



November 9, 2023

The Honorable Cook County Board of Commissioners

Sent via email to _____

Re: Considerations for the 2024 Cook County Budget

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of our member organizations and the thousands of Cook County residents we represent, the Coalition to End Money Bond writes to request your attention and consideration of our concerns regarding the 2024 budget. While it is encouraging to see [total and proportional spending](#) on jailing and incarceration decrease in Cook County, we are troubled by many of the Sheriff's proposed expenditures. We submit for your consideration the following objections to the proposed 2024 budget:

Cook County continues to spend millions of dollars on the Sheriff's electronic monitoring (EM) program, which has destabilized the lives of those subjected to it and has not demonstrated any measurable positive impacts on recidivism or court appearance rates. In 2020, the Cook County Board contracted Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts and CGL to complete a thorough [evaluation of Cook County Electronic Monitoring](#). The resulting report, published in 2022, made clear recommendations to consolidate and reduce the use of EM in Cook County. Moreover, the [Principles for Respecting the Rights of People on Electronic Monitoring](#) have been endorsed by 58 organizations and 23 public officials, including five Cook County commissioners, and Chicago's Mayor Brandon Johnson and Evanston's Mayor Daniel Biss. These principles call for a number of direly needed adjustments to how electronic monitoring is administered in Cook County, and for a reduction in its use.

The Cook County Sheriff's Department is requesting millions of dollars to implement universal mental health and substance use assessments for everyone released onto their electronic monitoring program. Adding resources for mandated treatment assessments of people on electronic monitoring is yet another duplication of functions that are already served by the Office of Pretrial Services, which assesses people awaiting trial and makes recommendations to judges for any pretrial conditions. Electronic monitoring heavily interferes with people's ability to work and take care of their families while awaiting trial, and paradoxically given the current request, significantly limits access to behavioral health care. Adding universal assessments that may increase mandated treatment would exacerbate these challenges and put people at greater risks of conditions violations that result in reincarceration. [Research firmly indicates](#) that [treatment is best engaged voluntarily](#) and in community based settings. Moreover, people who are legally innocent and awaiting trial are entitled to the least restrictive conditions on their pretrial freedom.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office is requesting millions of dollars to expand service provision efforts that should be housed and funded within the Cook County Health system and community-based organizations. Sheriff Tom Dart has himself acknowledged that law enforcement are

“[not] the best people to handle [mental health responses]” in his July 2023 midyear budget address. Despite this admission, the Sheriff has requested funding to expand his community resource center, as well as a number of “alternative law enforcement” models. While framed as progressive, these centers and programs put law enforcement staff, who are trained to deal with delicate community issues in a ways that have proven to be coercive, harmful, and at times, deadly, in a position of providing treatment, case management, suicide prevention, and violence prevention services.

Along similar lines, the two temporary staff positions added to the Sheriff’s Office to begin implementing the 911 alternative response model are now budgeted as permanent positions in their office. Action must be taken to follow through on community demands to establish a crisis response system that does not involve law enforcement unless they are called for backup by mental health professionals, and those positions should be relocated from the Sheriff’s Office for the next fiscal year. Ensuring that community-based be the primary provider of these services is crucial for protecting Cook County residents, especially Black and Brown residents, from encounters with law enforcement that are marked by discomfort, trauma, humiliation, and entanglement in the criminal legal system.

Cook County spends millions of dollars operating the Cook County Jail without sufficient scrutiny of the conditions that cause loss of human life. This continues following a year where 16 people have died in the jail’s custody, a higher death toll than that experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and a mortality rate higher than the late 1990s, when the jail was twice its current size. Nearly 700 community members have signed a petition calling for specific action steps to stop the preventable and tragic losses of life at Cook County Jail. This crisis is currently being addressed with punitive and harmful measures like limiting access to mail from loved ones and books. Cook County must take a public health approach to stop the further loss of life.

We ask that you reject funding requests for service provision routed through the Sheriff’s office and fund community based supports instead. We also request that the County follow through on the call to reduce the scale and scope of electronic monitoring. This budget cycle provides yet another opportunity for Cook County to follow through on the promise of the [Justice for Black Lives resolution](#) by redirecting funds from policing and carceral systems to supportive services. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss these requests further.

Thank you for your consideration,
The Coalition to End Money Bond

ACLU Illinois
A Just Harvest
Believers Bail Out
Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts
Chicago Community Bond Fund
Chicago Metropolitan Association, Illinois
Conference of the United Church of
Christ

Community Renewal Society
Nehemiah Trinity Uprising
The Next Movement
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
The People’s Lobby
Southsiders Organizing for Unity and Liberation
(SOUL)
Workers Center for Racial Justice

