



## **Honorable Sonya Harper, State Representative - 6th District and Joint Chair of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus**

Sonya Marie Harper has been a journalist and community activist on the south side of Chicago since she was 16 years old. Sonya's passions include promoting community, economic development and civic engagement in an effort to create more peaceful and prosperous neighborhoods.

Harper has been a member of the Illinois House of Representatives since 2015, representing the diverse and hard-working 6th district. She is the Chairperson of the Agriculture & Conservation committee, the first black member to serve in that capacity. She also serves as Joint Caucus Chair of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus. Recently appointed Chairman of the Agriculture committee for the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) Harper also serves as a board member for the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women and is the Illinois State Director for Women In Government, a national non-partisan organization.

The state of Illinois now recognizes urban agriculture and provides incentives for urban farmers because of a recent law sponsored by Harper. She has assisted with authoring the social equity components of the Cannabis Regulation & Taxation Act by co-chairing the Black Caucus's Economic Access, Opportunity & Equity and Cannabis Workgroups and engaging communities that have been harmed the most by the war on drugs in the policy conversation.

Because of Harper's work in passing healthy food access related legislation the state has to track and report the locations of food deserts throughout the state as well as allow hot meals and double value incentives at farmer's markets for SNAP recipients. Harper has been at the forefront of Agriculture Equity by authoring the Illinois Farmer Equity Act, Agriculture Disparity Study and Cannabis Equity Commission. Harper also passed a law that requires all schools in Illinois test for lead in their drinking water and the Right to Garden act which protects homeowners' rights to grow food on their own property.

Rep. Harper worked with colleagues to create a statewide taskforce to develop opportunities for disconnected youth who are jobless and out of school and continues to speak up for the equitable distribution of violence reduction funds to grassroots organizations who have consistently been on the front line of serving youth and adults impacted most by the public health crisis of gun violence.

Sonya runs a public relations and community organizing consulting firm, Sharper PR Communications. She founded and served as Executive Director for Grow Greater Englewood and was the Director of Outreach at Growing Home, Inc., the city's first and only USDA-certified organic high production urban farm. Prior to that she spent more than 10 years working in television news as a producer, writer and reporter for NBC (KOMU-TV) , FOX (WXIX-TV) and CBS (WBBM-TV) affiliates throughout the Midwest. Sonya began her journalism career as a legislative reporter covering state capitol news and issues in Jefferson City, Missouri (KMOX). Sonya returned home to Chicago, specifically West Englewood, to help nonprofits and community

organizations with their communications and public relations needs. As a community organizer, she has also worked for local and national political and issue based campaigns.

A staunch advocate for food access and wellness education, Sonya co-founded the Wood Street Meet & Greet Community Garden in 2012 and spearheaded Grow Greater Englewood, a non-profit organization which advances development projects, economic and educational opportunities related to food, urban agriculture and healthy living.

Sonya is a former member of the Appointed Local School Council at Lindblom Math & Science Academy, organized the Englewood Votes! Coalition, served on the leadership team for the Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.) and led efforts to organize the yearly neighborhood clean-up, Greater Englewood Unity Day when she was with Imagine Englewood If. Committed to youth leadership development and under the direction of Imagine Englewood If, she created Growing Citizen Leaders, a community organizing training program for teens in Greater Englewood

Harper was chosen as a BILLD Fellow (Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development, Council of State Governments), an Edgar Fellow, an Emerging Leaders Fellow as part of the State Legislative Leadership Foundation and completed a fellowship with McCormick Foundation Executive Fellows program on Childhood Trauma co-sponsored by Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. Chairwoman Harper frequently presents her requested model legislation at national conferences such as the Council of State Governments Annual Meeting, National Black Caucus of State Legislators Annual Conference and NOBEL Women Annual Legislative Conference. She also serves as a member of the Joint Caucus of Black Elected Officials, State Innovation Exchange : Agriculture Cohort, National Caucus of Environmental Legislators and an Executive Board member of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, CSG.

Sonya resides in West Englewood, with her 12-year-old daughter. She is a member of The Faith Community of Saint Sabina Church.

