

**Written Testimony to the Cook County President and Board of Commissioners  
Budget Hearing, Thursday, October 29, 2015**

**From: Sharon Biggs – Bethel African Methodist Church, 1744 Darrow Ave, Evanston, IL 60201  
Phone: (847) 864-4264  
Rosalind K Shorter Henderson, Pastor  
Nancy Massey, Secretary**

Dear President Preckwinkle and Board of Commissioners:

I write to share our excitement and gratitude to Commissioner Larry Suffredin for his commitment to our Bethel A.M.E Church families and neighbors throughout the County.

I am a proud member of the 13<sup>th</sup> district Community Health Task Force -- an effort that has no color or ethnic boundary and is vital to the community Bethel humbly serves for almost 90 years.

Pastor Rosalind K Shorter Henderson was appointed to Bethel last year, and her vision was to make certain the church went beyond its walls. One of the first things on the calendar was The Back to School Jam and Community Health Care Day this fall.

While this was not her first event, this was a massive undertaking for Bethel. We had no budget and no funding and no promise that the community would even embrace the effort.

The church gladly partnered with:

Advocate Children's Hospital  
Miles of Smiles  
Ronald McDonald Care Mobile  
Walgreens  
Youth Job Center of Evanston  
First Bank and Trust of Evanston  
Evanston Police and Fire Departments

The above list just names a few of our partners. As the days drew closer to the event others that made early promises dropped out, and others enthusiastically stepped up. As the word spread, we began getting monetary donations as well as tangible donations, including tickets to the Brookfield Zoo from the Commissioner's office. That may not seem important-- but to kids and families that are under privileged that can be and is a big deal!

Correspondence was sent to every alderman in the city of Evanston. Alderman Holmes was in attendance, Former Mayor Lorraine Morton and we did receive regrets from Alderman Braithwaite.

We canvassed the community in numbers and in the rain and heat of summer knocking on doors and talking to the community.

The real testament was the Saturday morning of the event before we could open the doors -- Maryville Academy brought a busload of children for their physicals and dental and many of the other offerings. We serviced more than 250 people that day from as far as Waukegan in Lake County and Chicago's Rogers Park.

As we talked to attendees -- we found many don't know that there are resources available and where to get them. Some didn't have identification so they could not get healthcare. Others could simply not afford some of the services offered large households with multiple children. There were some that didn't have an address and couldn't get care through normal channels. We served mothers that had cared for their children, but not for themselves. Beyond these realities -- we also heard alternative medicine is not covered under most insurances and certainly not Medicaid. Many undocumented and others are still uninsured in Cook County.

We witnessed our neighbors and communities from near and far that had been riddled with crime and gunshots come together.

What we gleaned from this awesome event is access to healthcare in our community of Cook has to be a priority, but beyond that there must be an avenue to communicate the services and opportunities like this to all families and communities.

Healthcare and access to healthcare is part and parcel to rebuilding a community. I learned just by being in the 13<sup>th</sup> district taskforce meeting there are resources. I'm now certain that we need more resources on this north end of Cook. I ask you to please consider all needs as you finalize your budget.

It's not enough to provide school supplies if children cannot hear or speak and go undiagnosed or if a parent cannot prevent diabetes by being tested early.

Access to healthcare goes beyond color, ethnicity, religious beliefs and social status; we proved that with our Bethel AME community health day. We were concerned about not being able to speak Spanish; didn't know we would also need French and Japanese. Access to healthcare is vital to Evanston and all communities.

Humbly submitted, Sharon Bibbs, Bethel AME Church, 1744 Darrow Avenue, Evanston 60201