

Mark Clifton Testimony to Cook County Board of Commissioners Legislation and  
Intergovernmental Relations Committee Meeting 9/17/25

Good morning. My name is Mark Clifton, and I serve as the Executive Director of the North Shore Mosquito Abatement District. I am here today to speak on Resolution 25-3114, which calls for an evaluation and reform of Cook County's mosquito abatement districts.

First, I want to thank the Legislation and Intergovernmental Relations Committee, as well as Chairman Britton and Commissioner Degnen, for their attention to this issue and for their active interest in vector-borne disease and mosquito control.

I want to specifically acknowledge Commissioner Degnen, who took the time to meet with my team at the North Shore District, as well as with other professionals who work directly in mosquito abatement. She ensured she heard from those with on-the-ground experience in this essential public health work. I was also able to provide her with a full tour of our facility in Northbrook. I extend the same invitation to any commissioner who would like to learn more about how we keep our section of Cook County safe. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime—I would be happy to schedule a visit.

Now, let me emphasize why mosquito abatement districts matter.

Mosquito abatement districts exist across the country, and they are critical, irreplaceable tools for protecting public health. This year alone, Cook County has already seen more than 50 reported cases of West Nile virus—with many more likely going undiagnosed. Without coordinated mosquito control, those numbers would almost certainly rise into the hundreds, if not thousands.

The reality is that West Nile virus is preventable. By reducing mosquito populations, we reduce risk. But climate change is making the challenge harder. It extends mosquito seasons, speeds viral replication, and introduces new species into our area.

Dedicated mosquito abatement districts are our most effective defense. When mosquito control is absorbed into general health departments or county governments, it often becomes deprioritized, underfunded, or outsourced. In fact, a 2023 national report found that nearly 90 percent of local health departments and municipal governments “need improvement,” compared to only 36 percent of dedicated mosquito abatement districts. Those districts were six times more likely to be rated “fully capable.”

That brings me to this resolution.

We support the goal of improving mosquito abatement districts and have already taken steps toward developing standards of care that can be applied across the county. But this process must include subject matter experts.

Mosquito control is a highly technical scientific field. Excluding experts would be like commissioning a report on bridge safety without consulting civil engineers. Unfortunately, the Civic Federation report referenced in this resolution, while well-intentioned, was deeply flawed for exactly that reason. It did not consult with district leadership or experts in mosquito control. As a result, it overlooked key realities:

- Public health agencies consistently perform worse than dedicated mosquito districts.
- Public health agencies are already under severe funding constraints, and additional responsibilities would only strain them further.
- And because mosquitoes travel across municipal boundaries, regional district-centered abatement is far more effective than fragmented, municipality-by-municipality approaches.

In closing, I urge the Board to ensure that any evaluation called for in this resolution is informed by subject matter expertise. Cook County should build upon—not undermine—the essential role mosquito abatement districts play in protecting public health.

Thank you.