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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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For More Information:

State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford

(773) 378-5902

Ford Urges IDOT to Make Extra Efforts to Use Minority-Owned Contractors

Legislator will lead new task force to study how to increase minority participation in government

CHICAGO – In light of a recent report by WBEZ radio that revealed that less than 10 percent of federal stimulus dollars have been awarded to minority or women-owned firms in Illinois, State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) is urging the Illinois Department of Transportation to step up their efforts to meet the goal of 22 percent that they set with the federal government.

“The Department of Transportation has failed to meet their own goals, while minority and women-owned road building companies sit by the phone waiting for a call,” Ford said. “Unemployment has hit minorities especially hard, and we can’t miss this opportunity to help disadvantaged communities in this time of recovery.”

Disadvantaged business enterprises are getting a smaller percentage of stimulus funds than they did of regular highway funds. Additional data from the Fiscal Year 2008 report of the State of Illinois Business Enterprise Council for Minorities, Females and Persons with Disabilities shows that out of \$2.189 billion in total contracts for that fiscal year, approximately 6 percent went to African-American owned firms and 7.5 percent were awarded to Hispanic-American owned firms. Unemployment data for 2008 shows that the unemployment rate for African-Americans of 12.1 percent was nearly double the state average of 6.5 percent.

In July 2009, Ford was appointed chair of the House Democratic Task Force to Increase State Government Business Opportunities for Minority-Owned Enterprises and Small Businesses. The legislators who have joined the task force are charged with examining the current data about minority participation in state agencies and contracts, exploring reasons why minority participation is as low as it is, and working with all stakeholders, including organized labor, to come up with a winning strategy to increase minority employment in good-paying jobs.

“Qualified minorities should have equal access to opportunities and contracts,” Ford said. “One important part of the solution to the problem of gun violence and crime in minority communities is to increase business and employment opportunities. The state must lead the way in this effort, giving an example to private businesses,” Ford added. “I look forward to working with the new Secretary of Transportation, Gary Hannig, as we work strategically to increase fairness and eliminate the disparities in the awarding of IDOT contracts.”

Ford will join reporter Adriene Hill on WBEZ 91.5 FM tomorrow, September 16, 2009 at 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. to discuss this issue. For more information, please contact Rep. Ford’s constituent service office at (773) 378-5902.

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