



March 9, 2021

The Honorable Cook County Board of Commissioners
118 N. Clark Street, Room 567
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Re: Cook County Public Defender Appointment – Item 21-2052

Dear Commissioners:

The role of the Public Defender is critical to our criminal justice system, one that is charged with upholding the law and fiercely advocating for the clients they serve. When the last Public Defender's term came to an end in 2015, my administration developed an open and transparent selection process to identify a new Public Defender for the statutory six-year term. In support of that 2015 commitment, on December 29, 2020, it was announced that my administration would once again engage in an open and transparent selection process to address the next Public Defender term which commences on April 1, 2021.

On December 29, 2021, I announced the formation of a committee that would assist me in interviewing and selecting candidates for the position of Cook County Public Defender to produce the candidate best equipped to deliver high-quality legal representation to our residents who need it most. Committee members included community leaders with substantial experience in the practice of law within marginalized communities. The committee also included members who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. The composition of the committee is as follows:

- Honorable Judge Patricia M. Martin, retired
- Julie L. Biehl, Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Children and Family Justice Center, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law
- Floyd Stafford, Heartland Alliance
- Eddie Bocanegra, Heartland Alliance
- Khadine Bennett, Director of Advocacy and Intergovernmental Affairs, ACLU of Illinois

The committee sought highly qualified individuals whose practice of law has clearly demonstrated experience in the representation of persons accused of crime, who are dedicated to providing high-quality representation to defendants and are committed to improving the quality of defense services in an equitable manner. The selection process utilized public surveys, including a survey of the current staff of the Legal Office of the Cook County Public Defender, community outreach, applicant interviews, resumes and writing samples. In the first set of twenty-one interviews a subset of the Committee, asked each applicant a series of questions, including questions derived from community outreach. The six applicants invited for

a second interview spent 90 minutes with the entire Committee discussing their credentials and qualifications for the position. After the second round of interviews the Committee deliberated and agreed to recommend two candidates to President for final interviews. Following final interviews of the two recommended candidates, I am recommending Sharone Mitchell, Jr. to the position of Cook County Public Defender.

Upon confirmation of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, Mr. Mitchell will assume the position of Cook County Public Defender on April 1, 2021 with his term expiring on March 31, 2027.

Sharone Mitchell, Jr. is currently the Director of the Illinois Justice Project, a policy reform organization dedicated to supporting people, programs, and policies that can reduce inappropriate incarceration, improve community safety outcomes, reduce recidivism and increase justice in the legal system. Mr. Mitchell's work has focused on adult justice specializing in pretrial issues, sentencing policy, and violence prevention. As the Director of the Illinois Justice Project, Mr. Mitchell is responsible for the overall direction of the organization, including creation, management and compliance of the organizational budget, grant writing, supervision of employees, development of policy agenda, interfacing with their Board and the formulation of media strategy. Prior to joining the Illinois Justice Project, Mr. Mitchell worked as a Cook County Public Defender. His responsibilities at the Public Defender's Office included the handling of complex felonies, ranging from serious Class X felonies to simple misdemeanors, including trying numerous bench and jury trials in the Criminal Division and handling child unification cases involving the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and the Cook County Public Guardian's Office in the Civil Division. Mr. Mitchell has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and earned his law degree from DePaul University College of Law.

I am confident that Mr. Mitchell will continue efforts to expand the Public Defender's role as part of Cook County's commitment to comprehensive criminal justice reform. In partnership with the current Public Defender, we have been successful in strengthening the office and setting new, progressive priorities from day one. I thank Public Defender Amy Campanelli for her partnership and look forward to building on the successes that have been realized so far.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Toni Preckwinkle". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Toni Preckwinkle
President