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COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to be here today to talk about the challenges the Cook County Recorder of Deeds Office faces with FMLA.

When I took over the Recorder of Deeds Office in late 2012, we faced a number of challenges. One of my first actions was to commission a Workflow Study, which analyzed how we deliver services at CCRD. The report found many redundancies, and through smart workforce management we've reduced our workforce from over 190 to 141 FTEs .

One of the challenges we faced then and now is FMLA. Although the federal law is well-intentioned and necessary to provide protections to families dealing with significant health issues and the complications they present in the workforce, the burgeoning increase in the rolls of FMLA certified employees often make it impossible to provide the services that taxpayers want and deserve. Though we have reduced our FTE workforce, we still owe it to the taxpayers to deliver services. To that end, we have taken some steps to better manage the status of our employees who are on or who apply for FMLA.

Some of the reforms we implemented include better tracking of FMLA usage and comparing it to the previous years' total hours worked to determine eligibility. We've started sharing with supervisors which of their employees are eligible for FMLA (while maintaining medical confidentiality), and what usage allotments they are approved for. We track expirations of FMLA. We now require the usage of accrued (paid) County benefit time, before unpaid time pursuant to FMLA can be applied. This is expected to realize over 4000 hours of productivity because employees cannot exhaust their 480 hours of FMLA time and then use their benefit time upon returning to work. We even reset everyone onto the same calendar year, which has made managing the entire program easier for our HR team.

Now, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to share some specific statistics at CCRD. We currently have 141 employees. 33 of those, or 23 percent, are on FMLA. 78 percent of those on FMLA are for their own care, and the rest is to care for others.

I also want to refer to a particular section within CCRD, where FMLA usage is having a tangible effect on service delivery. In that one department, which produces the online availability for searching and tracking all recordings, 20%



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were on FMLA before the 2016 County Board imposed 8% Reduction in Force layoff.

For calendar year 2016, this section accounted for 1314 hours of FMLA or 27% of total FMLA hours used. An average of approximately 131 hours annually per employee, which is about 25 hours per week in lost productivity. As a result, over the last six months, we have fallen over 20 days behind. That means a longer delay from when you bring in your deed to when you can see it online. For historical reference, we have always traditionally been 2-5 days behind.

I'm not claiming to have the answers to this expanding problem, but I thank you again for providing me the opportunity to share with you the issues from our perspective in hopes that this dialogue will foster a uniform Countywide policy that will alleviate the stress that this issue brings to agencies within Cook County Government. I look forward to hearing what suggestions this committee may have in moving forward and have brought here with me our Labor Counsel, Mr. Ed Michalowski and our HR Chief, Mr. Erwin Acox if you would like to discuss further details.

Thank you.