



**CITY OF CHICAGO BOARD OF ETHICS
GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS COMPLAINT**

January 11, 2023

Steven I. Berlin, Executive Director
City of Chicago Board of Ethics
740 N. Sedgwick, Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60654
Via Email: steve.berlin@cityofchicago.org

Dear Mr. Berlin:

This is an ethics complaint filed pursuant to [Governmental Ethics Ordinance Chapter 2-156](#) of the Municipal Code of Chicago against Mayor Lori Lightfoot and her campaign manager, Megan Crane. Parents Defending Education formally requests that the City of Chicago's Board of Ethics open an investigation into the campaign activities of the Lightfoot reelection campaign.

As reported by WTTW's Heather Cherone on January 11, 2023 in "[Lightfoot Campaign Asks CPS Teachers to Encourage Students to Help Her Win Reelection in Return for Credit](#)" (attached as Exhibit A):

Mayor Lori Lightfoot's reelection campaign sent an email to Chicago Public Schools teachers Wednesday asking them to encourage their students to volunteer to help Lightfoot win a second term as mayor – and earn class credit.

It was unclear how many Chicago teachers received the email from Megan Crane, whose LinkedIn page identifies her as the deputy campaign manager for Lightfoot. The message was sent to teachers' official work email accounts, which end in cps.edu.

The email says participants in the "externship program" would be expected to contribute 12 hours per week to the Lightfoot campaign and students could earn "class credit."

This inducement appears to violate Section 2-156-135 (b) governing prohibited political activities:

No official, employee, or candidate for City office shall intentionally use any City property or resources of the City in connection with any prohibited political activity; provided, however, any official, employee or candidate for City office may reserve and rent a City-owned facility at a fair market value before any such activity or event connected therewith.

The use of an email list composed of cps.edu emails merits investigation as to how these email addresses were obtained, and whether the Lightfoot campaign paid fair market value for this contact information.

Furthermore, the offer of "class credit" to students raises questions whether the Lightfoot campaign also violated Section 2-156-142 (c), which governs "Gifts and Other Favors":

No person shall offer, with intent to violate, or make a gift that violates, this section.



Accordingly, we ask that the Board of Ethics promptly investigate the allegations in this complaint, act swiftly to remedy unlawful policies and practices, and order appropriate relief.

Thank you for your prompt assistance with this request for investigation and resolution. Please contact me for further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Neily".

Nicole Neily
President
Parents Defending Education

Enc. Exhibit A



EXHIBIT A

1/11/23, 8:26 PM

Lightfoot Campaign Asks CPS Teachers to Encourage Students to Help Her Win Reelection in Return for Credit | Chicago News | WTTW

EDUCATION

Lightfoot Campaign Asks CPS Teachers to Encourage Students to Help Her Win Reelection in Return for Credit

Heather Cherone | January 11, 2023 5:01 pm



Mayor Lori Lightfoot appears on "Chicago Tonight" on Jan. 3, 2023. (WTTW News)

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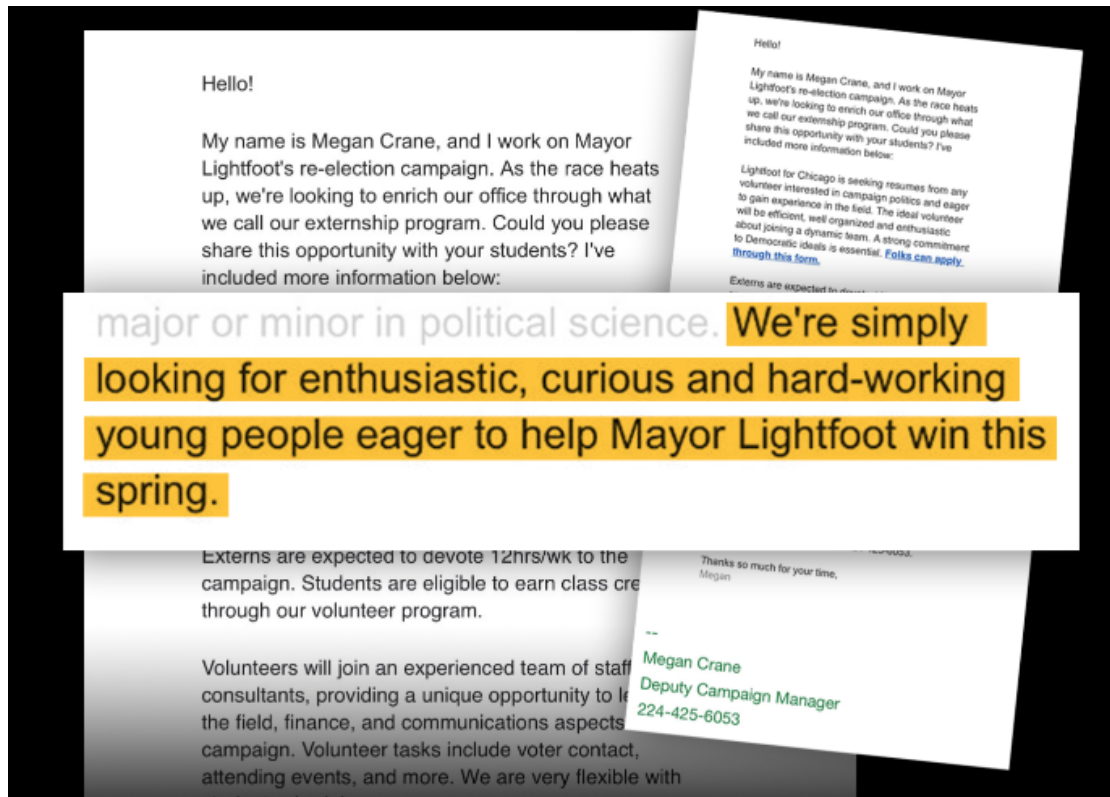
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1/11/23, 8:26 PM

Lightfoot Campaign Asks CPS Teachers to Encourage Students to Help Her Win Reelection in Return for Credit | Chicago News | WTTW

“We’re simply looking for enthusiastic, curious and hard-working young people eager to help Mayor Lightfoot win this spring,” according to an email obtained by WTTW News.



A spokesperson for the Lightfoot campaign told WTTW News in a statement that the effort was designed “to provide young people with the opportunity to engage with our campaign, learn more about the importance of civic engagement and participate in the most American of processes” and “done using publicly available contact information.”

As mayor of Chicago, Lightfoot appoints not only the superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools but also the members of the Chicago Board of Education. Chicago’s ethics ordinance prohibits the use of public resources, including email accounts, for non-official purposes.

A Chicago Public Schools spokesperson told WTTW News that “as a rule, the district does not coordinate with any political candidates or campaigns. It has not done so to date and will not be doing so.”



1/11/23, 8:26 PM

Lightfoot Campaign Asks CPS Teachers to Encourage Students to Help Her Win Reelection in Return for Credit | Chicago News | WTTW

Chicago Teachers Union President Stacy Davis Gates told WTTW News the campaign's action was "unethical" and that she was concerned teachers who decline to volunteer for the mayor's campaign, or encourage their students to do so, could face retaliation.

Davis Gates said it was unclear how many teachers received the email, which attorneys for the union believe not only violates the city's government ethics ordinance but also the ethics policy imposed by Lightfoot when she took office in 2019.

The teachers' union has endorsed Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson in the race for mayor. Johnson is a paid staff member of the union.

All employees of the city and its sister agencies are prohibited from engaging in work on behalf of political campaigns while being paid with taxpayer funds. Encouraging their students to volunteer for a particular campaign could violate those rules, and could result in the employees' discipline.

In July, the Chicago Board of Education [rejected a recommendation from Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez to fire two George Washington High School teachers](#) who protested city officials' decision to allow a metal shredding and recycling operation to move from the North Side to the Southeast Side.

Chicago Teachers Union leaders accused Lightfoot of retaliating against Lauren Bianchi and Chuck Stark for protesting the decision to give the parent company of General Iron the green light to move its metal shredding and recycling operation from Lincoln Park to the Southeast Side outside the mayor's Logan Square home.

Political patronage has long plagued all levels of Illinois government, with employees' jobs often hinging on their political activities in support of – or against – specific political candidates. The practice – which gave the Chicago machine much of its power – has been outlawed after a series of court decisions that forced government agencies to reform their practices.

Lightfoot ran for mayor in 2019 on a platform promising to root out corruption at City Hall and toughen the city's ethics regulations in an attempt to break the grip of the city's "corrupt political machine."

Election Day is Feb. 28. If no candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, a runoff between the top two candidates will take place on April 4.

Contact Heather Cherone: [@HeatherCherone](#) | (773) 569-1863 | hcherone@wttw.com

