

Commissioners

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2018 Budget Message

For the Cook County Board of Commissioners

Remarks of Marisel A. Hernandez, Chairwoman

October 25, 2017

President Preckwinkle, Chairman Daley and Commissioners of the Cook County Board, on behalf of the Board of Election Commissioners, I want to thank you for this opportunity to review our goals and spending plans for 2018 – and beyond.

My name is Marisel A. Hernandez and I am the Chairwoman of the Chicago Election Board. With me are: Executive Director Lance Gough; Commissioner/Secretary William J. Kresse, Commissioner Jonathan T. Swain, our new Chief Legal Counsel Adam Lasker; Communications Director James P. Allen; and Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Peter Peso.

Six years ago, we held the “Voter Engagement Community Forum.” More than 130 voters and community leaders from Chicagoland told us to pursue:

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

We have achieved all of these items, but one: Universal Vote Centers on Election Day. Like Early Voting, voters would be able to use any Universal Vote Center, and we could ensure more highly trained persons at each site. Universal Vote Centers represent the biggest potential cost savings and voter convenience we could offer, when offered in combination with more Early Voting and Vote By Mail.

That being said, to prepare this 2018 budget, we reviewed our new mandates and examined our actual expenditures from 2014 and 2016. These are the years that provide the best vision of what the citywide midterm elections will cost in 2018.

As background, Chicago elections are financed differently each year, by a combination of the City and the County, based on the types of elections that occur that year. For this reason, Fiscal Year 2014 provides the best guide, excepting for changes in election administration that have occurred since then. The Board's request of \$17,792,599 for FY2018 represents an increase of 9.9% over four years or an average of 2.5% per year when compared to the FY2014 appropriation. In comparing other sections of the Board's FY2018 and the Board's FY2014 expenditures, the following variances are noted and explained:

Salaries & Wages of Regular Employees will remain virtually unchanged from 2014.

Transportation costs will be up 4.9% compared to 2014 expenditures, but down 15.7% from 2016 expenditures. These projections are based on: increased costs for cartage, including more tables and chairs for Election Day Registration in all 2,069 precinct. By contrast, in 2014, Election Day Registration was offered at only five sites.

Postage will remain identical to 2014 expenditures. We believe this is conservative given how: (1) postage rates have increased since 2014 and are scheduled to increase again soon; and, (2) the Board has successfully promoted more use of Vote By Mail. The Board will take all steps necessary to conserve expenses in this account.

External Graphics and Reproduction will increase 19.1% relative to 2014 expenditures, but will be comparable to the expenses incurred in 2016. This reflects increased mailings, cards, forms and signage. Most notable was the increased popularity of no-excuse Vote By Mail. In 2016, there were more than 100,000 applications to vote by mail and more 92,000 mail-ballots cast ahead of the November election. The last time that happened was in World War II. The Board plans to continue promoting Vote By Mail as a cost-effective alternative to voting in person.

Professional and Managerial Services will increase 20% over 2014 expenditures but will be 14.4% lower than 2016 expenditures. The items with the biggest impact on this area are election

equipment and services, security services and temporary staffing, who must be paid at the city vendor minimum wage of more than \$13 an hour. Although these items are higher than they were in 2014, they still will be far lower than 2016 expenditures, based on how midterm elections historically have lower turnouts than presidential elections.

Rental and Leasing will decrease 10.9% compared to 2014 expenditures.

Election Judge Fees will increase 19.2% compared to 2014 expenditures, but will be 14.8% lower than 2016 expenditures. This reflects the impact of: the increase in standard judge pay from \$170 to \$190 for those who completed training. Election Coordinators will receive the 2014 pay rate of \$350. Election Coordinators are responsible for trouble-shooting equipment, Election Day registration and addressing accessibility in the polling place. Election Coordinators will continue to be vital as the Board introduces upgrades to electronic poll books and voting equipment while also addressing issues related to the new Settlement Agreement on Accessible Polling Places with the U.S. Department of Justice.

From here, we will continue to review with lawmakers the concept of transitioning to increased use of Vote By Mail and Early Voting, and then the concept of Universal Vote Centers, where anyone from Chicago would be able to use any site on Election Day. Eight years ago, this concept might have seemed unlikely. But we have so many options for pre-election voting. We have the technology of Electronic Poll Books. We have the experience of Early Voting at any of 51 sites, regardless of where you live. We must consider Universal Vote Centers as a cost-cutting alternative to 2,069 precinct-based polling places.

Lastly, for many years, Chicago has led the nation in training and assigning high school judges of election. We continue to lead on that front and now also with more than 2,000 young people serving as high school judges of election and election coordinators who help set up and trouble-shoot the equipment and handle Election Day Registration.

I look forward to answering your questions.