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**BACP ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF THE CHICAGO TAXICAB DRIVER EXCELLENCE
AWARD FOR EXEMPLARY WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE SERVICE**

*Five Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle taxicab drivers rewarded with a free medallion for
exemplary service to people with disabilities*

CHICAGO – Today, City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) Commissioner Rosa Escareno and Mayor’s Office of People with Disabilities (MOPD) Commissioner Rachel Arfa recognized five outstanding taxicab drivers for displaying exemplary service to people with disabilities. The Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle taxicab drivers were each awarded a free medallion at the City’s Taxicab Driver Excellence Award ceremony this morning.

“This year more than ever, chauffeurs provide an essential service for people with disabilities and I am thrilled to be able to recognize these drivers for their excellent services,” said Commissioner Escareno. “Their commitment to providing service to the disability community has not wavered through the pandemic and I applaud all five of our recipients.”

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) taxicab drivers provide a critical service for people with disabilities by increasing accessible transportation options throughout Chicago. Since 2011, the city has more than tripled the number of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) taxicabs, with over 450 taxicabs currently designated as wheelchair accessible. Despite the pandemic, Chicago taxicab drivers still provided nearly 40,000 WAV trips in 2020.

“The five chauffeurs we honored today have shown a commitment to going above and beyond by working tirelessly to serve people with disabilities, and to provide a much-needed service allowing people with disabilities to continue to live independently,” said Commissioner Arfa.

In recognition of their service, BACP presented a Taxicab Medallion to each of the five awardees. A free taxicab medallion symbolizes independence and freedom from lease

payments, allowing the WAV taxi chauffeur to transition from a lease cab driver to a small business owner.

The winners of this year's Taxicab Driver Excellence Awards for service rendered in 2019 are:

- Solomon Manson
- Abdelsamad Ali
- Raja Zaid
- Andre T Moore
- Hail Saeed

Solomon Manson has driven a taxicab for 33 years. In recent years, he chose to start driving a WAV taxicab and expressed a passion for helping people with disabilities. He is proud to be a front-line cab driver.

Abdelsamad Ali has driven a taxicab for 25 years. Abdelsamad expressed to the award committee that he spent much of his time driving passengers to and from doctor's appointments and waited until their appointments were over. "I am grateful for being chosen as a recipient," said Abdelsamad. "It's been my privilege to give back and serve the disabled community and I will continue to do so."

Raja Zaid has driven a taxicab for ten years. He is proud to make a positive impact and has shown his commitment to transporting passengers with disabilities throughout Chicago. He expressed an interest in changing the perception of cab drivers and having a lasting impact on all of his passengers.

Andre T. Moore has driven for many years, recently starting to drive a WAV cab. He expressed to the selection committee during his interview that he dreams of owning his own cab and winning a medallion will help make that dream a reality. "I focus the majority of my WAV rides on the city's South Side where there is limited transportation for the disabled community," said Moore.

Hail Saeed has driven in Chicago for three years. He received the most nominations of any nominee and became a WAV driver when he moved to Chicago after working as a school bus driver in New York. He is prolific WAV taxicab driver and has made connections with passengers by helping them bring their groceries into their apartment. "I want to work with people who need me," said Saeed.

The Taxicab Driver Excellence Award was created to reward drivers providing services to passengers with disabilities, and the winner is chosen by the Taxicab Driver Excellence Committee. In addition to BACP and MOPD, the selection committee was comprised of representatives from Access Living, Equip for Equality, The Selfhelp Home, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab Life Center, Gridiron Alliance and Aon Corporation.

“Accessible, reliable transportation is critically important for the disability community,” said Rachel M. Weisberg from Equip for Equality. “Equip for Equality is thrilled to be part of the selection process to honor drivers who have gone above and beyond to provide exceptional service.”

“Access to transportation in all neighborhoods of Chicago is a fundamental need for people with disabilities,” said Kenneth Jennings, founder and CEO of the Gridiron Alliance and a Shirley Ryan AbilityLab mentor. “These drivers provide much-needed assistance to thousands of Chicagoans and we are thankful for their service.”

“One of the main reasons why, as a wheelchair user, I chose to live in Chicago is the access to accessible transportation services like the WAV taxi program,” said Michelle Lee, Senior Financial Analyst at Aon, disability inclusion advocate and frequent user of WAV taxicab and ride-hail services. “Without programs like this, I would not be able to get to work and live my life.”

Under Mayor Lightfoot’s leadership, the City remains committed to increasing transportation access for people with disabilities. Chicago remains one of the few cities in the country in which passengers using a wheelchair can request a WAV taxicab or a WAV ride-hail. Effective April 2020, BACP increased the financial incentives for both taxicabs and ride-hail vehicles – the City has distributed over \$3 million directly to the public vehicle industry to support wheelchair accessible vehicle services. Chicago taxicabs also provide trips to people with disabilities through the Taxi Access Program (TAP), which is administered by PACE. Over 300,000 TAP trips were conducted in 2020, making up over 25% of total trips performed in Chicago during some months of the pandemic.

BACP oversees the licensing of Chicago’s public chauffeurs and public vehicles including taxicabs, transportation network providers, liveries, charter and sight-seeing buses, horse drawn carriages, ambulances, water taxis and tour boats. The department oversees the purchasing of taxicab medallions, vehicle inspections and rates of fare. Learn more about BACP’s Public Vehicle Operations at www.chicago.gov/bacp.

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