



To Gary, With Love



By **NLC Staff** on **February 14, 2019**

Wondering why the National League of Cities is feeling so much love this Valentines Day? [Learn more at nlc.org!](http://nlc.org)

Dear Gary,

Recently, you celebrated your 113th birthday. What a milestone for you and citizens like me who love you so much. So often people talk about you and focus on your challenges and problems—poverty, crime, unemployment, vacant and abandoned buildings. But, you can't let the naysayers get you down – you're still the precious gem that your founders saw in 1906.

Sure, I know you have some blemishes after all this time, but I also know about your boundless potential. That's why "I ♥ Gary" is my favorite shirt. When I talk about you, I beam with pride and passion. I talk about your beautiful beaches on the southern end of

Lake Michigan; your transportation assets such as an airport, three class one railways, four interstate highways and the fact that you are so close to Chicago, the third largest city in the country. But the thing that makes you so special are your people. Not your famous people like the Jackson family, Frank Borman, the Karras family or Avery Brooks, but the people that I see every day in the grocery store, at church and in city hall.

Your people are passionate, loyal, enterprising, and willing to “leave it all on the floor” for you. It is because of this dedication and commitment that those of us who are chosen to serve you consider it a privilege and blessing. Not a day passes without me thinking about how best to meet your needs. How can I provide more jobs and opportunity for your young people? How can we continue to eliminate blight and encourage development? What is the best way to honor the legacy members of your community, those who have raised their families, invested in homes and demonstrated their commitment to you? How can we equip families with the tools to live their best lives? The answer is what you have demonstrated for 113 years—perseverance and hard work.

Every day I am grateful for the opportunity to serve you and your people. Not because I have all the answers or always get it right the first time, but because I consider it the greatest honor of my professional life to work with other dedicated individuals on behalf of friends, family, church members, classmates and former teachers to help you reclaim your place as the jewel of Northwest Indiana. Don’t give up on yourself, because I will never give up on you.



About the author: *Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson is the mayor of Gary, Indiana, and the president of the National League of Cities (NLC), the nation’s largest organization representing cities and their leaders. As president of NLC, Freeman-Wilson is leading the organization to focus on four priority areas: helping city leaders tackle the housing crisis; uplifting legacy cities; creating communities for all generations; and, encouraging civic engagement. Through these four pillars of work and a national campaign, Freeman-Wilson and NLC will engage city leaders to create a more meaningful bond between communities and their residents. Freeman-Wilson also leads the organization’s advocacy efforts, focused on the critical issues of infrastructure, public safety and economic development.*