



DRAFT Remarks of Langdon D. Neal, Chairman
Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

October 22, 2014

President Preckwinkle, Chairman Daley and Commissioners of the Cook County Board, thank you for having us here to present our 2015 budget for the Board of Election Commissioners.

My name is Langdon Neal, and I serve as Chairman of the Chicago Election Board. Joining us are: Executive Director Lance Gough; Assistant Executive Director Kelly Bateman; Chief Legal Counsel James M. Scanlon; Communications Director James P. Allen; and Human Resources Director and Budget Liaison Peter Peso.

Three years, ago, we began working together – with our voters, our community groups, the City Council, the Cook County Board and the General Assembly – to upgrade election administration in the state of Illinois.

Many of the changes we have seen, and that we are seeing with this election, began in 2011. That was when we convened the Voter Engagement Community Forum. It was the largest focus group of its kind to look at how we manage elections. We gathered more than 130 voters and organization leaders from across the city to consider ways we could make voter registration and participation simpler and more efficient. The Community Forum resulted in calls for:

- On-Line Voter Registration
- Election Day Voter Registration
- Military and overseas voters to be able to access their ballots online.
- And Universal Vote Centers

We put all of that data on which voters supported which ideas – by geography, gender, ages, race, and ethnic group – into a report that went to the Cook County Board, the City Council and Members of the General Assembly.

I am proud to say that this report did not collect dust on a shelf. Since we issued that legislative agenda, we have seen the following:

- We won passage of On-Line Voter Registration for the entire state. In just the first three months of this new system's operations, more than 7,000 Chicagoans used it successfully to register or update their records.
- We will see a pilot program for Election Day Voter Registration on November 4.
- We secured a Pentagon grant to provide military and overseas voters with online access to their ballots online. This system is now in its third year of operation and has won praise from our military and overseas voters. We have virtually eliminated complaints from voters who once said they could not receive or return their ballots by the deadline.

Most importantly, we began to re-tool for these changes and even greater reforms that we believe are coming soon. At this year's Primary Election, Chicago became the first large jurisdiction in the State of Illinois to deploy Electronic Poll Books in every precinct on Election Day. With the permission of the Chair, we'd like to show you a brief video that explains the importance of this new technology.

As you can see, the Electronic Poll Books mean convenience for our voters and security for the election. More importantly, they position Chicago to be ready to for 2016, which is when we anticipate that the State will mandate Election Day registration in every polling place. That would mean Illinois voters would gain access to a system that has been proven successful and secure in many states including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Maine and Montana.

Thanks to the ability to introduce this equipment at the low-turnout Primary Election, we were able to learn how to improve the performance of the Electronic Poll Books. One of the many

upgrades we have developed with ES&S is a much faster “smart upload” that will show a progress bar and that should take less than half the time it took in the Primary.

Currently, the Chicago Election Board is managing the most hectic part of its four-year election cycle. We are essentially managing two elections at once right now. Even before Absentee ballots began going out for the November 4 General Election, we have campaigns in our offices gearing up for the February 24, 2015 Municipal Election.

However, because most of the fiscal responsibilities shift to the City in the coming year, our County budget will be reduced greatly relative to 2014. Even so, we want you to be aware that we are performing the following now and in the coming year:

- Preparations for the 2015 Municipal Election, including what we believe will be a large number of candidate filings and objection hearings.
- Administering the 2015 Municipal Elections in all 50 wards.
- Preparations for the 2016 Presidential Primary and Presidential Election.
- Filings for the 2016 Election Cycle, during which the Chicago Election Board will be responsible again for Electoral Board hearings related to candidates for State Representative, State Senate and Members of Congress whose districts touch any part of the City and are contained within Suburban Cook County.

Longer-term, we want you to be aware that in addition to adding the Electronic Poll Books, we are examining options for the next generation of voting equipment. The City has an aging inventory of ballot scanners, touch screens and HAATs to consolidate and transmit the results. These tools were developed with HAVA in 2002 and delivered in 2005. Like any computer equipment that is more than a decade old, these devices are at the end of their useful lives.

More importantly, newer generations of balloting equipment provide the possibility of moving to one balloting system that can service voters of all physical abilities. The next generation of ballot scanners allow for:

- Producing ballots on demand in any ballot style or language
- Ballot-marking systems for people of different physical abilities with a component to check the ballot through an audio reader before casting the ballot.
- And reducing the tech-support role of our Judges of Election so that we may focus instead on voter-registrar capacity given the likelihood of Election Day registration.

The Cook County portion of the Election Board's 2015 budget includes only funding for postage for the 2016 mail canvass and the salaries for the three Election Commissioners and Executive Director.

Throughout the coming year, we will do our utmost to minimize our costs, even as we work to adapt to growing lists of state and federal mandates, and even as we stay true to our mission of administering transparent, impartial and accurate elections for the citizens of Chicago.

I look forward to answering your questions.