

Testimony of Irene Romulo
Director of Advocacy, Chicago Community Bond Fund

Good afternoon, my name is Irene Romulo and I am the director of advocacy at the Chicago Community Bond Fund. The Chicago Community Bond Fund pays bond for people in Cook County who cannot afford to pay their own bonds and advocates for a fairer pretrial justice system. I am responding to Commissioner Boykin's resolution calling for an investigation into electronic monitoring and bond reform. Three weeks ago, Sheriff Dart announced that he would begin unconstitutionally detaining people who have been cleared for release by judges based on his own unilateral review of their cases.

By defying court orders, Sheriff Dart is exceeding the scope of the Sheriff's role and usurping the power of the courts to make bail decisions. He is unilaterally depriving legally innocent people of their freedom without regard to mitigating evidence presented in court. The Sheriff also sent selective, unsubstantiated data to newspapers with the goal of instilling fear and rolling back the progress Cook County has made in reducing the number of people incarcerated at the jail due to unaffordable money bonds.

Since the announcement of these reviews, there has been a federal lawsuit filed against the Sheriff's Office for delaying release and refusing to release a class of individuals cleared for release by judges. Public Defender Amy Campanelli and several prominent civil rights lawyers have publicly admonished Sheriff Dart for his actions, which threaten to result in civil rights settlements against the county.

Given the negative impact that Sheriff Dart's actions have on individuals who are being deprived of their freedom and the pending lawsuit, any investigation into the Electronic Monitoring program should include an assessment of the liability Cook County now faces for Sheriff Dart's unconstitutional detention of people who have already been ordered released pretrial.