

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts: Jim Bloyd: 708-955-4100 jimbloyd@gmail.com and Wesley Epplin: 217-979-2632 wepplin@hmprg.org

HEALTH GROUPS DEMAND CDPH COMMISSIONER DR. ALLISON ARWADY & MAYOR LORI LIGHTFOOT ACT ON PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSIBILITIES BY DENYING GENERAL IRON PERMIT

CDPH's response to letter from 500+ Health Workers and 70+ organizations was rebuked with reminder that General Iron permit decision will indicate to Chicagoans if City takes seriously health equity, antiracism, & environmental justice

CHICAGO (March 23, 2021)--Today, another public health-focused [letter](#) was sent to Dr. Allison Arwady, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, again encouraging her to deny the permit for the General Iron/RMG polluter on public health grounds. The new letter seeks to hold her and CDPH accountable for the City's public health and air quality plans, responsibilities, and commitments, which include environmental justice.

On March 17, CDPH Commissioner responded to an [open letter](#) signed by more than 500 health workers and 70+ organizations that had been sent to her and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. [Dr. Arwady's response](#) noted that the City had delayed the decision regarding the General Iron permit and more information has been requested of the company that is seeking to set up yet another polluting facility in the Southeast Side of Chicago. The permit delay is a partial relief for the Southeast Side; however, the demand remains for the City to act decisively to deny the permit to General Iron/RMG and for CDPH to act in favor of environmental justice.

In her response, Dr. Arwady re-stated CDPH's commitments to a health equity vision for Chicago and shared several future plans, including pursuing a cumulative impact assessment and developing the City's first Environmental Equity Working Group. However, the CDPH Commissioner stopped short of committing to denying the permit to General Iron in fulfillment of CDPH's environmental justice and antiracism commitments.

In the new letter to Dr. Arwady, the Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County and Health & Medicine Policy Research Group reaffirmed support for Southeast Side community members' demands for environmental justice, stating that CDPH's health equity commitments "...requires that you deny the permit to General Iron/RMG."

"Dr. Arwady's letter reaffirmed CDPH's pledge to follow their data and plans that focus on health equity and environmental justice. We therefore look forward to their denial of the General Iron's permit," said Susan Ávila, of the Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County.

The health groups' reply to Commissioner Arwady states, "Do not overlook the decision before you now. Looking toward potential future actions and highlighting past plans cannot obfuscate your current responsibility and authority on this General Iron/RMG permitting decision." Furthermore, "CDPH cannot on the one hand state commitments to health equity and anti-racism, noting that 'racism is a public health crisis,' and on the other, betray those very commitments by exacerbating structural racism and inequitable health risks. Failing to deny the permit to General Iron would be such a betrayal. If CDPH does fail in this regard, you cannot expect that people will take your department's or the City's health equity commitments and plans seriously."

"CDPH's own 2020 Air Quality and Health report demonstrates that this Southeast Side community is already at the worst decile in the City's air quality and health index. Anything other than a denial is contradictory to the city's own plans and is an environmentally and structurally racist decision," said Joanna Tess of the Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County.

#