

Timothy Casey (Secretary to the Board)

From: Michael Rabbitt <mprabbitt@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 22, 2020 3:13 PM
To: CookCounty Board (Secretary to the Board)
Subject: Written Testimony for Cook Co. Board Meeting - April 23, 2020 - File # 20-2378

I'm a founding member of the Northwest Side Coalition against Racism & Hate, the organization that led the community response in the area where the hate crime against Mia Irizarry – for wearing a Puerto Rican flag shirt - occurred in the Caldwell Woods Forest Preserve in 2018. Our organization also created and organized the annual Peace in the Preserves event, begun in 2018, in partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Today I would like to call your attention to the resolution “to share addresses for emergencies with first responders.” I strongly urge the Board to oppose this resolution. While I appreciate and respect the positive intent, and agree that the safety of first responders is important, there are serious potential consequences to this resolution. Beyond the clear and obvious privacy concerns, there are two other major implications to consider – stigma and harm.

Fear and anxiety about COVID-19 has produced social stigma toward people. Identifying people with COVID-19 taints them, which may prompt prejudicial responses against them. Families and friends of identified patients may also be stigmatized by extension. In fact, we've already seen this play out nationally against Asian and Chinese-Americans, with well over 1,000 incidents of discrimination, hate and harassment reported.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) raised this specific concern on its website under “Reducing Stigma”, stating “Stigma affects the emotional or mental health of stigmatized groups and the communities they live in. Stopping stigma is important to making communities and community members resilient...Maintain privacy and confidentiality of those seeking healthcare and those who may be part of any contact investigation.”

Meanwhile, from a harm standpoint, we must view this through the lens of the experiences people of color have had with the police, especially black and brown residents of Cook County. Given the history of systemic racism and shortcomings of police accountability, especially in Chicago, could this increase the risk of harm? Does this resolution actually ensure the safety of residents? It's been stated that this practice would lead to first responders taking more precautions – could those precautions lead them to take more aggressive action and ineffectively de-escalate a problematic encounter?

Finally, I noticed that the resolution mentions that this practice was implemented in McHenry County. Please be aware that local health officials there are asking a judge to reconsider the order. The Illinois Department of Public Health is opposed as well.

This resolution undermines Cook County's core value of equity, especially racial equity, and should be rejected.

Thank you.

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