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Testimony to CC re file 17-5572

Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak regarding the services of Cook County Health and Hospitals, in particular the Trauma Department at Stroger.

As you face looming budget cuts, I do not envy the Solomonic decisions you will be making. As a Cook County tax payer I appreciate your diligence to cost savings, but one area that I urge you to support financially is the health system and the services of the Trauma team at Stroger.

For 30 years I have worked as a volunteer and staff member at Bishop Anderson House, across Wood Street from Cook County Hospital. My first experience with the CCHHS was in 1987 at the behest of a Bishop Anderson House chaplain who visited daily the wards at old Cook County Childrens. Those wards were hot, old time hospital wards, and there was nothing to entertain the children who spent days or weeks there. My church collected funds and toys to supply a “play room,” and I was forever captivated by the caring medical staff and grateful children. Because of that visit I’ve spend my adult life working for better conditions and pastoral care for patients in the Cook County Hospital System.

Dr. Shannon has done an admirable job of educating our community on the Public Health Crisis of Gun Violence in Chicago, and the Trauma Unit at Stroger is Ground Zero in that battle. Each member of the team is invaluable in patching up physically the people whose bodies are riddled with bullets. But what is invaluable about this Trauma Department is a commitment to healing the spiritual and emotional wounds that those most vulnerable citizens of our community suffer. The department is devoted to trying to break the trauma cycle so that the most vulnerable don’t become victims again.

I say team, because each staff member is a critical component of the healing process, from intake to discharge. If cuts are made, we risk losing a cog or two in the wheel, and then the machine is unable to function at the highest level. We all know that waiting times are crucial—do we dare slow that down? And having the best possible equipment—do we cut corners there? Or having top notch physicians who are willing to work in a battle-zone—do we hire less competent doctors?

As you debate and ponder how to allocate funds, I urge you to envision the children, teens, adults and the elderly who are directly impacted by the crucial services of the Cook County Health and Hospital System. Our society deserves nothing less than the finest health care in the nation.