



# Lori Lightfoot

Mayor Of Chicago

Vignette  
by National Journal

## Life In Brief

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**Current Title:** Mayor

**Hometown:** Massillon, OH

**Education:**

- JD, University of Chicago Law School, 1989
- BA, University of Michigan, 1984

**Work History:**

- Mayor of Chicago, 2019-present
- Senior Equity Partner, Mayer Brown, 2005-2019
- President, Chicago Police Board, 2015-2018
- Co-chair, Chicago Police Accountability Task Force, 2016
- First Deputy Procurement Officer, Chicago Department of Procurement Services, 2005
- Chief of Staff & General Counsel, Chicago Emergency Management and Communications, 2004-2005
- Chief Administrator, Chicago Police Department Office of Professional Standards, 2002-2004
- Assistant U.S. Attorney, Northern District of Illinois, 1996-2002
- Legislative Aide, Barbara Mikulski, dates unknown
- Legislative Aide, Rep Ralph Regula, dates unknown

## Quick Summary

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**Former prosecutor, white collar lawyer, and political campaign newcomer who became the first Black woman and first LGBT person elected mayor of Chicago as an insurgent reformer**

- Humble upbringing in working class northern Ohio. Financial struggles and father's disability fueled passion for social justice and equity
- Prosecuted drug conspiracies, corruption, and fraud as an Assistant U.S. Attorney
- In city government, was tasked with investigating police misconduct and developing a police accountability task force
- Background working in white shoe law firm representing large corporations and as a prosecutor frustrates some activists who question her progressive credentials
- Insurgent reform candidate who beat establishment-favorite candidates to win 2019 Chicago mayor's race
- Education is a top issue, influenced by her wife's career in education and mother's role as a school board member

## Approach and Motivations

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**Collaborative, community-facing "one city" approach**

- Made transparency and communication hallmarks of her campaign for mayor
- Believes listening tours and hearing from community stakeholders is the smartest way to approach bold policies
- Designs policies that benefit the socio-economically depressed south and west sides of Chicago and divert resources to those communities

**Rooting out corruption**

- Reformer mentality whose approach is to root out corruption from within, often with new political appointments and auditing processes
- Has used executive action to curtail what she views as excessive power, including limiting aldermanic privilege for council members



## Policy Position and Areas of Focus

### Humble upbringing sparked interest in advancing social justice and ending corruption

### Police Reform: Shaped by years in police oversight and Laquan McDonald shooting

- Cites Obama-era DOJ report on Chicago police force as basis for police reform policies
- Chaired task force that compelled then-Mayor Emanuel to abolish controversial police disciplinary agency and create new one
- Pushed for complete re-design of community policing to train officers in better understanding the dynamics of the neighborhoods they patrol

### Educational Reforms: Positions herself as a reformer who avoids catering to developers

- Supported freeze on new charter schools when entering office; criticized Emanuel admin for closing 50 neighborhood schools without sufficient community engagement
- Believes in standardizing community planning, establishing a comprehensive development plan, and criticizes developer-centric planning

### Ethics Reforms: Anti-corruption served as cornerstone of mayoral campaign

- Pledged to create non-partisan city council ward map redistricting process and implement term limits for mayor and council chairmanships
- Issued executive order to curb aldermanic privilege by abolishing council member veto power over licenses and permits

### Gun Violence and Public Safety: Collaborative approach with federal agencies, favoring new, pro-active investment streams

- Views gun violence as a public health problem and favors investing in distressed communities

- Favors collaboration with federal agencies and U.S. attorney's office to stop flow of illegal guns from other states
- Wants to increase resources devoted to violence interruption techniques as a pro-active measure to curb violent crime

### Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Equity: Fighting for transparency in TIF spending

- Argues TIF money has been abused and gone to wealthy developers and not to blighted areas
- Favors setting performance thresholds for TIF districts and penalties on recipients of TIF funds who do not meet contractual obligations
- Withheld Lincoln Yards development TIF funds until a deal was reached to hire more minority-owned and women-owned contractors

## Core Communities

### Maintains diverse network of activists, insiders and business ties throughout city

### Daley-era Influencers: *Despite running against establishment, has close ties to Daley allies*

- Mary Dempsey, Library Commissioner under Mayor Richard Daley and current President of DePaul College Prep, was an original backer of Lightfoot and gave her \$50,000 early in the race
- Former Dept. of Environment Commissioner under Daley, Suzanne Malec-McKenna, was an early supporter and served on her transition

### Chicago/Illinois LGBT: *Early support from LGBT community helped propel mayoral candidacy*

- State Rep Kelly Cassidy was an early supporter; the two met through ACLU
- Jennifer Pritzker, the only transgender billionaire, was a supporter and served on her transition team



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### **Chicago Legal Community: *Forged relationships on both sides of the aisle***

- Close with Len Goodman, criminal-defense attorney and top investor in the Chicago Sun-Times, who was a major donor in her campaign
- Connected to senior lawyers at former firm Mayer Brown, including former Illinois Attorney General Ty Fahn

### **Chicago Progressive Reform Activists: *Received key support from renowned community organizers and political activists***

- Don Rose, activist and former press secretary to MLK, is a key ally and political consultant who helped her win the mayor's race
- Brought in Manuel Perez as campaign manager, and later as a legislative affairs advisor, who is credited as the progressive force behind U.S. Rep. Chuy Garcia
- Remains close to the Better Government Association board, government watchdog group whose board she served on, including previous board president Dave Lundy

### **Education Community: *Strong ties to education advocacy and administrative sectors***

- Current communications director, Michael Crowley, was previously chief of staff at After School Matters, an after-school program for high school students
- Wife Eshleman worked in Chicago schools for 18 years and was an assistant commissioner with the Chicago Public Library
- Appointed Sybil Madison, former director of Chicago City of Learning, to be deputy mayor for education

### **Criminal Justice and Government Reform Community: *Connections from work with police accountability and advisory board***

- Daniel Biss, former state senator and board member with Reform for Illinois, counsels her on pension issues
- Many connections to the Center on Wrongful Convictions advisory board including former colleague John R. Schmidt, who was Associate Attorney General at the DOJ in the 90s
- Ralph Matire of the left-leaning Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, is also a close outside advisor

## Relevant Financial Information

### **Secured mayoral run-off funding from labor advocates that previously contributed to Bill Daley, Susana Mendoza, and Chery Chico**

#### **Top Individual Donors (2019)**

- Sam & Helen Zell, Founder of Equity Group (Chicago, IL), \$150,000
- Dale Taylor, CEO of Abelson Taylor (Chicago, IL), \$140,000
- Donald Wilson, CEO of DRW (Chicago, IL), \$125,000
- Leslie Bluhm, Co-founder of Chicago Cares (Chicago, IL), \$110,000

#### **Top Interest-Group Donors (2019)**

- LiUna Chicago Laborers PAC (Chicago, IL), \$500,000
- Laborers Political League Ed Fund (Washington, DC), \$200,000
- Local 134 State & Municipal PAC (Chicago, IL), \$100,000
- UA Political Education Committee (Annapolis, MD), \$100,000
- SEIU Illinois Council PAC (Springfield, IL), \$100,000



## **Publications, Media and Speaking**

**Engages with state and local media on criminal justice matters**

**Publications: Authors op-eds in local and national newspapers on public safety initiatives**

- Favorite Subjects: Gun control, community policing
- Preferred Outlets: The Chicago Sun Times and Washington Post

**Media: Appears in local and national cable news outlets to speak on crime rates and gun control**

- Favorite Subjects: Violent crime, her vision for Chicago
- Preferred Outlets: National cable news including CBS, MSNBC, and CNN; local channels including WGN News and ABC 7 Chicago; and talk shows including the Late Show with Stephen Colbert

**Speaking: Speaks before community groups on civic engagement, crime, and equity**

- Favorite Subjects: Community engagement, public safety, diversity
- Preferred Audience: Midwest-based nonprofits including Reform for Illinois, Southland Rise, Greater Stark County Urban League

## **Professional Affiliations**

- NARAL Illinois
- ACLU of Illinois
- Center on Wrongful Convictions
- Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law – Chicago
- Illinois Campaign for Political Reform
- American Constitution Society
- Better Government Association

- Center for Conflict Resolution

## **Family and Personal Background**

**Humble upbringing and personal connection to public service; big Chicago sports fan**

**Heavily influenced by mother’s activism on school board and father’s disability**

- Mother, Ann Lightfoot, was a nurse’s aide who worked in mental hospitals and nursing homes, later served on the Massillon City Schools Board of Education
- Father, Elijah Lightfoot, was a barber and janitor who lost his hearing and lived rest of his life with a disability
- Credits parents with profoundly shaping her views on social justice
- Brother robbed a bank in Nebraska and shot a security guard, sentenced to several years in prison

**Early motivations for financial stability evolved into desire for public service, criminal justice, and ethics reform**

- Grew up in working class family in Massillon, Ohio, a largely segregated city
- Family lived on the predominantly white West side
- Parents moved north during “Great Migration” to escape the Jim Crow south
- Witnessed her family struggle financially, which motivated her to pursue a career in law in order to take care of herself financially.
- Struck by racial dynamics in Hyde Park while in law school, where she states she first witnessed black poverty, and influenced her to fight for equity in the black community

**Super fan of Chicago sports**



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- 20-year season ticketholder to Chicago Bears
- Season ticketholder to White Sox and WNBA team Chicago Sky

### **Criticisms and Controversies**

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No notable controversies