



LITTLE VILLAGE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION  
LA ORGANIZACIÓN DE JUSTICIA AMBIENTAL DE LA VILLITA

July 24, 2020

My name is Juliana Pino, and I am the Policy Director of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO), a community-based group in the Little Village neighborhood where Cook County Jail is physically located. We submit this testimony in support of the Justice for Black Lives Resolution (Resolution 20-2867). We urge the Cook County Board to pass this resolution and take swift action to move funds from the Cook County Jail and the Cook County Sheriff budgets toward community well-being and safety.

At LVEJO, we work against environmental racism in Little Village and beyond. The communities of color in Cook County fighting environmental racism are also heavily policed—with the worst impacts falling on Black neighborhoods—redoubling violence. Jails, prisons, and immigration detention centers are also a form of environmental racism and violence, as they are built on Native lands and often on brownfields, polluted post-industrial grounds. Cook County Jail, itself, covers 96 acres abutting a formerly extremely toxic Superfund site converted by community struggle into La Villita Park instead of an additional jail parking lot. This park now serves over 5,000 young people under the age of 5 in the surrounding blocks, is home to food vendors and intergenerational recreation and gatherings, and it houses Mi Parque, a youth-led restorative justice, alternatives to policing, and park cleanup program. La Villita Park is a demonstration of the benefits of investment in community well-being instead of incarceration. Still, including this park, over twice as much land in Little Village is dedicated to incarceration of neighbors and loved ones in Cook County Jail than to green gathering spaces like these for the community.

In addition to shouldering policing, particularly of youth, Little Village residents are exposed to daily pollution from dozens of industrial sites and heavy trucking—and already scant companies or government responses to harm routinely exclude redress or protection for community members incarcerated in Cook County Jail exposed to the very same pollution. Criminalized for poverty and their racial identities, they are trapped in the jail with pollution, and recently, with COVID19, a deadly respiratory illness whose transmission is made substantially worse by air pollution, with little to no recourse for addressing these dire health consequences.

Cook County's funds should be attending to community priorities for safety, not routinely exposing Black people and other people of color to harm and death through policing

**2445 S. Spaulding Avenue Chicago, IL 60623 – Tele: (773) 762-6991**  
**Fax: (773) 762-6993 Email: [info@lvejo.org](mailto:info@lvejo.org) – Web: [www.lvejo.org](http://www.lvejo.org)**



LITTLE VILLAGE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION  
LA ORGANIZACIÓN DE JUSTICIA AMBIENTAL DE LA VILLITA

and incarceration. Communities most impacted by policing across Cook County have identified that mental health services, local good foods, family-sustaining jobs, housing, restorative justice, anti-violence and survivor support programs, pollution cleanup, clean water access, and more, are essential building blocks for community safety. The Cook County Board should act now to reallocate dollars away from policing and incarceration and invest in these community priorities instead.

Juliana Pino  
Policy Director  
Little Village Environmental Justice Organization  
jpino@lvejo.org