



PUBLIC COMMENTS TO THE ILLINOIS SENATE OPPOSING GOVERNOR RAUNER'S AUSTERITY MEASURES APRIL 29, 2015

My name is Valerie Leonard, a long time North Lawndale resident and consultant to nonprofit organizations.

I am here today to express concerns regarding Governor Rauner's budget cuts. Governor Rauner has developed proposals to reduce costs in order to close a \$1.6 billion budget gap for FY 2015, and a \$6 billion budget gap for FY 2016. In order to eliminate the budget deficit, the Governor cut costs by 2.25% across the board and issued an executive order to terminate all contracts that he has deemed "non-essential". Some of the biggest hits have been to education, youth programs, parks and health and human services. The latest round of announced cuts include \$25 million to human services and \$106 million to Medicaid.

North Lawndale faces a number of challenges, including poverty and blight, homelessness, hunger, low access to mental and physical health facilities, declining resources for high quality youth programming, and the list goes on. Our median household income is \$23,388 while the median household income for the state of Illinois is \$61,253. Over 45% of our residents live below the poverty line. We have over 17,000 residents that qualify for TANF and Medicaid. Our unemployment rate is 13%, while the unemployment rate for the state is 6%.

Clearly, the North Lawndale community is more vulnerable than most. There are over 68 DHS offices and nonprofit agencies that service our community. They provide access to health care, welfare-to-work programs, food and nutrition, mental health and substance abuse and child care. The nonprofit social services sector is our number one employment sector. Over 25% of our local workforce is employed in healthcare and social services, as compared to 8% for the State of Illinois. Our largest employer is Mount Sinai Hospital, which receives 38% of its reimbursements from Medicaid.

Our local service providers are struggling, and some have closed their doors. This has left our community without needed services and reduced the number of available jobs. If the State refuses to invest in our social services safety net on the front end, we will all pay dearly on the back end through increased crime and higher rates of incarceration.

We cannot balance the budgets on the backs of the "least of these". I respectfully request that the Cook County Board continue to advocate for a common-sense budget that eliminates waste in a manner that is humane and equitable. We need to acknowledge that we cannot simply cut our way out of the fiscal problems that plague our state.

In closing, I thank you for your time and consideration.

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