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Testimony for Committee on Economic, Capital and Technology Development

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[Begin testimony]

Hi. I'm Ryan Wilson here on behalf of the Metropolitan Planning Council. Thank you to Chairman Villegas and the committee for holding today's hearing. At MPC, we work to improve the quality of life for Chicago and our region, advocating for policies and public investments that achieve equitable outcomes for all. This includes:

- **Ensuring access** to safe drinking water from a healthy Lake Michigan;
- **Improving accessibility** to our rivers and supporting natural areas;
- **Targeting investments** in nature-based stormwater management strategies to protect and improve our vulnerable neighborhoods from flooding; and
- **Developing steady streams of revenue** to support public and civic investment.

Today, the convergence of three crises—Justice, Climate, and Disease—define our time and shape the future of Chicago. Each crisis has accelerated the need for solutions to pressing local water challenges, including:

- **Damage caused by urban flooding** that disproportionately affects communities of color;
- **Exposure to lead in drinking water** that causes significant lifelong health problems for too many Chicago children; and
- **Uncoordinated planning and investments** that fail to make the best use of public resources and reduce the chances for private investment.

We hear from our constituents, and yours—residents and activists, business and community leaders—that these local water crises risk squandering our city's significant freshwater advantage, and must be addressed.

Here are three investments that the City should prioritize now:

The first investment is to **Establish water as a human right**. Chicago can—and must—do this by:

- Declaring access to water and sanitation as a human right, and implementing policies that:
 - Create equitable fee structures and ensure water access.
- Implementing an equitable lead service line replacement plan that prioritizes replacement of lines serving vulnerable populations such as children. A successful plan will:
 - Replace all, not some pipes;
 - Have a fair funding source;
 - Ensure low-income protections; and
 - Provide equitable job benefits.

The second investment is to **Create a comprehensive flood relief program**. Chicago can—and must—do this by:

- Accelerating new investments in green infrastructure;
- Expanding maintenance of existing infrastructure;
- Consolidating management of public asset across departments;
- Adopting innovative policies, such as:
 - Stormwater credit trading; or
 - In-lieu and impervious area fees; and
- Modernizing the City's Stormwater Ordinance.

The third investment is to **Implement a One Water Agenda**. Chicago can—and must—do this by:

- Centering water in the comprehensive plan;
- Recognizing water as a key to economic development and workforce strategies;
- Incorporating Community Benefit Assessments into all capital asset planning;
- Expanding collection and access to water and climate data and model projections; and
- Building capacity for public participation, transparency and data-sharing.

Addressing systemic water issues requires coordination across city departments and agencies, as well as with regional, state, and federal government partners, and meaningful engagement with residents and neighborhood leaders. Together, it is possible to create a water future for Chicago that preserves our advantage as a Great Lakes city, improves our business climate, and above all protects the health and well-being of all of our city's residents. We look forward to partnering with the City toward bold, inclusive water policies and practices that will ensure this future.

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