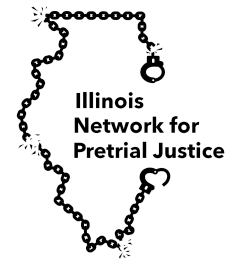


September 17, 2026

The Honorable [REDACTED]
Cook County Commissioner [REDACTED] h District
118 N. Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60602
Sent via email to [REDACTED]



Re: 55 Organizations Call for Community Investments & Law Enforcement Spending Freeze

Dear Commissioner [REDACTED],

The Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice and the undersigned 57 community, faith, policy, and service-providing organizations write to call on you and your fellow commissioners to protect funding for essential services like violence prevention, behavioral health, and community investment to reduce intra-community violence. With the County facing a \$550 million budget shortfall, we believe the best way for the county to protect these critical services is by freezing law enforcement spending, which is already far above the levels set when there were many more people in jail and many more criminal cases being processed by our court system. As County Board President Preckwinkle noted in her recent [op-ed](#), community violence interventions (CVI) have been proven extremely effective, which is why “[r]esearchers, law enforcement and communities support CVI.” Addressing the causes of crime is a smart, proactive, and holistic approach when compared to jailing people.

In the last decade, county stakeholders and community advocates have worked together to reduce the number of people incarcerated in the Cook County Jail by nearly 40%. Cook County has simultaneously seen a dramatic decrease in both violent and property crime—direct results of increased investments in housing, violence prevention programs, healthcare, job programs, education, direct financial supports, and services within the community that address the root causes of crime.

Nonetheless, the Cook County Department of Corrections budget has not seen a reduction that coincides with that drop in pretrial jailing. Similarly, the budget for the State’s Attorney’s Office grew tremendously over the last decade, even as both the number of case filings and crime rates continued to decrease.

The need for freezing law enforcement spending has only increased since we made this same request in 2025. Last year, the Cook County Board of Commissioners increased funding to law enforcement and corrections by over \$300 million. This happened while the federal government was simultaneously dismantling the social safety net, leaving massive service gaps that Cook County will be forced to fill.

It is more important than ever that Cook County freeze law enforcement spending to ensure that we can protect essential health and human services that result in significantly better public safety outcomes while operating with compassion and care for our communities. It is critical that the County continues to prioritize community-based supports and services that address the root causes of crime, including:

Violence Prevention and Crisis Intervention

As the Trump administration divests from the social determinants of safety while advancing more punitive and carceral responses, Cook County must invest more in community-based violence prevention and crisis intervention. Research and recent crime trends alike show that safer communities are built not through ever-growing law enforcement budgets, but through investments in initiatives focused on: violence prevention, intervention, and reduction; mental and behavioral health; youth jobs and arts programming; safe passage for students; job readiness and employment; and re-entry and non-police behavioral health responses.

Such programs address the root causes of violence by leveraging outreach workers on city streets trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation paired with support programs that promote opportunity, stability, mental health, and support in the communities most impacted at the intersection of disinvestment and gun violence. Cook County has an opportunity to build on strategies that have already shown real results. At a time when federal cuts are threatening the very programs that make communities safer, Cook County must continue and expand investments in the Justice Advisory Council Violence Prevention Grants program, Youth Jobs Programs, re-entry support, Safe Passage, and Community Emergency Services and Supports Act implementation so that residents have access to care, stability, and crisis response without deeper reliance on incarceration.

Domestic Violence Support

In 2025, more than 30,000 contacts were made from Cook County to the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline, according to The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence. In 2024, more than 20,000 domestic violence survivors (adults and children) received important supportive services including housing, legal advocacy or legal aid, and more. Housing, like emergency shelter or transitional housing options, remains the number one request of survivors. Yet, in 2024, there were more than 180 days where no beds or cribs were available to survivors in suburban Cook County who reached out for support.

Cook County has previously invested \$7 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds into domestic violence services through Justice Advisory Council grants from 2023 through 2026. With ARPA dollars ending in 2026, Cook County must continue funding critical services for domestic violence survivors beyond this one-time ARPA revenue. By funding community-based services, like legal advocacy, housing and safe exchange, crisis intervention, and counseling, the funding serves both survivors who interact with the criminal and civil legal systems, and those who do not wish to engage in the legal system.

Housing

The Trump administration is divesting from Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), one of the most critical and successful government interventions anywhere in the world for homelessness. The PSH model has helped unhoused individuals and families, justice-involved people returning to home, and domestic violence survivors; it can also be applied to disabled people and seniors who will be displaced as nursing facilities are shut down as a result of disastrous cuts to Medicaid funding. Putting more funds towards PSH would advance efforts towards creating needed stability for all forms of Cook County families.

However, Cook County won't be able to tackle ending homelessness without first boosting homelessness prevention. Prevention is, by far, the most cost-effective and humane intervention. Additional investments in rental, utility, and legal assistance for people facing eviction will cost far less than the cost of unnecessary interventions further down the line.

Safety-Focused Infrastructure

Community centers, municipally-supported grocery stores in food insecure areas, and reliable street lighting are practical, visible investments that strengthen community life and help prevent harm without expanding the carceral system.

Guaranteed Income Expansion

There were nearly 750,000 households in Cook County living below the poverty line in 2022, and while the full scale of need is far greater than a single budget cycle can meet, expanding Guaranteed Income is an obvious place to start. Increasing the number of households receiving \$500 per month would provide immediate support for housing, food, transportation, child care, and other basic needs, helping families stay stable before hardship turns into crisis.

Two specific areas of increased investment will allow for full realization of the vision of the Pretrial Fairness Act and earlier pretrial reforms in Cook County:

Pretrial Success Grants Program

In 2024, Illinois enacted the Pretrial Success Act, which intends to create a statewide network of voluntary services for people who remain in the community while awaiting trial. With the right supports—case management, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, and transportation to court—early participants are achieving stability, returning to court as required, and successfully remaining in the community. The State has implemented the program on a pilot basis with an initial investment of \$3.5 million, with only \$500,000 allocated for services by only one organization in Cook County. We are seeking funding to bring the Pretrial Success Grants Program to scale in Cook County, with an array of 10 service providers offering tailored supports to meet the unique needs of people who remain in the community while waiting for trial.

Cook County Public Defender's Office

In 2023, Illinois implemented the Pretrial Fairness Act and became the first state in the country to end the use of money bail. Under the new system, the court is spending more time and receiving more information when making decisions about pretrial release and detention. This important advancement for public safety has significantly increased the workload of the Public Defender's Office, especially since December 2024, when prosecutors began seeking detention at a much higher rate. The office was already operating on a fraction of the budget given to the State's Attorney's Office before these changes. By increasing the funding for the Public Defender's Office, Cook County can hire more attorneys so as to ensure that accused people are fully benefiting from all the protections in the law.

We would be remiss not to acknowledge the federal government's abhorrent attacks on Cook County's immigrant communities. The Cook County Public Defender's Office's Immigration Division is an example for the rest of the country but desperately needs more attorneys to defend against the tidal wave of immigration cases filed by the Trump administration.

The increase in immigration enforcement has needlessly endangered all members of our communities. Across the county, community members from all walks of life have come together to defend our neighbors from the Trump Administration. Unfortunately, that has not been true of all of our county stakeholders. Neither the State's Attorney's Office nor the Sheriff's Office have taken significant actions to interrupt or prevent the weaponization of Cook County's Courts against vulnerable residents. Nor have either of these offices taken action to hold ICE accountable for the harm they've caused Cook County residents. It would be especially inappropriate to increase funding to their offices at this pivotal moment when they are failing to marshal the resources already available to keep the people of Cook County safe.

Over the last decade, Cook County has made tremendous progress in building safer communities and reducing pretrial incarceration, but failing to invest in essential social services could jeopardize those gains. **We call on you to freeze law enforcement spending to ensure that we can protect essential health and human services at a time when the federal government has abandoned them. With the County's looming budget deficit, it would be unconscionable to allocate more funding towards bloated law enforcement budgets when there is such a desperate need for social services.**

Sincerely,

The Cook County members of the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice and supporting Organizations:

33rd Ward Working Families
46th Ward Neighbors United
48th Ward Neighbors for Justice
Access Living
A Just Harvest

Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights
and Empowerment
American Friends Service Committee
Chicago

Asian Americans for Advancing Justice:
Chicago
Believer's Bail Out
BlackRoots Alliance
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Cannabis Equity IL Coalition
Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts
Chicago DSA
Chicago for Abortion Rights
Chicago United Solidarity Project (CUSP)
Children's Best Interest Project
Circles and Ciphers
Clergy for a New Drug Policy
Community Renewal Society
Dems 45
Equity and Transformation
HANA Center
Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice
Illinois Black Advocacy Initiative
Illinois Coalition to End Permanent
Punishments
Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Illinois Social Justice Alliance
Illinois National Organization for Women
(NOW)
Illinois Prison Project
Indivisible Chicago-South Side
Inside Out Network
JCUA (Jewish Council on Urban Affairs)

Liberation Library
Lucy Parsons Labs
Mamas Activating Movements for Abolition
& Solidarity (MAMAS)
Muslim Civic Coalition
National Lawyers Guild Chicago
National Organization for Women: Illinois
Nehemiah Trinity Rising
Nikkei Uprising
Parole Illinois
The People's Lobby
The Puerto Rico Project
Recipe for Change
Restore Justice
Sana Healing Collective
She Votes Illinois
SisterReach, Inc.
Stick Talk
Southsiders Organized for Unity and
Liberation
Students for Sensible Drug Policy – IL
Treatment Alternatives for Stronger
Communities (TASC)
Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of
Illinois
Unitarian Universalist Prison Ministry of
Illinois
The Uplift
Workers Center for Racial Justice