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January 15, 2021

Mary Ellen Messner, Commissioner  
Chicago Public Library  
400 South State Street  
Chicago, IL 60605

Dear Commissioner Messner:

As you know, our union represents the overwhelming majority of frontline CPL employees. For nearly a year now, we have been raising a variety of concerns regarding the insufficiency of the measures being taken to protect these employees against the threat posed by the coronavirus.

Over that time, we have frequently raised the question of why some or all of the branches cannot be closed to the public. In response, CPL leadership has stressed the essential role that libraries play in sustaining Chicago communities—and insisted that virtually all branches remain open.

I am writing you now to state in the strongest terms that your office should immediately act to ensure that all CPL employees are designated as “essential” for purposes of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. As I’m sure you are aware, the designation of “essential” would ensure that these employees would be included in Phase 1b of the vaccination program which is about to get underway in our city.

There is no doubt in my mind that the work that these employees do every day is indeed essential—and also that it puts them at ongoing risk to contract the virus. Given your unyielding insistence on the essential need for libraries to remain open, I cannot see how you could disagree with this perspective.

The CDC has largely left it to state and local governments to make the determination as to which employees are considered “essential”. When we recently inquired of IDPH how those determinations would be made, they indicated that the judgment of employers would play a significant role. It is therefore imperative that you act immediately and publicly to affirm that you consider your employees to be “essential workers” and urge that they be included in Phase 1B of the City of Chicago vaccination program.

Sincerely yours,

Roberta Lynch  
Executive Director

05/20

