

Hello, I am Wesley Eplin and I serve as the Director of Health Equity at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, a policy think tank focused on advancing health equity. We are here today to demand safe, affordable, accessible, and healthy housing investments for Chicago's communities.

I also serve as community co-chair for implementation of the Root Causes section of Healthy Chicago 2.0, the City of Chicago's official Community Health Improvement Plan led by the Department of Public Health—which has been endorsed by Mayor Emanuel. In these roles, inequity in housing policy as a determinant of health inequity falls within my purview. Healthy Chicago 2.0 states, "Economic development and community improvement efforts will require policy and planning approaches that safeguard against the displacement of families and communities," making clear the understanding that people are "able to stay in their homes and communities".

It is for these two roles that I am here to offer my testimony related to the draft five-year housing plan before you today.

As a member of the Chicago Housing Justice League, a coalition of 37 organizations, Health & Medicine urges you to delay the vote on this plan that is critical for advancing health equity and social justice in Chicago. Currently, the plan is much stronger than the prior five-year plan in naming some of the many problems facing Chicagoans with regard to housing. It names gentrification, displacement, and disinvestment.

While the plan's diagnosis is decently improved over the prior plan and we agree with some parts of the plan, its overall investment is much too small for the scale of the problem.

Again, I urge you to delay a vote on this plan until three things have happened:

- One, until after Chicago's municipal elections, when we'll have a new mayor and some new City Council members
- Two, the new Department of Housing is fully established and has had an opportunity to provide meaningful input on this draft and edit it according to their analysis.
- Three, we have collectively had a deliberative process to consider how Chicago can be more aggressive with regard to addressing housing inequity in Chicago with a much larger investment to meet the scale of the problem. This includes the general public, new city council members, and the new Department of Housing to be established in 2019.
  - On this last point, the draft plan itself states that—quote: "The Department of Housing will be a strategic agency, with a mission and capacity to set an agenda for housing in Chicago." (page 14)
  - However, the Department of Housing will lose a major opportunity at its very beginning of existence if this plan is approved before that office can be established.

Unaffordability and displacement of Chicagoans are overwhelming issues in Chicago, with estimates of about 180,000 Black Chicagoans displaced over the last 20 years or so.

This problem is multi-faceted and in need of major investment of funds to address it.

We cannot afford to continue the status quo of investing a pittance to address the problem. This plan needs more time to get it right and more money to address the problems of housing inequity in Chicago—and more time to get it right. I urge you to postpone the vote until: 1) after election of a new mayor and city council; 2) the new Department of Housing is established; and 3) We've had a full-fledged deliberative process for ensuring adequate investment and resources to address housing inequities in Chicago.