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MAYOR EMANUEL JOINS COVENANT HOUSE TO LAUNCH NEW SHELTER AND SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH IN CHICAGO

Covenant House opens first new location in 17 years; selects Chicago for demonstrated commitment to addressing homelessness among youth

Mayor Rahm Emanuel joined Covenant House International for the official opening of the provider's first new shelter in more than a decade, which will provide services exclusively to youth experiencing homelessness at the new central location at Lawson House at 30 W. Chicago Avenue. Covenant House Illinois will build upon the City's comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing homelessness, expanding overall citywide capacity to serve and shelter homeless youth by 13 percent on any given night.

The added shelter capacity increases the City's existing network of youth shelter space, and contributes the overall doubling of youth shelter beds citywide in the last five years.

"I want to thank Covenant House for the support they provide to our most vulnerable young people," said Mayor Emanuel. "The City and our partners at Covenant House will not give up on our commitment to providing every child in the City of Chicago with shelter, support and care they need."

In recent years, the City of Chicago has made important progress in improving delivery of services to homeless residents, despite limited resources, with recent data revealing an overall decline in homelessness by more than 10 percent over the course of 2015—including in the youth subgroup. Still, based on 2016 Point-in-Time Count data, the City estimates that there are as many as 500 youth ages 16-24 experiencing homelessness on any given night in Chicago.

To that end, Covenant House Illinois opened earlier this month to fill a critical need for youth ages 18-24 with drop-in services and safe daytime space when overnight shelters close in the morning. As a privately funded organization in Chicago, Covenant House is able to cast a wider net with its services, reaching not only kids on the street, but hundreds more across the city who are doubled up, "couch-surfing," or otherwise unstably or unsafely housed. These services, which will be offered Tuesdays through Saturdays, include breakfast and lunch, showers, laundry, lockers for safe storage of personal belongings, crisis care, case management and a computer lab.

"These are young people who have aged out of the foster care system – or, sadly, maybe never have had a stable, safe place to call home," said Joseph Mole, the new executive director

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of Covenant House Illinois. “One-third of the homeless youth in our city have been thrown out of their homes by a parent or guardian for a variety of reasons. They need help to stay away from gangs, drug dealers, child traffickers and pimps who prey on these vulnerable youth. We give them support, compassion, a path out.”

Later this year, Covenant House Illinois plans to add overnight shelter – beginning with 20 interim beds – initially providing a safe space to sleep along with continued day services, and with plans to scale up to 60 beds of interim and transitional housing in Chicago.

In addition to the day services, Covenant House Illinois is also partnering with a number of existing organizations to provide more extensive support, including Haymarket for substance abuse treatment, Thresholds for mental health services, Heartland Health Outreach for medical care, Cara for employment skills and Cabrini Green Legal Aid for legal services. All of these collaborators will offer services onsite.

“All of us at Covenant House are excited to be part of the collaborative and innovative community in Chicago that is working to end youth homelessness,” said Mark Hennessy, Board Chairman for Covenant House Illinois. “Chicago homeless young people have additional vulnerabilities because of the violence and weather, but they have the same dreams and aspirations as all our children. With the help of a very strong network of partners in Chicago, we look forward getting more young people away from the despair of the streets.”

Caring for more than 50,000 homeless and trafficked youth across the U.S. and in six countries, Covenant House International is one of the largest and most renowned homeless service agencies in the nation. The new Covenant House Illinois location will support the chief mission of providing homeless children the ongoing care and crisis support, and builds on the services currently delivered in 27 cities in six countries.

Covenant House’s opening today builds on a series of investments by the Emanuel Administration to address homelessness citywide. Since taking office in 2011, Mayor Emanuel has increased funding for homeless services by more than 10 percent and invested in new programs targeting veterans, youth, families, victims of domestic violence and the chronically homeless. Additionally, the City of Chicago has launched a series of new initiatives, including: an expansion of dedicated youth shelter space and establishment of three regional drop-in centers to serve 1,400 youth annually; an unprecedented surcharge on the house sharing industry, making Chicago among the first municipalities to leverage a dedicated funding source for homelessness; and several investments expanding vouchers and creating thousands of new affordable housing units to provide permanent housing for homeless residents.

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