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CONTACT: Anel Ruiz, ar@cullotonbauerluce.com

**ILLINOIS INTERNATIONAL PORT DISTRICT NAMES ERIK VARELA AS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Experienced transportation and logistics expert tapped as first Latino to lead one of the top ports in the country

CHICAGO –The Illinois International Port District Board Chairman (IIPD) Ivan Solis today announced that the IIPD will name Erik Varela as the incoming Executive Director. Working with the board of directors, Varela will solidify the IIPD as one of the most important domestic and international trade hubs.

“To truly compete on a global scale, the Illinois International Port District needs to capitalize on its intersection of waterways, rail and roads that make it an attractive and efficient center for the passage of goods and resources,” said Ivan Solis, IIPD Chairman. “The IIPD manages the various stakeholders who use the port, that is why I am proud that Erik Varela will serve as Executive Director. Erik brings extensive logistics, real estate and transportation experience. His leadership and expertise will ensure the region capitalizes on the IIPD.”

"I am pleased to see the Illinois International Port District select an Executive Director who has such deep infrastructure, transportation and logistics expertise," said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "On top of this invaluable knowledge, Erik will also bring a wealth of lived experience to this role as he will serve as the port's first Latino leader. I want to congratulate him on this historic appointment and look forward to working with him to attract more and enhance existing economic development within our state."

Prior to being named IIPD Executive Director, Varela most recently served as Senior Director of Public Affairs for Union Pacific Railroad. In that role he was responsible for leading all legislative, governmental and community relations activities in Illinois and Wisconsin on behalf of Union Pacific. During his time with Union Pacific, Varela served as Chairman of the Illinois Railroad Association and on several boards and committees, including the Illinois Freight Advisory Council, CMAP Freight Committee, Cook County Economic Development Advisory Council, Will County CED, Metro Milwaukee Association of Commerce, and others. Prior to Union Pacific, Varela worked for fifteen years at various levels of local government.

Varela’s appointment comes at a unique inflection point for the history of the IIPD. Chicago’s COVID recovery plan, the first of any major city in the country, focuses on transportation, distribution, logistics and warehousing. TD&L and warehousing is the largest intermodal hub in the Western Hemisphere and continued local, state, and federal dollars to support infrastructure means the Port is primed for investment.

The port is also located adjacent to Chicago’s Pullman and South Chicago neighborhoods, both of which are key communities in Mayor Lightfoot’s Invest South/West initiative.

“I am honored to be appointed to serve as the Executive Director of the Illinois International Port District at such an important time for Chicago and Illinois,” said Varela. “I look forward to building on the momentum of the IIPD and continue to support its growth as one of the most important domestic and international trade hubs so that it may continue to attract economic development and spur prosperity for the region.”

Varela is expected to start his role as Executive Director on September 20, 2020.

About the Illinois International Port District

The Illinois International Port District is an Illinois municipal corporation created to promote the shipment of cargoes and commerce through its facilities. The IIPD is the owner and master landlord controlling two land areas in South Chicago: the Iroquois Landing Terminal, an open paved terminal with 3,000 linear feet of ship and barge berthing space located at the mouth of the Calumet River in the southwest corner of Lake Michigan; and Senator Dan Dougherty Harbor (Lake Calumet Terminal) which encompasses approximately 1,600 acres of land and currently is home to various harbor operations and terminals located at the junction of the Grand Calumet and Little Calumet Rivers, situated six miles inland from Lake Michigan. The IIPD’s harbor facilities are served by rail facilities and are adjacent to three interstate highways and feature an abundance of warehouse facilities.