



Lori Lightfoot

Mayor Of Chicago

Vignette
by National Journal

Life In Brief

Current Title: Mayor

Hometown: Massillon, OH

Education Summary:

- 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

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

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

No notable controversies