



**CHICAGO
TEACHERS
UNION**



October 13, 2021

The Honorable Lori E. Lightfoot
Mayor
City of Chicago
121 North LaSalle Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

As you know, vaccination access has been a critical component of protection from COVID-19 and the Chicago Teachers Union's push for safety in our schools during the pandemic. This is why nearly 90 percent of rank-and-file CTU members and thousands of SEIU Local 73 members have been vaccinated.

Since shots became available, our unions have advocated for employee vaccine access as a precursor to reopening schools to in-person learning, actively promoted the immense value of vaccines to our members, and tried repeatedly for months to collaborate with Chicago Public Schools to promote and provide vaccines to employees, students and school communities.

Our goal has been, and continues to be, to get as many of our members, school community members and Chicagoans vaccinated as possible. In contrast, other unions of City employees have opposed the vaccination policy, going so far as instructing their members to refuse to comply with it and detestably comparing it to Nazism.

Now, as the deadline for CPS and City employees to be vaccinated approaches, you have responded by [modifying vaccine requirements](#) for City workers, allowing those currently unvaccinated to opt for testing instead through December while those workers line up shots. In contrast, you are insisting that the comparatively much smaller percentage of unvaccinated CPS employees will be barred from work on October 18.

This disparate enforcement of the vaccine policy will leave schools dangerously understaffed, and disproportionately impact employees of color within CPS. Be clear: We want every one of our members who can safely be vaccinated, to get vaccinated. But surely you are aware that our schools confront desperate shortages of staff, from janitors and bus aides, to substitute teachers and school nurses.

Punitive enforcement of the vaccination policy in its current form will be ineffectual and will further destabilize already understaffed schools. We cannot have mandates without engagement, and without resources. Surely, you are also aware of the reluctance to vaccination that exists in Black and Brown communities, which is justified in the context of our nation's history. We must educate and inform members of these communities, which are most in need of outreach, to dispel myths around the vaccine.

Lastly, you must also know that the CPS employees yet to be vaccinated, whom you intend to bar from work, are disproportionately Black and Latinx women. Despite this, your team at CPS has refused our bargaining proposals to, 1) allow employees who have begun the process of vaccination by at least receiving their first shot, to continue working while they move to full vaccination, and 2) pair enforcement of the vaccination policy with guarantees of (a) staffing coverage, (b) targeted outreach to unvaccinated employees that recognizes racial disparities in access to health care and the historical roots of skepticism by some people of color, and (c) prioritization of equity and representation of people of color amongst CPS staff.

It seems inconceivable that you would move to accommodate some workers, including the predominantly white male workforce at the Chicago Police Department whose union has actively opposed the vaccine policy, while your team at CPS seems intent on simply barring from work Black and Brown workers who confront very different challenges in meeting vaccine mandates. These challenges include concerns about the historic harm that medical mistreatment has caused communities of color, to lack of access to shots and reliable information about the vaccine and how to get it.

The CTU will be holding events this week to administer more vaccinations to communities most in need. But we are deeply concerned that after Friday, October 15, your deadline for school workers to be vaccinated, our schools will confront even more acute staff shortages, particularly among health workers, janitors, substitute teachers and other critical frontline staff.

Understaffed schools are unsafe schools. We urge you to avert this dangerous situation by refraining from punitive enforcement of your vaccine policy for CPS staff. We also urge CPS to join the CTU and SEIU Local 73 in partnership to get unvaccinated workers access to the vaccine and greater safety in the coming days and weeks.

We have been advocating for this partnership for months. The funds are there. We just need political will to move forward. Mandates must be resourced, and with those resources must come education from medical professionals of color, and in seminars and webinars with employees of color in our school community to dispel the myths. We have been advocating for collaboration and partnership for months, and you have \$2 billion in federal funding to make this a reality.

We urge you to embrace this opportunity at last, and join us in crafting joint strategies that get our communities vaccinated, and maximize safety for students, families and the educators who serve them.

Sincerely,

Jesse Sharkey
CTU President

Dian Palmer
SEIU Local 73 President

Tom Balanoff
SEIU Local 1 President

cc: CPS CEO Pedro Martinez
Board of Education President Miguel del Valle
CPS Board Vice President Sendhil Revuluri
CPS Board member Luisiana Meléndez
CPS Board member Amy Rome
CPS Board member Lucino Sotelo
CPS Board member Elizabeth Todd-Breland
CPS Board member Dwayne Truss