



**CHICAGO  
TEACHERS  
UNION**

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October 1, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strongly endorses the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials Project and urges the city of Chicago to fulfill its commitment to completing the promised public memorial to the survivors of the Burge police torture. We believe that this public memorial is critical and necessary to ensure that community members can learn about the history and legacy of Chicago's worst era of police abuse and torture, but also about the survivors' precedent setting campaign which won reparations and other redress for the harm done. In 2015, the city of Chicago made a commitment to build the memorial and the fact that more than five-years later, the memorial has yet to be built is a stain on the city's record. The CTU calls on the city of Chicago to honor its commitment by providing both the initial and long-term financial support to build and maintain the public memorial.

The CTU, as both a labor organization and an advocate for public education, sees fighting for social, racial, and economic justice as intrinsically a part of its mission. Since its founding in 1937, racial inequality has been a force that sought to divide and undermine our mission. Over the course of our union's history, the CTU has had to grapple with its role in addressing racism both internally and externally and has evolved into the vocally anti-racist organization that it is today. Today, the CTU's commitment to contributing to internal and external work to address the systemic harms that hold back our students, our members, and our communities, is unwavering and is memorialized in our CTU Constitution's preamble.

Since the passage of the 2015 Reparations for Burge Torture Victims Ordinance, the first of its kind in the history of the United States, the CTU has sought ways to support, in particular, the implementation of the ordinance's commitment to teach students about the years of police torture done under former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and his men and the survivors' fight for justice. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) "Reparations Won" curriculum is now required to be taught in 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades annually in all CPS schools. To help ensure that our educator members would help realize this important mandate, the CTU, among other things, consulted with CPS on the development and piloting of the curriculum during the 2016-2017 school year, had torture survivor Darrell Cannon speak to its 500+ member House of Delegates meeting in January of 2017, and, once the curriculum was final, in 2018 and 2019, the CTU developed and provided multiple rounds of our own professional development on the curriculum to educators, with torture survivors as guest speakers. The CTU also hosted a public event with torture survivor Ronald Kitchen and attorney Flint Taylor in March of 2019 and worked with Timeline Theater to host a staged reading of John Conroy's play "My Kind of Town" about the torture in April of 2019 in the CTU's main hall for 300 CPS students during the course of their study of the "Reparations Won" curriculum. Recently, the CTU worked with the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials Project to broadcast, in June of 2020 on the CTU and Fox32/WPWR My 50's TV show "We Still Teach" (which was created for students without internet during the COVID-19 pandemic), a new video overview of the fight for reparations in Chicago featuring torture survivor Anthony Holmes and attorney Joey Mogul.

The curriculum is the most obvious aspect of the 2015 Ordinance that the CTU could support because it is directly relevant to our work as a teachers' union, but we fully support and endorse the other aspects of the ordinance being honored. The CTU wishes to express support for the broader mission of the Chicago Torture Justice Center to support and uplift survivors of police torture and to advocate for the release of torture survivors still incarcerated.

And, most importantly today, the CTU is expressing its support for the building of the public memorial which was promised. We believe that only by acknowledging the city's history of racism and police violence can we possibly move forward as a city. This includes the critical reexamination of public monuments in the city which do not reflect anti-racist values, supporting public art projects like Chicago Race Riots 1919, and, the specific topic here, honoring the commitment to fund

*Affiliations*

American Federation of Teachers, Illinois Federation of Teachers, American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, Illinois Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations, and Chicago Federation of Labor, Industrial Union Council



and erect the public memorial honoring the Burge torture survivors and their fight. Building the memorial would provide our students and educators a physical landmark to enhance their study of this history and a place to reflect on the ongoing nature of the struggle for racial justice and against police violence. The Chicago Torture Justice Memorials Project has already done the work to engage survivors and community in order to commission memorial designs and, ultimately, to select the thoughtful memorial design by Chicago artists Patricia Nguyen and architectural designer John Lee. All the city has to do is uphold its end of the deal to make this memorial real. We urge the city to support, fund, and work with CTJM to build the memorial as soon as possible. The moment that we are living in today further amplifies the urgency and the need for the public memorial to be built.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Johnson'.

Jennifer Johnson  
Chief of Staff

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