

From: Frank Gutierrez <[REDACTED]>

Date: May 5, 2025 at 1:35:14 AM GMT+3

To: 1st Ward [REDACTED], 2nd Ward [REDACTED], 3rd Ward [REDACTED], 4th Ward [REDACTED], 5th Ward [REDACTED], 6th Ward [REDACTED], 7th Ward [REDACTED], 8th Ward [REDACTED], 9th Ward [REDACTED], 10th Ward [REDACTED], 11th Ward [REDACTED], 12th Ward [REDACTED], 13th Ward [REDACTED], 14th Ward [REDACTED], 15th Ward [REDACTED], 16th Ward [REDACTED], 17th Ward [REDACTED], 18th Ward [REDACTED], 19th Ward [REDACTED], 20th Ward [REDACTED], 21st Ward [REDACTED], 22nd Ward [REDACTED], 23rd Ward [REDACTED], 24th Ward [REDACTED], 25th Ward [REDACTED], 26th Ward [REDACTED], 27th Ward [REDACTED], 28th Ward [REDACTED], 29th Ward [REDACTED], 30th Ward [REDACTED], 31st Ward [REDACTED], 32nd Ward [REDACTED], 33rd Ward [REDACTED], 34th Ward [REDACTED], 35th Ward [REDACTED], 36th Ward [REDACTED], 37th Ward [REDACTED], 38th Ward [REDACTED], Illinois GA 39th District [REDACTED], 40th Ward [REDACTED], 41st Ward [REDACTED], 42nd Ward [REDACTED], 43rd Ward [REDACTED], 44th Ward [REDACTED], 45th Ward [REDACTED], 46th Ward [REDACTED], 47th Ward [REDACTED], 48th Ward [REDACTED], 49th Ward [REDACTED], 50th Ward [REDACTED]

Subject: Chicago Park District's Reduction of Military Leave Benefits and Urgent Need for City Oversight

Dear Members of the Chicago City Council,

I am writing to express serious concern regarding recent amendments to the Chicago Park District's personnel code, changes that weaken military leave protections for public employees serving in the armed forces. These revisions not only represent a step backward in how we support Veterans, but they also raise troubling questions about potential retaliation against those who have spoken out.

On May 10, 2023, Master Sergeant Steven Galvin contacted me after being denied military differential pay while on active duty. I immediately elevated the issue to the Mayor's Office and later addressed it publicly at the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners meeting on September 11, 2024. I also raised this issue repeatedly in meetings of the City of Chicago's Advisory Council on Veterans Affairs, where I serve as an advisor.

Subsequent investigation revealed that at least two additional Park District employees were similarly denied compensation owed during their military leave. This is not an isolated failure, it is systemic.

Despite the Park District's code, which publicly commits to providing full salary and benefits to employees on active duty, the District has failed to uphold this promise. The Illinois Attorney General's Office, through ISERRA Advocate William Phillips, has confirmed the Park District is not following its own code. As a result, service members like MSG Galvin have suffered life-altering consequences, including the loss of their homes and families while serving their country.

In April 2025, the Park District amended Section B.5 of its personnel code, replacing the clear guarantee of full military leave compensation with vague language referencing "concurrent compensation," "differential pay," and "use of benefit time." This shift quietly aligns the policy with the state minimum of 60 working days, far short of the full support previously provided for the entire length of military service.

To make matters worse, the proposed amendment to Chapter V of the Chicago Park District Code was officially posted on April 9, 2025, launching a 45-day public comment period that ends on May 25, 2025. The timing could not be more striking: the District is using **Military Appreciation Month**, a time when we are supposed to celebrate and support our Veterans, to consider permanently reducing the benefits of those who wear the uniform.

The timing of this policy change, following MSG Galvin's formal complaints, raises legitimate concerns of retaliation. Weakening protections for Veterans after one of them stands up for his rights is not just a policy failure; it is an ethical one.

If we allow this rollback of military leave protections to stand, what's next? Will we begin reducing the benefits of our police officers, firefighters, and other public servants simply because their current protections exceed the minimum required by law? This sets a dangerous precedent that going above and beyond in service or policy can be quietly clawed back without accountability or discussion.

As federal support for Veterans continues to face cuts, local agencies like the Park District should be leading the way in strengthening, not reducing, support for those who serve.

I respectfully urge the City Council to:

- Investigate the Park District's noncompliance with its military leave policy
- Pass a resolution or ordinance to restore and guarantee full differential pay for the duration of active-duty orders
- Lead a citywide initiative to expand military leave protections and Veteran benefits across all departments and sister agencies
- Publicly oppose the April 2025 proposed amendment to Chapter V and encourage public participation during the open comment period at chicagoparkdistrict.com

Chicago should be the national benchmark for how municipalities honor their Veterans. Unfortunately, this situation reveals a glaring contradiction between our values and our actions.

It is well documented that both the Park District and the Mayor's Office were aware of MSG Galvin's situation for nearly a year before his life was upended. His only "offense" was serving his country and requesting the support he was rightfully owed. Many who knew chose silence. The result: a family torn apart, with children now growing up in a broken home.

This is not just about a policy amendment. It is about moral responsibility.

Let us correct this failure. Let us restore our commitment to those who serve, not just in rhetoric, but in policy and practice.

Respectfully,
Frank Gutierrez

Frank Gutierrez

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

"We sleep safe in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm." — George Orwell