department of Health and Human Services Federal Poverty Guidelines for the applicable family size shall pay only a \$1 fee as a co-payment for child care services. My mayoral administration will work with my Springfield colleagues to lower the barriers that exist so every child can receive the quality child care and preschool services that they deserve and need to thrive in life. When child care agencies were not getting paid under the Rauner administration, I was joined by many leaders of these agencies to meet with state officials that led to the restoration of \$300 million of child care funding for low-income families. I introduced and passed legislation that lowered the mandatory age for school attendance from age 7 to age 6 in the state of Illinois. Early childhood education is very important to me and will be a priority in my administration, especially for those who are homeless.”



LORI LIGHTFOOT

“We must expand early childhood education opportunities in the city, and ensure that those opportunities are available for homeless students. For homeless students, school often represents the primary source for food and social services, and a primary place of shelter. As mayor, I will ensure that CPS works and coordinates with homeless shelters, relevant advocacy groups and social service organizations to actively identify homeless families with preschool age children and educate homeless parents about preschool opportunities throughout the city.”



SUSANA MENDOZA

“As part of my Future Now Plan, I’ve made a commitment to creating universal full day pre-K throughout the city. In order to fulfill that commitment, I will go after the resources we need by pursuing federal Title I funds set aside for this purpose. I will also build a culture in the homeless services task force to specifically perform outreach to homeless families with children to encourage them to take advantage of public pre-K programs. Homeless children also face other barriers to enrolling in preschool like healthcare services for obtaining immunizations. I will improve access to these services and also implement a grace period for these families that want to enroll their children but face the extra hurdle of being homeless and not having access to healthcare. I will also improve data collection so that my administration remains focused in targeting resources and efficiently serving families and providing them with the support they need.”



TONI PRECKWINKLE

“The STLS department within CPS helps to address challenges with enrollment, transportation, attendance, and retention for students affected by homelessness. I would work with this important department and implement their recommendations for preschool enrollment challenges for homeless students. CPS’s immediate school enrollment program allows children in temporary living situations to still enroll in school. Families experiencing homelessness must have knowledge and understanding of options for their children, including this program. We will measure our success by whether or not the participation of homeless students in preschool enrollment matches their participation in CPS enrollment as a whole.”



WILLIE WILSON

“As stated [in a previous answer], children represent a special challenge in that they must have a proper guardian. We must combine our resources and ensure that these children have not just a place to sleep but proper structure and protection.”

