

Dear Honorable Commissioners:

This letter is being written with regard to the budget vote for the Bureau of Administration's 2017 fiscal year. We are completely dedicated and responsible members of the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office Toxicology Laboratory. Our efforts help provide the citizens of Cook County with answers when they have suffered the loss of their loved ones. Please let us continue our mission.

- We were not aware that we were not meeting the needs of the CCMEO until we were told that our services will be eliminated in favor of sending samples to private laboratories. We will need time to put processes into place that will enable us to meet these new challenges but it can be done.
- We have recently added new toxicologists to our department. This addition will finally provide the relief needed to move toxicologists from the bench to efforts to develop more efficient and comprehensive methods.
- We have requested but not received a copy of the proposed cost savings analysis. As a veteran toxicologist, I do not believe it will be less expensive to privatize Cook County's toxicology services.
- The budget estimate was not completed by a toxicologist who is aware of all of the time and effort it will take to compile, document, choose tests, assist pathologists, and interpret reports. One of the new tests developed and conducted in our laboratory since June, 2016, may add at least \$250,000 to an annual budget.
- I believe that that privatization of Cook County's forensic toxicology laboratory may lead to decisions that are based on cost rather than the needs of the pathology department. This may cause fewer tests to be ordered and a less complete toxicology profile to be available.
- The synthetic drug crisis calls for creation of a state-of-the-art forensic toxicology laboratory in Cook County that can respond to a drug-related emergency as soon as possible. I believe that we can meet these challenges if given a year to accelerate our R&D potential.
- If Cook County's forensic toxicology laboratory is eliminated, drugs outbreaks centered on our community may not be seen as profit centers for privatized laboratories or be overlooked by these laboratories who process thousands of tests daily. Additional large R&D charges may be required for these laboratories to develop methods to detect and analyze these drugs.
- Private laboratories are not connected to the lives of the people of Cook County as directly as your toxicologists are.

Toxicologists are more versatile, knowledgeable, and valuable as they grow in their positions. We have a number of new staff that have begun this process and are willing to put in the time and effort to make the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office Toxicology Laboratory a valuable asset to the community. It will not be possible if the laboratory is disbanded and the experience and knowledge base lost. Please give us the opportunity to continue our work.

Thank you for taking the time to read our concerns. We appreciate the fact that you are willing to listen to our views and hope that you will consider them in your decision when you vote on the budget.

Sincerely,

Colleen Lord
Toxicologist for the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office