



Mayoral Recall

The founding of our country was based on the proposition in the Declaration of Independence that “... Governments ... deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed ... That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

Abraham Lincoln characterized our democratic process as a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Participation in safe, fair, free and orderly regular elections is the usual way that citizens express their preferences for those who will lead them and make the decisions that affect their lives. However, sometimes another process must be used when those who are governed feel so strongly that they cannot wait for the next election to make a change – these processes include impeachment or recall elections. More than half of the states have state laws allowing for the recall election of local officials, including mayors – Illinois does not have such a law. But the idea of recall is not foreign to Illinois – in 2010, 66% of voters approved an amendment to the Illinois Constitution to provide for a mechanism to recall a governor.

As state representative of the Eighth District in Illinois, representing the West Side of Chicago and the near west suburbs, I have heard plenty – through phone call, letters, emails, texts, and social media posts - from those who feel that their best interests are not being represented by the current mayor of Chicago. I felt the frustration and the anger when I marched with and talked with protesters on Michigan Avenue on Black Friday. People are angry that promises to help and improve our local schools - after the 49 neighborhood schools were closed – have not been kept. People are angry with the corruption and unfairness associated with the red light and speed zone cameras. People are angry that, over the last ten years, the city has paid more than \$521 million for settlements and verdicts in police misconduct cases. People are angry that they not only feel threatened by the criminals on the street but also feel threatened by some of the same people who have taken the oath of office to serve and protect them. People feel that the West and South sides of our city have not received the same attention as more wealthy parts of our city. People feel left outside of the decision-making process as priorities are set for our city. And though as a state representative I have voted for the city of Chicago to receive billions of dollars, I have also been frustrated by the lack of support to address the major needs of my constituents on the West Side – we cannot be satisfied with assistance with small things like requests for repairs. I have the duty to stand and work for the will of the people I represent – and we need more.

And the tipping point came with the case of the shooting of 17 year old Laquan McDonald, who grew up on the West Side in Austin just a few blocks from the house where I grew up and where my mother and my extended family still live. The discrepancies between the police reports and what the whole world could see on the video, the tampering with the Burger King videos, the \$5 million payout to the family before a lawsuit was even filed, the withholding of the video from the public for more than 13 months, the coincidental timing around the mayoral election, the changing stories of when the video was seen and by whom, and now the emails involving close aides to the mayor have all led to a deep lack of trust in how the current mayor has dealt with the issues of how the police serve and protect residents of Chicago. We have heard plenty of apologies – but after a while, apologies are not enough - action is needed. In light of all of these issues that people brought to me, I felt I needed to make a respectful response to the ongoing unrest in our city, so I introduced House Bill 4356 as a sincere effort to create a mechanism to recall the mayor of Chicago. Voters expect elected officials to respond to their demand for change, and this is what the recall bill attempts to do. We have to take the process of recalling a democratically elected official very seriously – it should not be done on a whim, and it should not be easy to do. The fight for House Bill 4356 will not be easy – first, we have to make it through the process in Springfield to have the bill become law. Then, after it is law, almost 89,000 signatures and the sponsorship of at least two aldermen are required to even call a recall election, and then the election would take place to determine the fate of the mayor.

I am thankful for the many supporters for this legislation so far, especially state Rep. Mary E. Flowers, who has been Chief Co-Sponsor of the bill since it was introduced. More are signing on every day. Some have doubted the legality of the legislation and whether it can actually happen – to those I say that this is just a small step in bending the moral arc towards justice. If prayers are answered and the mayor makes things right, having a mechanism to recall the mayor of Chicago is still important public policy for the future, just as voters decided it was important for the governor’s office.

I am convinced – and I believe wholeheartedly – that if this effort is truly the will of the people, it will happen. No one thought that the buses in Montgomery would ever be integrated until Rosa Parks remained in her seat, leading to a mass movement and a bus boycott that led to change. No one thought that voting rights violations would be addressed until Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood with so many of our civil rights leaders to protest and to make the Voting Rights Act happen. It will take the people – all of us – to make our government truly of, by, and for the people. We will be hosting town hall meetings to hear from participants, to explain the process, and to consider possible amendments. I have been so impressed by the largely peaceful protests in this movement, and if we can turn the energy of these protests into actions, the will of the people will prevail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District