

My name is Sarah Ross. I'm a local educator, artist and the co-Director of the Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project. I live in the southwest part of Humboldt Park, where funding for policing and incarceration is visible in the vacant lots, and missing neighbors, locked away in the county jail and state prisons. This is one of many reasons I fully support Resolution 20-2867. I urge the Cook County Board to pass this resolution and follow through with reallocating our precious resources to communities who have been starved of financial investments for so, so long. As an art educator, I drive to Stateville prison each week to teach incarcerated students. I want to sketch an image of my community—through a short drive between where I live on Grand Ave. to the I-55 freeway, where I head out to Stateville. One can travel along, say, Homan Ave. to see a clear history of divestment, racial discrimination and who matters in Chicago. The scene has been developed over years and years of abandonment from the city, even before your tenure on this board. On any given day we can see the impacts of the lack of mental health resources and the raging opioid crisis visible in people asking for help at street corners, residents of homeless encampments, and the sirens of ambulances to pick up our community members who have overdosed. Decades of divestment is materialized in the vacant lots, boarded up businesses, few health care clinics and grocery stores. Yet these neighborhoods, in which I call home, have plenty of police zipping through streets watching the scene safely from their police cars, mobile police stations and mobile surveillance towers. Yet, when I visit the northeast side of Humboldt Park, the scene couldn't be more different. The picture is clear: people are punished for being Black, Brown and poor in Chicago. The results of communities starved of social, life affirming resources is even more present to me when I reach Stateville. I teach a classroom full of South and Westside residents, all locked up for decades. From time to time when a student *does* get released, they all say the same thing: the neighborhood is worse now than twenty-plus years ago when they left. It's time for a change in not just rhetoric but in investments. What we have *is not working*. Our communities are not more safe, we are not thriving. Creating real community health and safety will require funding public services such as health care, mental health, housing, jobs, restorative justice, and more. Cook County Health is the primary provider of health care for low-income people in the county, and the County government also provides funding for housing, anti-violence programs, and restorative justice. Let's move funding from punishment — from when everything has failed— to. communities of color harmed by violence, policing, and incarceration. The time is now.

Thank you,
Sarah Ross

Asst. Prof. School of the Art Institute of Chicago
Co-Director, Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project
Soros Justice Media Fellow
Leaders for a New Chicago, Field Foundation and MacArthur Foundation