

Sept. 13, 2021

Ald. Pat Dowell, 3rd Ward
Ald. Roderick Sawyer, 6th Ward
Ald. Gregory Mitchell, 7th Ward
Ald. Michelle Harris, 8th Ward
Ald. Marty Quinn, 13th Ward
Ald. Raymond Lopez, 15th Ward
Ald. Stephanie Coleman, 16th Ward
Ald. David Moore, 17th Ward
Ald. Derrick Curtis, 18th Ward
Ald. Matt O'Shea, 19th Ward
Ald. Howard Brookins, 21st Ward
Ald. Silvana Tabares, 23rd Ward
Ald. Michael Scott, 24th Ward
Ald. Walter Burnett, 27th Ward
Ald. Jason Ervin, 28th Ward
Ald. Gilbert Villages, 36th Ward
Ald. Samantha Nugent, 39th Ward
Ald. Jim Gardiner, 45th Ward

Dear Aldermen and Alderwomen:

We represent more than 50 Arab American and Asian American gas station and small grocery store owners who have businesses in your communities and wards.

We are writing **to request a City Council investigation** into the apparent racial targeting of our store owners by the administration of Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the city's Inspections Department.

During the past three months, a Special Task Force consisting of several police units (3 to 6 police officers) and several of the city's inspectors (3 to 5 inspectors) have been **racially harassing our stores and forcing us to close.**

On many occasions, in a brazen disregard for our rights, the inspectors have told the Task Force leaders that they could not find

any code violations and were then ordered to “Close them down anyway.”

The code violations range from the ridiculous to the frivolous and clearly are intended only to create a cause to justify the forced closure of our gas stations and grocery stores.

We have been told by inspectors that by shutting our stores, the city is able to discourage armed street gang members from congregating in our areas. The assertion is ridiculous and a clear attempt by Mayor Lightfoot to convey a false impression that she is doing something effective to stem the horrendous killings that plague our city, the neighborhoods that we serve, and our businesses.

The closure of our stores, which ranges from weeks to many months, has resulted in huge revenue losses for our businesses. But these revenue losses directly impact the City of Chicago, too.

- Closing our stores has resulted in the loss of more than 300 jobs, most held by local residents who live near our establishments.
- Closing our stores has directly resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in sales tax revenues and even more losses in gasoline tax revenues to the city, county and state.

Worse is the ruse that there are serious code violations. The alleged code violations that have been cited by the Special Task Force range from improper use of electrical cords, spacing between shelves, lack of back flow on coffee makers, improper lighting, doors that are suddenly “too small,” and the use of power surge bars.

Most of the code violation scan be fixed immediately. But to ensure the stores are forced to close, the Special Task Force assaults our stores on Friday afternoons, closing us down to prevent us from obtaining permits to correct the alleged infractions. In fact, when infractions are corrected, the Special Task Force inspectors issue new and even more frivolous code violation citations to keep our stores closed.

We are business people who are proud of our businesses, many operating for more than three decades. We are proud of the services that we provide in communities where the big grocery stores have fled because of the gang violence. We have been victims of that very same gang violence, too. We strive to offer the best possible services to our neighbors. We employ our neighbors. We donate to support our neighbors, and donate to support the local schools. We have been responsive to requests for support from local officials and have always been generous in actively engaging in our communities, areas that many other business people have refused to operate in because of the gang violence.

Closing our stores is a public relations stunt by the Mayor to convey a false sense of the city doing something about the rising wave of violence in our communities. Many of our gas stations and stores are located in the areas where the worst levels of crime occur.

Worse is the attitude of the inspectors who have expressed disdain because of our Arab Heritage and Muslim religion. It is not just an ineffective strategy to confront street gangs violence, it is also racist and contradicts the principles that Mayor Lightfoot has asserted in her campaigns of caring for minorities, women, and the LGBTQ community. This targeting of our stores contradicts those claims and makes a mockery of the need to speak out against discrimination and racism against all people.

We are asking you to convene a special City Council hearing to investigate these closures, the targeted racism and the failed policies intended to create positive PR in the so far failed war against street gang violence. Closing our stores will not stop the violence. It will only bring more hardship on the communities where we operate.

We urge you to hold this public hearing so that this racist, discriminatory and misguided approach to the serious problem of street gang gun related killings and violence.

Chicago needs a serious strategy to confront and defeat the street gangbangers, not a publicity stunt intended to deflect from the mayor's failure to reduce and stop the violence.

Our store owners are not only willing to testify about our experiences and the citations issued and period of closure, but also will provide store surveillance video evidence to support our claims.

American Arab Chamber of Commerce

www.AACCUSA.org