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**AT THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS, MAYOR DE BLASIO AND MAYOR
LIGHTFOOT PROMOTE EMPOWERED CITIES**

Empowered Cities is a landmark initiative to advance equity and economic opportunity for low-income people with disabilities and their families

NEW YORK—Today, at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot promoted Empowered Cities, a national network of city and municipal disability leaders focused on the immediate needs of the disability community and addressing long-standing equity issues magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with today's event, the Empowered Cities initiative launched a [website](#) which will serve as a tool for other cities to become more inclusive.

"New York City is thrilled to be leading like-minded cities across the country to uplift the voices and concerns of the disability community," said **New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "Empowered Cities was born out of a need to fix long standing issues disproportionately impacting people with disabilities, and we're doubling down on that commitment as we create a recovery for all of us."

"Being a part of the nationwide Empowered Cities initiative has contributed to our work in creating a more equitable city," said **Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot**. "Equity is at the forefront of everything we do, and this includes a commitment to serving Chicagoans with disabilities. Through our collective efforts, we are working towards an achievable goal to ensure we live in a more accessible and inclusive nation."

Launched in 2019 with support from Citi, Empowered Cities catalyzes municipal efforts to advance equity and economic opportunity for people with disabilities and their families. This unique collaboration is spearheaded by the NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and co-chaired by the Commissioners of the Mayor's Offices of People with Disabilities in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Since its inception, the Empowered Cities network has worked to address the most critical unmet needs facing people with disabilities and their families during these challenging times. These include providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to people with disabilities and their healthcare aides, tackling food insecurity, offering durable medical equipment, and ensuring accessible COVID-19 communications.

As the nation and the world continue to address the impacts of COVID-19, Empowered Cities is a necessary collaboration to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are being met. Empowered Cities will focus on issues like accessibility, the digital divide and identifying strategies to advance the original pillars of the Empowered Cities Initiative: financial empowerment, employment, and access to affordable accessible housing. The newly

launched [Empowered Cities website](#) provides access to resources and the priorities, advocacy and policies of this landmark initiative.

"There is strength and power in numbers," said **Boston Mayor Kim Janey**. "The Empowered Cities program has created a cohesive group of Disability Commissioners from across the US, and brought them together at a critical time in our country. They were able to share information on resources and supports for residents with disabilities during the pandemic," she added. "And they are now working hard to ensure that people with disabilities are fully included in the equitable recovery efforts in each of their cities, which is among my top priorities."

"This pandemic has shined a bright light on where our cities fell short, where our policies could improve, and where our leaders could learn from the past rather than return to business as usual — and that's especially true when it comes to accessibility in our public spaces," said **Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti**. "Empowered Cities is helping bring this crucial issue to the forefront of the national conversation, while providing real solutions for cities to make their communities more livable for individuals with disabilities."

"While we know that disability equity has always been a critical part of our success as a city, the pandemic has taught us that elevating residents with disabilities within our communities is more important now than ever." said **San Francisco Mayor London N. Breed**. "We know that Deaf and disabled communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The work of Empowered Cities truly shows us that cities can come together, and all of us, including people with disabilities, can thrive together."

"During these unprecedented times, the need to create a better, fairer, and more equitable America, in which every person is helped to realize their full human potential, has never been greater. This initiative focuses critical attention on one of our most vulnerable communities and is helping to serve as a real catalyst for change," said **U.S. Conference of Mayors President and Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer**.

"The disparities in outcomes for individuals with disabilities that already existed prior to COVID-19 have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. As we look to recovery, there has never been a more important time for mayors to lead on efforts to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion than right now," said **Tom Cochran, CEO and Executive Director of The U.S. Conference of Mayors**. "Empowered Cities is a critical effort to truly create opportunity for all."

"In the United States, one in four people identify as having some kind of disability," said **Victor Calise, Commissioner of the NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities**. "As a nation still reeling from COVID-19, the Empowered Cities initiative helps to ensure that everyone's needs are being met. In 2020, we came together to provide resources and information to address the issues within the disability community. As we begin an inclusive recovery process, Empowered Cities will help put disability needs at the forefront of municipal government."

"I am proud to work with our fellow Commissioners across the nation to develop effective solutions and strategies to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities nationwide," said **Rachel Arfa, Commissioner of the Chicago Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities**. "We have worked together throughout this pandemic to share approaches that will ensure people

living with disabilities continue to access employment opportunities, maintain financial freedom, and thrive independently in our communities.”

“Being part of the Empowered Cities initiative has helped us to better serve the residents of our cities,” said **Boston Disability Commissioner Kristen McCosh**. “MOPD Commissioners from across the country have learned from each other and developed best practices to support people with disabilities during the pandemic. But we know that there is more work to be done,” she added. “Boston Mayor Kim Janey is committed to an equitable reopening, and my work with Empowered Cities will be a key piece of this moving forward.”

“COVID19 has caused us to imagine new ways to work, learn and provide access to resources and information,” said **Stephen David Simon, Executive Director, Los Angeles Department of Disability**. “With the creation of Empowered Cities, we have the opportunity to reimagine and elevate accessibility for all people with disabilities across our nation.”

“San Francisco is privileged to be part of the Empowered Cities effort,” said **Nicole Bohn, Director of the San Francisco Mayor’s Office on Disability**. “From the distribution of PPE to residents with disabilities to truly understanding the technology and digital equity needs that have arisen after a year of our communities sheltering in place, we are forging pathways that will build better futures for all of us.”

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