



**Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson
on the City of Chicago's Economy**

*Addressing Chicago's economic needs is a complex challenge
that we must address on multiple fronts.*

1. We need to start by getting the city's finances in order. For too long, including under the current mayor, we've been kicking the can down the road. The longer we do that, the worse the eventual cost will be and the longer we'll have to keep paying off yesterday's mistakes instead of making much-needed investments in a better tomorrow. On Monday, Jan. 23, 2023, I will be releasing a detailed plan to pay down our debts while ramping up investments.
2. These investments include not just infrastructure needs but also investments in housing, health, mental health and child care. We also need investment in education and training to ensure that we can attract better jobs in growing industries, and that Chicagoans can hold those jobs. I will ramp up investments in these areas over four years to \$1 billion per year, and pay for them by reducing unneeded and wasteful spending in other areas.
3. If we're going to compete successfully in the 21st century, we need to ensure that all Chicagoans possess 21st century skills. We need to tie workforce development efforts into our schools, starting in the earliest grades, and help CPS to do its job by providing needed supports around school safety, helping students traumatized by violence, expanding school-based health centers and improving access to technology – rather than cutting City aid to schools as Mayor Lightfoot is doing, and plans to do as we implement and elected school board. Then we need to work together to increase school funding and institute a fairer school funding formula.

We also need to do better to train Chicagoans to fill the jobs that exist today. Businesses are hiring and manufacturers are hiring. There may be somewhere around 30,000 unfilled manufacturing jobs across the state, and a good number of them are here in Chicago. But we've abandoned vocational training in our schools. Modern manufacturing jobs require tech skills, and it is our job to give our students the skills necessary to succeed. Similar opportunities exist – to fill open positions – in transportation, logistics, retail and hospitality industries

4. We need to make Chicago a leader in sustainability: We need to find new and better ways to support economic growth that is environmentally sustainable, and make our city a center of the growth industries of the future that involve sustainable, green, and circular economy principles, where the jobs increasingly will be. We also need to address the legacy of environmental racism that has made some of our neighborhoods “sacrifice zones,” where polluters are allowed to foul the air and water in ways that undermine the health of the entire community.

It’s great that City Hall has a green roof; but that commitment to environmental sustainability needs to filter down through the entire building. A better economy will mean a more livable city for all – which will mean a better economy.

5. We absolutely should be targeting investments in the South and West sides. The contrast between the North and the South and West couldn’t be any more stark. The North is 60% white and 35% make more than \$100,000 a year. In the South and West, it is 2% white and half make less than \$25,000 a year. Downtown must adapt to the post-Covid landscape, whether that means converting commercial to residential or new bioscience labs taking the place of offices. On the other hand, on the South and West sides, decades of structural racism have led to underinvestment, and it is the government's role to step in where the private sector has failed our communities. However, the process must be truly community-led, and must be inclusive of local businesses and workers.

6. A safe, reliable transit system is fundamentally important if Chicago is to grow jobs and employment. Chicago’s transit infrastructure is a tremendous asset, but we need to do better at providing *good service* to connect residents with jobs and educational opportunities. We will need to address funding shortfalls for transit, but at the same time, we can be doing a lot better with the resources we already have. I want to see the CTA as a customer-focused agency with service frequency and reliability as the highest priorities. As just one example, we need to create a citywide bus lane network and bus rapid transit system that gives buses priority over other traffic. We also need to install more well-designed, dedicated bike lanes, so that cyclists feel safe on our streets. By investing in viable alternatives to automobiles, we can reduce congestion and make getting around Chicago faster and more pleasant for everyone.

7. Finally, we need to change how economic development incentives are provided in this city: regularizing the use of TIF funds, requiring and enforcing

binding agreements to create specified numbers of jobs and hire local workers, and focusing on revitalizing neighborhood business districts and industrial development/redevelopment to provide good jobs for all Chicagoans, not just those in high-income jobs.