Testimony of

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Before the Hearing of the Chicago City Council

Anti-Torture Resolution

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Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to speak with you today on behalf of Heartland Alliance Marjorie Kovler Center, a torture treatment center here in Chicago. Dr. Mary Fabri, one of the founders of the Marjorie Kovler Center and also a senior director, could not be here today because of her work with genocide survivors in Rwanda. I am especially thankful to Alderman Joe Moore for introducing this resolution and for his steadfast support of torture survivors and torture treatment.

I am speaking today with the collective experience of 25 years of service to survivors of politically-sanctioned torture who have come to Chicago seeking asylum and who have come to Marjorie Kovler Center seeking to rebuild their lives – lives that have been devastated by the most cruel and inhuman acts imaginable. Since 1987, nearly 1700 individuals and their family members from 79 countries have found a place for healing and hope at the Kovler Center. Our mission is this: Marjorie Kovler Center transformsthe lives of individuals recovering from the complex consequences of torture. Kovler Center provides medical, mental health, and social services; trains and educates locally and globally; and advocates for the end of torture worldwide.

I can not stand here today without stating unequivocally that torture is ineffective, at *least* in terms of obtaining accurate information. We know that from what survivors tell us, that they will say anything to get the torture to stop. And, torture is wrong -- period. I believe, however, our place here today is to talk about the horrific impact that torture has on the individual, on the family, on the community, and ultimately on the country. Its purpose is not to obtain information, it is to break bodies and minds and to create an atmosphere of fear. And it does, it breaks people apart, it shatters their spirit, it ruins their bodies, it destroys their belief that the world is a decent place. To survive, torture survivors leave their families, often unable to see them again for many years, they leave their home, their community, their culture, their country. They don’t want to be here – they had to run for their lives. And what is the effect, if they are lucky enough to survive? They can’t concentrate, they can’t sleep, they can’t eat, they are frightened, they feel all alone. What is that in clinical terms? It’s depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress. And in medical terms? It’s nerve and musculoskeletal injuries, complex wounds, dental trauma, genital trauma, infections, and brain injuries. But the impact does not stop with the individual who is tortured - the repercussions are literally endless. The family is broken apart. The leaders are eliminated. The community is silenced. The country is shamed.

My hope in passing this resolution is not just that Chicago takes a stand against torture, but that survivors who come to Chicago, who are embraced by the many wonderful people living in this city, can feel safe. My hope is that they can trust again. My hope is that they can feel valued by a supportive community that also values democratic ideals and the rule of law.

And finally, there is something that Mary Fabri often speaks about as do many of us at Kovler Center. It is the day our eyes were first opened to torture in the world – and the fact that we can no longer close our eyes. Today is another confirming day that we pledge to keep our eyes eternally open to torture and to the many egregious human rights violations in the world. But today, we are comforted to know we have the support of ourpolitical leaders right here at home in the city of Chicago. Thank you.