



CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

January 5, 2023

VIA Electronic Mail

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

Dear Mayor Lightfoot:

I'm writing to you today as a woman, a mother and a spouse.

On November 15, CPS officials told the CTU that the District would recommend that the Board of Education vote to approve a new parental leave policy modeled on a similar policy available to city employees, starting on January 1st, 2023. We have been working cooperatively with your team at CPS to craft a parental leave policy that could potentially be a nation-wide model for school districts. The policy enables city workers to take up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave to address the needs of a new child via birth, adoption or fostering. Currently, CTU members are only guaranteed one to two weeks of paid leave, unless they are eligible for short term disability. Unfortunately, CPS Labor Relations has now reversed course, telling us instead that they'd be "reviewing" a "possible" policy change and that no decisions or recommendations would currently be forthcoming.

That reversal of good policy promised to our members is a terrible move that hurts educators, our school communities and the city.

As a mother, woman and educator, this particular issue is close to my heart and the hearts of thousands of women that work for our school district. It's difficult to understand why — after multiple CPS/CTU meetings that produced a robust parental leave policy and an accompanying FAQ — you and your team have chosen to walk back our opportunity to give women who work in the Chicago Public Schools a policy that supports them and their families — a policy that was slated for a Board of Education vote in January.

We have worked with your team to create a model parental leave policy for our school district — a policy modeled after the plan already provided to city employees starting on January 1. This policy was slated to offer educators up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave to address the needs of a new child via birth, adoption or fostering. As you know, nearly 80% of our educators are female. Having a paid parental leave policy makes sense for our school district — and it's the right thing to do, especially as these rights are extended to city workers.

Family planning for educators is quite a thing. We plan our pregnancies around our school calendars. We come to work sick because we cannot afford to squander sick days on being sick because we need them for parental leave. When I had my first two children, I had to avoid sickness and personal misfortune to ensure I had enough paid time off to sustain our household. The inequity of this practice typically falls the hardest on newer educators because they have yet to accumulate enough sick days or personal business

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days to absorb the cost of our district's current inadequate parental leave policy. This means most cannot take the appropriate amount of time off after having their children, and many return to the classroom before they're physically or emotionally ready because they cannot afford to be without their paychecks and health insurance.

My oldest daughter's June birth date meant a few things for our household: 1) my "maternity" leave would cost our household less than it did when I had my first child in March a couple years earlier; 2) a June birth meant that I could heal properly from the cesarean section it took to bring her (and all three of my children) into the world; 3) my family would have time to bond without the pressure to return to my classroom.

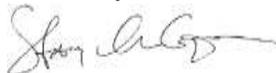
Our country, unlike other developed countries, does not have universal paid parental leave. That's why it has been a priority in contract negotiations to provide more support for female workers who want families. In a profession that is having a tough time welcoming new educators into the classroom at the same time that current educators are fleeing their classrooms in droves, it would seem like CPS would jump at creating a better and more fair paid parental leave policy — something that would be a model for the rest of our nation.

We made significant progress with your team at CPS on creating this policy — a policy that labor and management could be proud of. We've literally been co-drafting a FAQ of the actual policy, with your team also agreeing to recognize the need to allow school staff who suffer a miscarriage — a devastating physical and emotional loss — to access bereavement rights. We did this without headlines or mobilizations or confrontations. We figured it out with your team — yet now it appears that you and your team have chosen to rescind your agreement to extend parental rights to CTU educators, even as you are already successfully implementing this policy at the city level.

We have been working to move past the acrimony of the past with your CPS leadership team, yet this recent development sets those efforts back tremendously. This pattern of you and your team retracting good policy agreements fails to create quality partnership and forces a series of challenges from our membership that detracts from our shared goal of making our district the best in the world.

It's a policy approach that looks terrible publicly — and does real harm to hardworking CPS employees who deserve no less than their fellow public sector workers in Chicago. I urge you to reverse course and give your CPS team the green light they thought they had earlier to offer CPS workers the same progressive rights that you've granted to our colleagues in City agencies.

Sincerely,



Stacy Davis Gates
President

SDG:CG:yv

CC: CPS CEO Pedro Martinez

Board of Education President Miguel del Valle

CPS Board Vice President Sendhil Revuluri

CPS Board Member Joyce Chapman

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