



## Cover Letter

March 8, 2021

To:

Honorable Lori Lightfoot, Chicago Mayor  
Dr. Allison Arwady, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)  
Candace Moore, Chief Equity Officer, City of Chicago  
Megan Cunningham, Managing Deputy Commissioner, CDPH  
Genese Turner, Director, Health Equity and Strategic Partnerships, CDPH  
Sandi Brown, Chief Racial Equity Officer, CDPH

Please find attached/enclosed the letter circulated by [Health & Medicine Policy Research Group](#) and the [Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County](#) and signed by over 500 public health and healthcare workers, students, community activists, and over 70 national and local organizations demanding that the City of Chicago take decisive action to deny the permit to relocate the General Iron/Reserve Management Group (RMG) scrap metal recycling facility to the Southeast Side of Chicago.

This open letter in support of demands to #DenyThePermit to the General Iron/RGM facility and in support of Chicago Hunger Strikers demands the City follow its own health plan, [Healthy Chicago 2025](#). Those that have signed onto the letter include organizations and individuals from across the City, national leaders in public health, social service and advocacy and includes many who worked to produce the City's Health Plan.

Below is a listing of some who have signed onto the letter:

- Eleven organizations that are members of the Partnership for Healthy Chicago have signed, as well as many recognized individual leaders and partners:
  - Chicagoland Equity Network, Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, Heartland Alliance, Illinois Community Health Worker Association, Sinai Urban Health Institute, Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago, Natural Resources Defense Council, NAMI Chicago, Metropolitan Planning Council, UIC School of Public Health Collaboratory for Health Justice, and Metropolitan Tenants Organization
- Local and Nationally recognized public health, social service and advocacy organizations and leaders have signed onto the letter. They include Human Impact Partners; National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter; Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America; Brian Smedley, PhD, Co-Editor of the IOM landmark Report *Unequal Treatment*; Linda Rae Murray, MD, MPH, Past President of APHA; Steven K. Rothschild, MD, member of the Chicago Board of Health; David Ansell, MD, MPH, Rush University Medical Center

- Organizations from across civil society have signed onto the letter, including public health advocates, research, philanthropic, healthcare, religious, labor, mental health, racial justice, immigrant rights, disability rights, student groups, legal aid, housing, environmental justice, and community-based organizations from all around Chicago.

Please read the letter below for the complete information and perspective from hundreds of public health and healthcare organizations and dozens of organizations who have signed on. We hope you will yield to the community demands that you deny the permit to the General Iron / RGM facility in order to advance health equity and racial justice in Chicago.

Sincerely,

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March 8, 2021

To:

Honorable Mayor Lori Lightfoot

Dr. Allison Arwady, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)

Candace Moore, Chief Equity Officer, City of Chicago

Megan Cunningham, Managing Deputy Commissioner, CDPH

Genese Turner, CDPH Director, Health Equity and Strategic Partnerships

Sandi Brown, CDPH Racial Equity Officer

We, the undersigned public health and healthcare workers and organizations urge you as City of Chicago decision-makers and as public health-, racial equity-, and health-equity-focused public servants to take decisive action to deny the permit to relocate the General Iron/Reserve Management Group (RMG) scrap metal recycling facility to the Southeast Side of Chicago and to support a broader environmental justice response to this situation. We stand in solidarity with the Chicago hunger strikers and their supporters who have been demanding environmental justice for the Southeast Side of Chicago.

Until the last day of 2020, General Iron operated a metal shredding operation in Lincoln Park that was closed down after repeated fines for violating environmental laws.<sup>1</sup> The proposed move of the metal shredder polluter from Lincoln Park, a predominantly White, wealthy Chicago community, to Chicago's Southeast Side—made up predominantly of people of color, including Latinx and Black people, and working class people—exemplifies environmental racism and class inequity. The Southeast Side is already overburdened with polluting industries, so moving this metal scrapper there would add to an already overburdened community. Structural racism is a root cause of health inequities. Chicago's elected and appointed officials should not allow this relocation and operation of this polluter.

In 2020, Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) launched Healthy Chicago 2025, the current community health improvement plan for the city. The plan's vision is, "All people and all communities have power, are free from oppression and are strengthened by equitable access to resources, environments and opportunities that promote optimal health and well-being."<sup>2</sup> A major theme from the

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<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne, M. (2020). General Iron scrap shredder pays \$18,000 fine for explosion, noxious air pollution on the North Side. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/environment/ct-general-iron-pollution-fines-20201103-fhke6s4t6bbtnczrywphpskna-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> Chicago Department of Public Health. (2020). Healthy Chicago 2025. Chicago, Illinois: City of Chicago. Retrieved from [https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdph/statistics\\_and\\_reports/HC2025\\_917\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdph/statistics_and_reports/HC2025_917_FINAL.pdf) page 20.

assessment is the need to, “Transform policies and processes to foster antiracist, multicultural systems.” The plan described the intention to “promote and advocate for policies and leaders that are antiracist,” as part of a broader effort to foster antiracism in public health and advance health equity. Antiracism and health equity require more than words and intentions; they require aligned actions, including in promoting antiracist policies and leadership, as Healthy Chicago 2025 states.

The American Public Health Association notes that “structural racism and discrimination in planning have further contributed to environmental injustices and, thus, threats to public health in Environmental Justice communities.”<sup>3</sup> In this case, the local community health improvement plan—Healthy Chicago 2025—properly takes aim at environmental injustice and structural racism. However, with the proposed relocation of the General Iron/RGM scrap metal facility, the environmental health risks would be worsened for the residents of this area and children attending nearby schools. This means that in addition to damaging Southeast Side residents’ ability to breathe clean air, this polluter would likely worsen the current educational opportunity inequities, a critical social determinant of health.

Air pollution and disease burdens are inequitable in Chicago and air pollution is a problem throughout the city.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the proposed new location of the metal scrapper would not simply be a move from one community to another with equal pollution burdens; rather it would be from a less burdened community to an already highly burdened community area. The move would worsen toxic air in an already burdened community of color, worsening structural racism.

A failure of the City to take decisive action and deny the permit for General Iron/RGM scrapper to move to the Southeast Side would be in conflict with CDPH’s own plan, which commits on page 20: “Here’s how we – the local public health system, including government, community organizations, academic institutions, businesses and others who support a Healthy Chicago – will make change, together, over the next five years and for generations to come.” On the same page, the plan states that populations experiencing inequities include “Communities disproportionately burdened by pollution” that could expect that a future “ideal state” will include the ability to “Breathe clean air free of harmful pollutants.”

If permitted by the City of Chicago, the operation of the General Iron/RGM facility would abrogate these and other commitments to health equity and racial justice and demonstrate that the City values the scrap metal company’s profits over the health of the Latinx, Black, and working class people on the Southeast Side who would be most impacted by the decision. One article noted that according to court records, two owners of General Iron had each received \$64 million—totaling \$128 million in profits for

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<sup>3</sup> American Public Health Association. (2019). Addressing Environmental Justice to Achieve Health Equity: Policy Statement 20197 of the American Public Health Association. Retrieved from <https://apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2020/01/14/Addressing-Environmental-Justice-to-Achieve-Health-Equity>

<sup>4</sup> City of Chicago. (2020). Air Quality and Health Report. Chicago, Illinois: City of Chicago. Retrieved from [https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdph/statistics\\_and\\_reports/Air\\_Quality\\_Health\\_doc\\_FIN\\_ALv4.pdf](https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/cdph/statistics_and_reports/Air_Quality_Health_doc_FIN_ALv4.pdf)

the owners—over the last decade. Chicago must stop sacrificing its people’s health for business owners’ profits.<sup>1</sup>

**There is much at stake with this permitting decision.** The health and wellbeing of people living in Chicago’s Southeast Side is at stake. The proposed relocation and operation of General Iron/RGM would worsen Southeast Side residents’ ability to breathe clean air. The City of Chicago’s stated commitment to equity and racial justice is likewise at stake.

CDPH’s stakes include: its ability to consistently be in service of the public’s health and for health equity; to work on behalf of and in partnership with communities, especially those facing structural racism, class inequity, and other oppressions; and the faith and partnership placed in the department’s ability to respond to and follow through on its community health assessment and community health improvement planning processes. The very vision for Healthy Chicago 2025 and whether or not CDPH, its leadership, and the Lightfoot Administration are all willing to use their authority to stand up for that vision, for public health, and racial and environmental justice—against industry profiting off of pollution—is all at stake.

As public health, healthcare, and other health and social service workers, we expect that our local health department will follow through on the health equity and racial justice commitments it has been making for years and that it has made central to Healthy Chicago 2025. We expect our Mayor, Lori Lightfoot, and her entire administration to be accountable for advancing racial justice and public health.

CDPH should fulfill its ethical obligations, which the APHA<sup>5</sup> states in part is to promote equitable distribution of burdens, benefits, and opportunities for health; ensure that health inequities are not exacerbated; and remediate structural and institutional forms of domination that arise from inequalities in voice, power, and wealth. Ignoring these obligations would be an instance of public health malpractice. Public health malpractice is the preventable gap between established science and actions by policymakers.<sup>6</sup> We demand that CDPH follow its own community health improvement plan—Healthy Chicago 2025—and prioritize environmental justice, racial equity, and health equity in its actions. As a minimum first step, CDPH leadership should publicly state its support for the Chicago hunger strikers and community members who have raised their voices in support of their community’s right to breathe clean air and for racial justice.

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<sup>5</sup> American Public Health Association. (2019). Addressing Environmental Justice to Achieve Health Equity: Policy Statement 20197 of the American Public Health Association. Retrieved from <https://apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2020/01/14/Addressing-Environmental-Justice-to-Achieve-Health-Equity>. page 5.

<sup>6</sup> Javier, J. R., Brumberg, H. L., Sanders, L., Hannon, T. S., & Shah, S. (2018). How gaps in policy implementation cause public health malpractice. *The Lancet*, 391(10138), 2414. doi:10.1016/s0140-6736(18)31038-9

CDPH should follow health equity-focused public health practice by forming partnerships with social justice actors and environmental justice organizations, which will push it out of its comfort zone, and will be a major step in beginning to address environmental racism.

**For the many reasons listed herein, we demand that Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health support the health and wellbeing of the Southeast Side people by denying the permit and not allowing the relocation to and operation of the metal shredder in Chicago's East Side community area—or anywhere else in Chicago.**

Sincerely,

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**Organizations signed on to public health and healthcare sign-on deny the permit letter:**

Access Living

AIDS Foundation Chicago

Alliance for Community Services

American Federation of Government Employees Local 704

Arise Chicago

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Black AIDS Institute

Black Treatment Advocates Network Chicago

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council

Center for Neighborhood Technology

Centro de Trabajadores Unidos (United Workers' Center)

Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance  
Chicago Center for Health and Environment - CACHET  
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless  
Chicago Democratic Socialists of America  
Chicago Women's AIDS Project  
Chicagoland Equity Network  
Citizen Action/Illinois  
Coalición de Migrantes Mexicanos  
Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County (letter organizer)  
Edgewater Environmental Coalition  
Enlace Chicago  
Environmental Committee, Indivisible Lincoln Square  
Equal Hope  
Equity And Transformation  
Esperanza Health Center  
EverThrive Illinois  
Family Matters  
Garfield Park Community Council  
Health & Medicine Policy Research Group (letter organizer)  
Healthy Illinois  
Heartland Alliance  
Human Impact Partners  
Illinois Area Health Education Centers Network Program  
Illinois Community Health Worker Association  
Illinois PIRG Students  
Illinois Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival  
Illinois Unidos  
Indivisible Chicago-South Side  
Indivisible Illinois  
Indivisible Illinois 9th District Andersonville-Edgewater  
Learning Disabilities Association of Illinois  
Legal Council for Health Justice  
Metropolitan Family Services  
Metropolitan Planning Council  
Metropolitan Tenants Organization  
MiMedico (Salud Latinx LLC)  
Minority Students for the Advancement of Public Health  
NA4J  
NAMI Chicago  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored  
National Association of Social Workers, Illinois Chapter  
Natural Resources Defense Council

Nehemiah Family Fellowship Church  
ONE Northside  
People (NAACP) Chicago Southside  
Planned Parenthood of Illinois  
Protect Our Care Illinois  
Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago  
Public Health Student Association (PHSA)  
Radical Public Health  
Respiratory Health Association  
SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana  
Shriver Center on Poverty Law  
Sinai Urban Health Institute  
SOUL Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation  
Southeast Environmental Task Force  
Southeast Side Coalition to Ban Petcoke  
Student Alliance for Public Health and the Environment  
Students for Animal Liberation  
Students for Justice in Palestine UIC  
The Southwest Collective  
Thresholds  
UIC Public Health Alliance  
UIC School of Public Health Collaboratory for Health Justice  
United Neighbors of the 35th Ward  
Workers Center For Racial Justice  
Working Family Solidarity



**Individuals signed on to public health and healthcare sign-on deny the permit letter:**

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Kim Jeffries, NA4J  
Kirsten Peachey, MDiv, MSW  
Kirstin Williams Smith  
Kori VanDerGeest, MPH  
Kristen Richter, MSN  
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Kristine Zimmermann, PhD, MPH  
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