

Hello my name is Willette Benford,

I am the Decarceration Organizer for Live Free Chicago. I am here offering testimony in support of the Justice for Black Lives, Resolution #20-2867 and urging the Cook County Board of Commissioners to pass this Resolution. Live Free Chicago supports this resolution because it is a resolution that seeks to restore resources back where they belong within our communities of color that have been hardest hit by poverty and racial injustices. Cook County jail is a place to primarily house individuals pretrial. The cost to house one individual pretrial could be used in support of a family. By channeling those resources into lives you could prevent future incarceration. An Excerpt from chicagosmilliondollarblocks.com stated that "Over the course of 5 years, \$3,882,778 was spent on incarcerating people from just one block. Just one block, nearly \$4 million dollars was spent on punishment. And guess where the \$4 million came from? OUR TAX DOLLARS. Do you think that level of investment made that one block feel safer? Did it provide vital resources to residents of that block? Housing, jobs, healthy food access, etc? What would your block do if it was handed a \$4 million dollar check? I tell you what our blocks would do, we would invest in our communities. Using those costs towards resources such as housing, education, employment, counseling, and many supportive services that are necessary to overcome barriers that prevent people of color and low-income from becoming free in our communities would speak volumes. Our tax dollars should be spent investing in supportive services that promote community health and safety such as mental health, substance use disorders, housing and job creation located within our own communities and provided by County departments that are specifically designed to address those issues with expertise. Each community has a unique demographic that needs monetary, professional and relational sources to address their needs. The Cook County Sheriff has expertise in policing and incarceration not supportive services. I am a formerly incarcerated individual having spent time in Cook County and I can tell you that nothing inside of Cook County contributed to my success. No, it came from individuals that believed in me and took a chance on me because they saw my worth and helped me recognize it for myself. These individuals are those in our communities and they know us and have an inside view and information on how to help us. Investing in those individuals and communities is a win-win situation. If these services were offered on the front end there would be less need for incarceration and the warehousing of individuals awaiting court on the backend. Since 2013 the population of the Cook County jail has decreased by more than half yet the jails budget has increased by more than a quarter. Just imagine for a moment what it would look like if we invested the resources that we have poured into a place that confines our communities and rerouted them into a place to call home? Our City would be a model for restorative justice and one that is at the forefront of healing centuries of oppression

and disregard for a class and color of people that is long overdue. Creating real community health and safety will require funding public services such as health care, mental health, housing, jobs, restorative justice, and more. We as a community organization and representative of our people look to this Board today and your leadership to partner with us in achieving this. How, by passing this resolution and letting the City of Chicago and County of Cook know with your emphatic yes, that you are committed to rebuilding lives here in Cook County, not destroying lives, families and communities. Thank you.