



July 27, 2020

Dear Cook County Board Commissioners:

We, the undersigned organizations representing a coalition of both immigrant organizations and advocates for criminal justice reform, present this letter in support of the Justice for Black Lives resolution 20-2867. Our coalition aims to guarantee that the Cook County Public Defender has the funding necessary to create a dedicated immigration unit to protect immigrants from deportation and family separation. Accordingly, we support and urge the County Board to redirect funds from the Cook County Sheriff and the County Jail to be used instead to fund services and programs that promote community health and safety, particularly in Black, Brown, and immigrant communities.

Both locally and nationally, Black, Brown, and immigrant communities are calling on elected officials to redirect resources and funds from carceral institutions back into communities that have been disinvested for decades; we believe this resolution is a great starting point in laying the foundation of our shared values towards this united goal. We need to allocate public funds and resources that promote community health and safety in order to engage in restorative processes that address harm and generate needed accountability of law enforcement while working to heal Black, Brown, and immigrant communities impacted by violence.

In addition, we agree with President Preckwinkle that “the tremendous investments we make are not in the relatively modest sheriff’s police, they’re in the jail...we have to try to move resources to community-based organizations that are doing the important work of keeping people out of the jail” and we believe that shifting funding from the Sheriff’s Department to the Public Defender, for example, would be a significant step in achieving our shared goal of protecting Black, Brown, and immigrant communities.



In fact, Cook County annually allocates more than \$600 million for the Sheriff's budget, consisting of funding for the Sheriff's police force, the Cook County Jail, and more. Despite the number of people incarcerated in Cook County Jail decreasing by more than 50% since 2013, the budget for the jail has actually increased by more than 25%, meaning that \$117 million are available for services if the County Board made changes to the Sheriff and County Jail's budget to reflect changes in the jail population. Why is it that the County Jail continues to see increases in funding all the while the jail population has decreased, thereby requiring less funds and resources that can instead be used for better purposes?

According to Commissioner Brandon Johnson, "as spending on police and incarceration has gone up over the last decade, Black and Brown people actually feel less safe." The growing distrust of the police force demonstrates the need for supporting pillars of public services such as housing, health care, mental health, restorative justice, legal representation, public transit, job creation, and increased opportunities for minority/women business owners. When a department so spectacularly fails to deliver on its promise of protection, service, and safety, it is time to reevaluate.

By undertaking the Justice for Black Lives resolution, Cook County has an opportunity to be a national and local leader in providing a framework that addresses systemic racism and champions justice for all. We urge the County Board to support this resolution.

Sincerely,

The Resurrection Project

The Illinois Business Immigration Coalition

Binational Institute of Human Development Legal Center

HANA Center



Chicago Community Bond Fund

The People's Lobby

Southwest Organizing Project

Shiller Preyar Jarard & Samuels Law Office

Equity and Transformation

Western Illinois Dreamers

Chicago Workers Collaborative

United African Organization

Chicago Community and Workers Rights

Spanish Community Center

Farmworker and Landscaper Advocacy Project -FLAP