

CCHHS Board Nomination Statement

President Preckwinkle, Commissioner Sufferedin and members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Board and offer my rationale for my nomination to the Cook County Health and Hospitals System Board. During my 26 years at CCHHS, I saw great changes, challenges and successes. I consider myself as matriculating through the health system, as nothing in my formal education could have prepared me for my experience. I am indebted to the various leaders I served who had confidence in my ability, as well as the physicians, nurses and other staff who are the heart of the system. I came to CCHHS with only one agenda—to serve the medically underserved residents of Cook County with dignity, respect and social justice.

My tenure started in 1988 and continued to 2013 when I elected to retire. Throughout my CCHHS journey, I was part of a number of innovations meant to enhance the excellent patient care delivered at a public hospital. Project Brotherhood; Neighborhood Referral Program; IRIS; mail order pharmacy; the Child Advocacy Center; and CountyCare are among the initiatives I supported to improve the system of care. There was never a question as to the quality of care available to consumers; the question was the path the consumer had to take to get the care. I became the administrator of several health centers and witnessed the development of the Ambulatory and Community Health Network, which I eventually managed as Chief Operating Officer. There was a growing recognition that healthcare was moving away from hospital care to community based care, which further supported the concept that the health centers needed to be equal to the hospitals. In addition to my primary care administration experience, I also served as the Chief Operating Officer of Provident Hospital.


I mentioned challenges earlier. The health system has learned many lessons over the years. Pharmacy, billing, information systems, and most important, customer service were among the challenges confronting the system during my tenure. The challenges were balanced by successes such as the opening of Stroger Hospital; better coordination of services with other parts of County government to serve detainees at Cermak and address the needs of sexually abused children; expanding ambulatory care north to Palatine and west to Cicero. We also constructed state of the art health centers in the suburban suburbs. CountyCare propelled the system into the arena of managed care as a health plan in addition to being a provider.

Some of the above remain challenges to this day, although to a lesser degree. The need for excellent customer service is paramount due to the choices available to the system's traditional target population. The landscape in which CCHHS operates is changing, creating new challenges and shining a light on unresolved ones. The health system, like all health providers, is faced with major issues. I am pleased to hear of the plans for a new Fantus Health Center along with the exploration of services to serve the growing Medicare population.

Since leaving CCHHS, I have stayed in the public health arena through my work with Federally Qualified Health Centers and enhanced my knowledge of the private sector by working with two

start-up health plans. I want to be a part of the shaping of the health system as it enters an era of continued health reform and refinement of the Affordable Care Act. CountyCare's success as a health plan must be balanced with making the primary care services available at CCHHS the first choice for the member's medical home. Lastly, the need for a strong safety net has not diminished with the expansion of Medicaid in Illinois and affordable commercial plans for the working poor. CCHHS must maintain its status as a premier medical facility for all, insured and uninsured.

Thank you again for your consideration.


Sidney A. Thomas


Date