



Good afternoon. My name is Amanda Benitez and I am the Director of Community Health for Enlace Chicago, a community-based organization in the Little Village neighborhood. Enlace's mission is focused on improving the quality of life of Little Village residents, and a major focus of our health work is improving access to care for our community.

Little Village is a predominantly low income Latinx immigrant neighborhood and has one of the highest uninsured rates in Chicago, at 28%. Among adults ages 18 to 64, the uninsurance rate jumps to 44%, or nearly half of all adults.

Cook County Health is a critical asset to our community, and we are so grateful for its mission to provide dignified and respectful healthcare to Cook County residents regardless of their ability to pay, or their insurance or immigration status. SO many of our Little Village community members rely on this system to get the care they need, and for many, that is particularly thanks to the CareLink financial assistance program.

The next CEO of Cook County Health must have a demonstrated commitment to health equity, to furthering the system's mission and protecting Cook County residents' right to healthcare. They should have extensive experience working with low income communities of color and have a deep understanding of the many barriers these communities face in being able to access care.

However, I believe there is more we need to be discussing than just the job description for the next CEO. Enlace would like there to be extensive discussions and public hearings about the planned changes to the ordinance regarding the County Health System and the proposal to give more control over the health system to the President and Board of Commissioners. There should be more research done into other models that are working well, such as the public healthcare systems in New York and LA, to understand their governance and accountability structures before making major changes to the way the semi-independent health system board interacts with the County Board President and Commissioners.

We also call for public hearings to discuss Cook County Health's deficit in depth. It is important to fully understand the reasons for the deficit. The fact that the County President and Board of Commissioners cut the taxpayer subsidy for the health system for several years is deeply concerning, especially given the growing budget challenges the health system faces. I urge you to reverse that trend and increase the tax allocation to Cook County Health further to ensure our community members continue to access the care they need and have a right to.

Enlace is supportive of policies that try to hold other nonprofit hospitals accountable to providing more charity care, and we will also continue to advocate for state-level policies that increase coverage. But I again ask you to keep the mission of the Cook County Health System at the front of your minds throughout these hearings and discussions. The suggestions that have been made recently to limit charity care are disturbing and go against the very core of what the health system was designed to be. The Cook County Health System was created to provide charity care and should hire a CEO who is committed to ensuring the health system continues to protect and preserve its intended purpose and mission. The lives of many of our community members literally depend on it.

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