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# Chicago Failed to Enforce Law Requiring City Contractors to Disclose Links to Slavery: Officials

[Heather Cherone](#) | June 9, 2022 5:53 pm



Twenty years ago, Chicago became the first city in the nation to pass a law requiring firms doing business with the city to disclose whether they profited from slavery. Now two decades later, there is no record that Chicago leaders — during the tenure of three mayors — fully implemented the law, officials said Thursday.

Designed to expose the horrors of the slave trade and its foundational role in America's economy, the ordinance requires the city's chief procurement officer to report annually to the Chicago City Council about the disclosures made by firms that provide goods or services to the city.

But Ald. Stephanie Coleman (16th Ward), the chair of the Subcommittee on Reparations, said Thursday her efforts to obtain two decades of those reports had been unsuccessful. Coleman said she had hoped to use that information to guide the next steps of the subcommittee.

"In order to know where we are going, we most definitely have to recognize the past," Coleman said.

Only six firms doing business with the city appear to have disclosed any information to the city in 20 years about their links to the slave trade and only one of those reports is complete, Coleman said.

While U.S. Holdings, Bank of America, Aetna Insurance, PNC Bank, Wells Fargo and Harvard College filed statements with the city about their historical ties to the slave trade, only the statement filed by Aetna was complete, Coleman said. Those reports came from the mayor's office, Coleman said.

Chief Procurement Officer Aileen Velazquez, appointed by Mayor Lori Lightfoot in September 2021, told members her office did not have the annual reports required by the slavery-era disclosure ordinance and could not provide them to the subcommittee. The 2021 report will be complete by June 30 and submitted to the City Council, Velazquez said.

Formed in June 2020 and spurred in part by the demands for racial justice that swept the nation in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the City Council's Subcommittee on Reparations met for just the second time in two years on Thursday.

Coleman and Health and Human Relations Committee Chair Ald. Roderick Sawyer (6th Ward) [have told WTTW News](#) they blame Mayor Lori Lightfoot for “stonewalling” their efforts to address the issue of reparations.

[Sawyer announced this week](#) he will run for mayor of Chicago against Lightfoot, who is seeking a second term.

“It has been a major, major challenge” to make any progress on reparations, Coleman said.

Coleman said she had to overcome “multiple barriers” to hold a meeting of the subcommittee.

Kamm Howard of the [National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations](#) attempted to remind City Council members of their reaction to Floyd’s murder by playing a five-minute video that compiled their remarks at a June 4, 2020, meeting pledging immediate action. Floyd was murdered 10 days earlier.

Chicago’s effort to address reparations for the descendants of enslaved people stalled even as suburban Evanston became the first city in the nation to offer reparations. In January, Evanston picked the first residents to get \$25,000 in housing benefits that can be used toward a down payment, home repairs or interest and late penalties to the first residents to qualify for the program.

Ald. Andre Vasquez (40th Ward), the vice chair of the subcommittee, said he was frustrated that Chicago has not led the nation on this issue.

“I look at Evanston and get pretty jealous,” Vasquez said.

Coleman agreed.

“I too am a little jealous,” Coleman said.

Sawyer has said he made a mistake when he dropped his effort to create a full commission to study the issue of reparations after Lightfoot objected.

Vasquez said Thursday that had that commission been created, the effort to study reparations and craft a proposal that the City Council could consider would not have stalled.

Sawyer agreed, and said the city should create a new office under the mayor's control to address reparations, much like the Office of New Americans focuses on Chicago's immigrant and refugee communities.

Sawyer vowed to continue to push for reparations to repair the damage caused by slavery, segregation and discrimination — which were all established by federal, state and local laws and often enforced with violence.

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