



State of Illinois  
Circuit Court of Cook County

Chambers of  
Timothy C. Evans  
Chief Judge

2604 Richard J. Daley Center  
Chicago, Illinois 60602  
(312) 603-4709

James R. Anderson  
Executive Officer

October 20, 2017

Honorable John P. Daley  
Chairman, Committee on Finance  
Cook County Board of Commissioners  
118 North Clark Street, Floor 3 ½  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

**Re: 2018 Budget Reduction Plan**

Dear Chairman Daley:

In accordance with your request, we hereby submit the Circuit Court of Cook County's budget reduction plans for FY2018. Our plan would reduce the Court's proposed FY2018 budget by \$37,729,777, or 13.7 percent, and would reduce the President's executive budget recommendation by \$26,423,506, or 10 percent, as the Committee on Finance has mandated.

On October 11, 2017, we reported to the Committee that budget reductions of this magnitude would have dire effects on the court and the citizens we serve and, therefore, are not reasonable nor prudent. I stand by those remarks. Nevertheless, we understand that we must undergo this exercise to minimize the damage to court operations likely to result if Cook County proceeds to reduce the Court's budget without our input. Our plans are submitted, however reluctantly, with these considerations in mind.

This budget cutting effort is made immeasurably more difficult by the short time-frame for implementation. It will take time to wind down programs implemented over many years, vacate offices, relocate staff, and plan the consolidation of operations. As such, our plan contemplates a 24-month period of implementation, with \$26.4 million in savings realized in FY2018 and additional savings in FY2019. We hope to satisfy budget cuts for FY2018 to a large degree with furlough days: 20 for all Court employees, along with select program cuts that can be made in the short-term. For FY2019, after sufficient study and planning, additional program reductions will be implemented along with selective office closings, and the full year of cost savings realized will replace the furlough days. Our plan is designed on that basis, and we will work with the Court's multiple unions to preserve the employment of the public servants who support our operations.

I must pause and reiterate, however, that, no matter how this plan is crafted, these cuts will significantly damage Court operations. That cannot be avoided. The furlough plan will impact

staff morale, increase off-time, and make operations difficult to manage. Case processing will slow, and caseloads in the probation departments and in the Public Guardian's Office will rise significantly, well above the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts and professional standards. And many of the Court's important programs, developed, implemented, and refined over the past 30 years, will be suspended or greatly diminished.

With those points made, however, the Court's plan includes the following significant elements for FY2018:

- Close Branches 29 and 42 at 2452 West Belmont in Chicago
- 20 furlough days for all staff
- 198 position reductions (vacant), including 75 eliminated in the President's budget
- Suspend 50% of Juvenile Detention Alternative Programs
- Suspend contract staffing at the JTDC and consider closing center(s)
- Suspend ACA training for Adult Probation
- Consolidate specialty caseloads in the Social Service Department
- Suspend the Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program
- Suspend the Child Support Enforcement operation in the Domestic Relations Division (if furloughs fail)
- Reduce Public Guardian representation in Domestic Relations
- Suspend the Public Guardian's home care unit
- Increase revenues in the Public Guardian's Office
- Reduce various other non-personal accounts.

The budget for 2019 will likely include these additional elements after appropriate planning:

- Close the Adult Probation reporting office on Walnut Street in Chicago
- Suspend the Traffic Safety Program
- Close cashier operations in probation units.

These budget cuts would include \$22 million in personnel reductions, or 83 percent, and \$4.4 million in non-personnel reductions.

The reductions we reluctantly propose take into consideration the Chief Judge's responsibility to adequately maintain and administer the Court in accordance with the Code of Judicial Conduct, his Oath of Office, and the Constitution of the State of Illinois. We have also made decisions based on the Court's obligation to provide for the Judiciary, a separate and equal branch of government. Lastly, we have considered the County's obligation to reasonably fund the Court, which is used by a broad cross-section of our community.

Please keep in mind that, not only did our constituents file more than 1 million new cases last year, but their public safety was also greatly enhanced by Court staff and programs. Our constituents also demand enhancement of alternatives to incarceration and detention of juveniles, and we have responded through changes to bond court, problem-solving courts, expanded social

services, community courts and the significant reforms being planned for clinical services at Juvenile Court, centered around trauma-informed care.

**Court Facilities** – After conferring with county officials, the Court is planning to close Branches 29 and 42 at 2452 West Belmont in Chicago. Many important issues remain unresolved, however. They include the relocation of the caseloads, the security concerns from consolidating cases, and the inconvenience to the public and the Chicago Police Department. The closing will also require relocation of the judges and the court's probation staff, although most staff savings will accrue to other offices. Cook County will also save deferred maintenance charges. In recognition of these efforts, the Court requests a credit for a portion of the savings realized by other offices, similar to the allocation of benefits the county recognized in the past for shared efforts.

The Court will also close the Adult Probation Department's community office on Walnut Street. The Walnut facility currently houses about 110 staff, including the training division, a standard probation caseload division, and clerical operations and serves as the main hub for all field service units including the Home Confinement\GPS Unit that operates 24/7/365. Staff and fleet will need to be relocated. The current lease arrangement requires 9-months notice for cancellation. The court will plan to vacate the premises late in 2018, with savings accruing mostly in 2019.

**Juvenile Detention Alternatives** – Over the past 25 years, the Court has developed a network of detention alternatives for youth who appear in the Court's Juvenile Justice System. This network of programs, clinical services, and pro-social interventions for juveniles within their neighborhoods is the cornerstone of the Juvenile Probation Department's efforts to successfully supervise and rehabilitate court-involved youth. The detention alternative programs, such as evening reporting centers, drug programs, family therapy, foster care, residential care, recreation, vocational skills, not only keep kids out of the JTDC, but also help them stay connected with the court and school, and help them fix what is broken in their lives. The Court and the Annie E. Casey Foundation have collaboratively constructed this network of detention alternatives and as a result the Court was designated a model-learning site. Despite all of the progress, success, and notoriety, these programs will have to be slashed by 50 percent in the court's plan, or about \$4.4 million in favor of preserving officer payroll positions for supervision. It is doubtful the Court will maintain its designation as a model-learning site.

Unfortunately, 20 furlough days will have a striking impact on the supervision services and programs provided by the Juvenile Probation Department. Staff will be forced to manage their caseload with 160 less hours per year. There will likely be fallout, in the form of an increase in the number of juveniles admitted to the detention center.

**The Juvenile Temporary Detention Center** – Superintendent Leonard Dixon has reported to us that the JTDC is currently understaffed due to the fact that approximately 45 percent of staff is on continuous or intermittent leave or benefit time. As such, he has requested that he be allowed to hire into his open payroll positions. Unfortunately, the budget reduction plan would eliminate his open positions, eliminate the supplemental contract staff and impose furlough day requirements – all exacerbating the problem. We must recall that the JTDC is a three-shift

operation, in a very inefficient 650,000-square-foot facility with 10 elevators on four floors, all of which must be staffed and secured.

Superintendent Dixon believes that these staff reductions will cause the JTDC to be placed back under Federal oversight. He anticipates that the staff to resident ratios will quickly exceed the AOIC and the Prison Rape Elimination Act standards. Moreover, the remaining staff will be under increased stress due to mandatory overtime. He also is troubled by the idea of closing centers. Closing centers would cause youth, who would otherwise be separated based on multiple assessment attributes, to be mixed to a greater degree. It would become difficult for staff to keep the violent from the victimized, rival gang members separate, and deconcentrate the mentally ill. The Superintendent believes combining centers will also lead to extended confinement (lock-up periods).

**Adult Probation and Social Service Departments** – The Adult Probation Department administers a wide range of programs covering both standard and specialized probation supervision, pretrial, and presentence services. The department provides the Court with pertinent information at many stages of the criminal justice process, enhances public safety, compensates victims of crime, and holds offenders accountable while affording them opportunities to make positive changes in their lives. Of those sentenced to probation, 85 percent have been convicted of felony offenses. Many of people sentenced present a challenging array of risks and needs that must be addressed by probation officers and social services staff to bring about positive behavioral change and promote public safety.

High caseloads seriously jeopardize the Court's ability to provide quality supervision and to hold offenders accountable. The Adult Probation Department currently supervises over 19,000 probationers. As of September 2017, there were 16,570 probationers on standard caseload supervision, yielding a caseload average 108 probationers per officer. These caseloads exceed the AOIC recommended standards by 21 percent. The reduction in work hours will drive the caseloads per officer higher, negatively affecting officers' ability to perform their essential job functions.

The Adult Probation Department has earned the distinction of being one of the few probation departments accredited by the American Correctional Association (ACA), which has championed the cause of corrections and correctional effectiveness for more than 147 years. Attaining ACA accreditation was a sign that the Adult Probation Department staff and department operations have successfully demonstrated knowledge and commitment to enhance operations through adherence to clear correctional industry standards relevant to all areas/operations of the facility, including safety, security, order, inmate care, programs, justice, and administration. In response to the budget crisis, the Court is planning to reduce training investments by about \$70,000 in 2018, jeopardizing ACA accreditation.

Similar to Adult Probation, the Social Service Department provides the Court with pertinent information at various stages of the criminal justice process, enhances public safety, and holds offenders accountable while affording them opportunities to make positive changes in their lives.

The Social Service Department administers a wide range of programs covering both standard and specialized supervision, pretrial, and presentence services for individuals accused of misdemeanors. The department has a number of specialty programs designed to meet the needs of the clients served. The 20-day furlough will make it difficult to divide casework into specialties. Most likely, the department will have to discontinue the following specialty caseloads: dedicated Female DUI Services, Enhanced DUI Services, Sex Offender Caseworkers, Community Service Program Caseworkers, reverting back to the basic monitoring services that were abandoned in the past for more effective practices. Moreover, in an effort to increase access to justice, the department schedules evening appointments to allow their clients to work and take care of child care responsibilities. The evening appointment opportunities will be reduced by 50 percent, reducing overtime costs.

**Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation** – The Court will immediately suspend the Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program. This program expedites case processing and levels the legal playing field between powerful interests of the plaintiffs and the poor often-unrepresented homeowners, promoting fairness, equality, and access to justice in the courts, basic tenants of effective court operations.

**Child Support Enforcement** – If the Court's furlough plans are rejected, the Court will have to suspend the Hearing Officer Program for Child Support Enforcement cases in the Domestic Relations Division. Previously funded by the state, until funding was lost last year, the hearing officers help the judges ensure through appropriate child support orders that single parents have the resources they need to effectively provide for their families.

Domestic Relations hearing officers are not a luxury. The loss of the operation will increase the caseload of the judges by about 35,000 filings per year. The increase in cases will double the time between filing a case and collecting child support. Currently it typically takes 4-6 months to begin collecting child support. If the hearing officer program is eliminated it will take custodial parents 9-12 months to begin collecting child support. The wait time will be unduly burdensome to the litigants particularly in the Maywood and Markham courthouses where a large percentage of the litigants are low- income and of color.

**Public Guardian** – The Public Guardian's Office will have to significantly scale back services as well, as furloughs will reduce the number of staff available to serve clients. Caseloads in the Juvenile and Adult Guardianship Divisions are already about a third higher than recommended by the American Bar Association and the National Association of Counsel for Children. The new interim Public Guardian has also stated that the office would have to substantially reduce or eliminate its financial recovery cases against exploiters of the elderly, which has resulted in over \$50 million recovered over the past 10 years for their vulnerable clients.

Moreover, faced with staff shortages, one-third of the attorneys will be transferred from the Domestic Relations Division to other areas of the office. The office currently represents hundreds of poor children often in contested, acrimonious custody battles in cases where parents do not have money to pay for counsel. This representation is critical to provide the Court guidance on and how best to support the interests of the child, balanced against the competing

interests of the parents as well as determining whether abuse is taking place. The Public Guardian would stop taking new cases until the caseload is reduced by approximately one-third. Judges will have to make decisions with less information if there are no attorneys to advocate on behalf of the child.

The Court will also consolidate the Public Guardian's Home Care Department with the Case Management Department. The Public Guardian has been able to stave-off placement of one third of the people under its guardianship in nursing homes as a result of the work of the Home Care Department. These employees recruit, train, and supervise independent contractor home care workers to provide in-home services; apply for public benefits to help the individuals pay for in-home services; and utilize special needs trusts and reverse mortgages to help finance home care expenses. When the Home Care Department is merged with the Case Management Department, the remaining staff will not be able to devote as much time to the home care work due to the need to absorb the case management function. The Public Guardian's ability to keep their clients in the most cost effective (non-custodial) home care will be greatly diminished.

The Court also but reluctantly proposes an increase in fees for the Public Guardian. A \$10 per hour increase in the social services and guardianship services fees and a \$250 increase in the one-time intake fee is estimated to net \$400,000 in 2018. It is noteworthy to consider that the overwhelming majority of the people under the Public Guardian's care are working people with very modest savings. To meet growing budget demands, the Court has been nudging fees upward year after year. Furthermore, The Illinois Supreme Court's Statutory Fee Task Force recently strongly criticized the "skyrocketing" and "dizzying array" of fees already facing litigants which have "effectively priced many of our state's most economically vulnerable citizens" out of access to justice.

**Traffic Safety** – For the past 29 years, the Court has operated a traffic safety school program in accordance with Supreme Court Rule 529(c) and the Traffic Safety Program Standards established by the Conference of Chief Circuit Judges. Currently, the National Safety Council administers the program on behalf of the Court, through a Cook County contract developed last year. The program serves about 50,000 eligible drivers per year who have received traffic citations. This long-standing program has proved a success. Research has shown that the program training reduces the incidence of accidents and traffic violations.

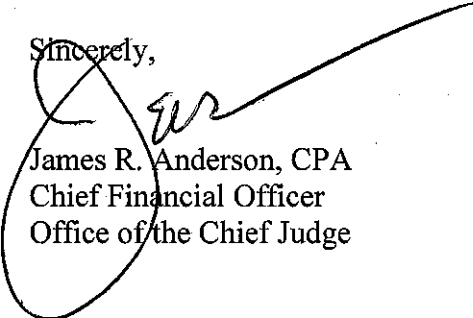
While we understand that difficult choices must be made because of the recent repeal of the sweetened beverage tax, Chief Judge Evans insists that Cook County fund the Court at a reasonable and necessary level in accordance with the State Counties Code. The Court must be funded at a level to fairly allow citizens of Cook County access to justice through effective court operation and adequate supportive services and programs. We have endeavored to cooperate during these challenging economic times and have enclosed a plan that achieves your requested reductions. However, we ask in the strongest possible terms that you reduce these budget cuts to the best of your ability.

We wish to close with one final point. More than 50 percent of the Cook County Operating Budget funds the Cook County Health and Hospital System. However, it is our understanding that the Health Fund budget gap for FY2018 is only about \$27 million, which roughly equates to

the Circuit Court's 10 percent budget reduction mandate. I trust that as the Court's share of the Cook County Operating Budget is only about 7.5 percent, we would not bear a disproportionate share of the budget reduction burden.

Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans looks forward to meeting with the Commissioners on October 27, 2017 to discuss these matters further. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the Court and the citizens we serve.

Sincerely,



James R. Anderson, CPA  
Chief Financial Officer  
Office of the Chief Judge

cc:

Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, President, Cook County Board of Commissioners  
Cook County Board of Commissioners  
Tanya Anthony, Budget Director, Department of Budget and Management Services

Enclosures