

Public Testimony submitted for public hearing on 8/24/21

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Cook County Health Budget Public Hearings

August 20, 2021

Verneda Bachus, CEO  
Friend Health  
800 E 55th St.  
Chicago, IL 60615  
[vbachus@friendhealth.org](mailto:vbachus@friendhealth.org)

My name is Verneda Bachus, Chief Executive Officer of Friend Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center serving Chicago's South Side. We are one of 16 non-profit owners of MHN ACO, an accountable care organization that works closely with CountyCare. The MHN ACO organization is owned by 13 Federally Qualified Health Centers and three health systems, spanning Cook County. I am writing today to voice support for the CountyCare health plan.

For over 23 years, Friend Health has been providing comprehensive and integrated care to Chicago's medically underserved populations in a manner that is accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate. Today we have 14 locations, seven medical centers and seven community-based facilities specializing in behavioral health and substance use treatment. In 2020 we served 47,093 patients regardless of their ability to pay, more patients than we've served in the four years prior.

Friend Health serves as the primary care medical home for over 16,000 CountyCare patients and has been a CountyCare in-network provider since the plan's inception in 2014. Through our relationship with MHN ACO, Friend Health takes on full care management responsibilities for our CountyCare patient population, and the ACO is at-risk for total cost of care. This industry-leading contract allows Friend Health to create jobs in our communities, employing a team of highly-skilled community health workers and nurses who lead our engagement and outreach efforts—as an integrated care team in our practices. This team provides individualized care to CountyCare Medicaid patients, assisting with social determinants like housing, food, and transportation, as well as behavioral and physical health needs.

Collaborating with CountyCare through the MHN ACO has helped Friend Health work toward our mission of providing a high quality, person-centered, integrated system of care for all. We appreciate CountyCare's partnership in transforming care and improving the health of our members.

The MHN ACO has also returned value to Cook County Health and CountyCare, generating \$81M in shared savings over five years. In practice, this means we can make investments in initiatives like our collaborative care depression management program, where behavioral health care coordinators work closely with the primary care provider, behavioral health provider and other care team members to support patients with a diagnosis of depression, enabling us to provide holistic, wraparound services. The program treats patients to target outcomes, and Friend Health has helped nearly 59% of patients reach at least a 50% reduction in their depression symptoms, and 38% of patients have reached full remission from depression. These numbers far surpass national standards for outcomes.



Thanks to our partnership with CountyCare, programs like this represent the best of integrated and collaborative care. I want to express my deep gratitude to Cook County Health for your ongoing support of the CountyCare insurance plan, which has positively impacted the health of so many in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Verneda Bachus', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Verneda Bachus, DHA  
Chief Executive Officer

Cook County Health  
Board of Directors  
1950 W. Polk  
Chicago, IL 60612

Dear Cook County Health Board of Directors,

My name is Rosalie Peoples and I am a patient at Cook County Health; more specifically at the Blue Island/Stroger Health Center. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to write this letter. I am grateful to Cook County Health for providing magnificent health services to me.

I was recently seen at the ER due to an issue with my current health condition. The medical staff was very compassionate about how I was feeling at the time of the visit and showed a great concern with making me feel comfortable. They included me when discussing their recommendations and continued to give their expertise, but allowing me to offer my feelings about my health. I would like to give an extra special thanks to my Gynecologist (Dr. Valerie J. Hansbrough), but not to exclude the hematology/PCP (Dr. Ogalee) Cardiologist (Dr. Bangayan ) /and Dermatologist departments who I have had contact with and who all provided me what quality care.

Many thanks for being there for us in the community.

Sincerely,

Rosalie Peoples

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4100 West Ann Lurie Place  
Chicago, IL 60632-3920  
773-247-FOOD  
chicagosfoodbank.org

August 18, 2021

Board of Directors  
Cook County Health  
1950 W. Polk  
Chicago, IL 60612

RE: Fiscal Year 2022 Cook County Health Budget

Dear Cook County Health Board of Directors,

My name is Emily Daniels, I am the Associate Director of Prepared Meal Programs, Client Services at the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

1 in 8 in Cook County is at risk for food insecurity, meaning they struggle to access the food they need to live a healthy life. Even one is too many. Hunger is as much a problem in suburban communities as it is in the city, and the consequences of inadequate food access threaten the health of children and families in every neighborhood.

While the rate of mortality related to chronic illness - like heart disease, stroke, and diabetes - has declined thanks to improvements in treatment, investing in chronic disease prevention will save additional lives and resources while lowering healthcare costs for all.

We believe a healthy community starts with food. For the past seven years, the Greater Chicago Food Depository has partnered with the Cook County Health to incorporate food insecurity screenings into patients' medical records. Patients who screen positive are provided with information and resources to access healthy food.

Food insecure patients receive a list of locations where they can access emergency food, a referral to our SNAP hotline to apply for nutrition benefits, and a referral to visit the Fresh Truck, provided by the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

The Fresh Truck visits participating CCH sites every other month to provide food insecure patients with fresh fruits and vegetables. Eating fresh produce is extremely important for preventing and managing chronic disease, but is frequently less accessible for food insecure people who many times can't afford it or don't live close to a grocery store that carries it.

Currently, all CCH health centers are conducting food insecurity screenings with 13 community health center locations hosting fresh produce distributions. **Over the past year, the Fresh Truck has been at these sites 66 times and distributed 140,114 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to 6,365 households, representing 21,809 individuals. On average, 100 people attend each of these distributions.** Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Greater Chicago Food Depository has seen the number of individuals turning to us and our partners for food increase significantly. Our partners, staff and volunteers have made changes to processes and

**FROM HUNGRY TO HOPEFUL**





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chicagosfoodbank.org

procedures to ensure that we are able to continue distributing food to Cook County residents. The support and resilience of the health center teams has been vital during this time.

We continue to look for new ways to engage the patient population. Resources are available to help patients access SNAP benefits as well as nutrition education materials, like recipe cards and samples of different produce items to taste. Last year we worked with Cook County Health on a six-month pilot to provide a weekly delivery of 7 frozen meals to a cohort of 10 prediabetic patients.

We are extremely happy with this partnership and the entire CCH staff have truly embraced this work. I want to thank Cook County Health for your leadership and commitment to the health of Cook County residents. As you begin the fiscal year 2022 budget process, I urge you to continue investing in the health, wellbeing, and nutrition of Cook County residents. The Food Depository is committed to being your partner to ensure everyone in Cook County has the nutritious food they need for a healthy life.

We know that we cannot do this alone and are truly grateful for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Daniels".

Emily Daniels  
Associate Director of Prepared Meal Programs, Client Services  
Greater Chicago Food Depository



August 17, 2021

Cook County Health Board of Directors  
c/o Deborah Santana, Secretary to the Board  
1950 W. Polk Street  
Room 9106  
Chicago, IL 60612

Dear Members of the Cook County Health Board of Directors,

I am a supervisory attorney in the Public Benefits Practice Group at Legal Aid Chicago. I manage our medical-legal partnerships, including Health Forward/Salud Adelante, Legal Aid Chicago's medical-legal partnership with Integrated Care at Cook County Health.

Legal Aid Chicago's Health Forward staff work primarily work with CCH care coordinators. When CCH care coordinators identify CCH patients or CountyCare members who have legal needs, they refer them to Health Forward for help. We work on "health harming legal needs," like public benefits, domestic violence, and conditions like mold in rental housing. Whenever possible, we try to intervene before there is a crisis—before a member is going hungry, before a patient skips medical appointments, before a member becomes homeless. Having care coordinators dedicated to providing holistic care CountyCare members and CCH patients makes that possible.

So far, in 2021, CCH care coordinators have referred over 200 new cases to Health Forward and have had about 50 consults with Health Forward staff. I would like to highlight a few recent Health Forward success stories for you:

- Mr. E was referred to Health Forward by the Complex Care team after he was denied disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA). He had a number of chronic health conditions, and he was living in a homeless shelter. Mr. E was represented by a private attorney in an application for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) who, unfortunately, lost his case and declined to represent him on appeal. Legal Aid Chicago offered to get involved. While preparing the federal court case about his SSDI benefits, Legal Aid Chicago filed a separate application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). With SSI, Mr. E had a stable source of income and moved into subsidized, supportive housing. Legal Aid Chicago won the SSDI appeal in federal court, represented Mr. E at his second SSDI ALJ hearing, and won that case, too. SSA awarded Mr. E about \$30,000 in past due SSDI benefits and ongoing Medicare coverage.
- A care coordinator at Stroger Hospital referred Ms. B to Legal Aid Chicago because her child needed a leg brace and insurance was not paying. Legal Aid Chicago investigated the child's

All Kids coverage, learned that DHS had terminated coverage for both of Ms. B's children, and advocated with DHS to reinstate coverage for both children back to the date when they had been cut off. When DHS sent the notice of approval for All Kids, Legal Aid Chicago noticed that DHS was improperly counting Ms. B's income and therefore improperly charging the family a monthly premium for their All Kids coverage. Legal Aid Chicago intervened again, and now both children are covered by All Kids at no cost to Ms. B.

- Legal Aid Chicago previously helped Mr. S, a Spanish speaker, obtain SSI benefits. Recently, a CCH Care coordinator referred Mr. S to Health Forward after he received correspondence from SSA about a requirement that he take early retirement benefits when he turned 62. Legal Aid Chicago ensured that Mr. S understood SSA's policy and helped him apply for early retirement. A few months later, SSA sent Mr. S a letter stating that he had not complied with the rule requiring him to take out early retirement and that in a few weeks his SSI would be cut off. Panicked, Mr. S called Legal Aid Chicago. Legal Aid Chicago quickly employed a multi-pronged strategy to save Mr. S's income, formally filing an appeal and calling multiple contacts at the agency explain that an error had occurred. It worked; Mr. S's payments continued without interruption. He is now receiving both early retirement and SSI benefits.

These are just three examples; we have had many other successes. Clients who have made power of attorney documents appointing trusted relatives to help them with medical and financial decisions. Clients who have received hundreds of dollars in SNAP benefits that helped them buy food. Clients who have obtained orders of protection offering safety from domestic abuse. Clients who have been approved for disability benefits on their first application, without going through the lengthy appeals process.

The care coordinators' assistance in all of these cases is invaluable. They identify patients with health harming legal needs and refer them to Health Forward. They help Legal Aid Chicago staff communicate with clients, and they help us understand clients' backgrounds so that we can tailor our service to each client's situation. The holistic services CCH care coordinators offer CCH patients and members of CountyCare continually impress me. More than one client has told me that their care coordinator has made a huge difference in their life. I know that Health Forward is just one tool in the Integrated Care toolbox. We at Legal Aid Chicago are proud to work alongside CCH care coordinators to help improve health and wellbeing for residents of Cook County.

Sincerely,

**Kaitlyn Quigley**

Supervisory Attorney, Public Benefits Practice Group

**p:** 312.229.6361 **f:** 312.612.1561

[kquigley@legalaidchicago.org](mailto:kquigley@legalaidchicago.org)



August 17, 2021

Board of Directors  
Cook County Health  
1950 W. Polk  
Chicago, IL 60612

**RE: Fiscal Year 2022 Cook County Health Budget**

Dear Cook County Health Board of Directors,

My name is Marilyn K, Render, and I am a long-time resident of the North Kenwood/Oakland Community. I serve as an Advisory Council Member for the Provident Hospital/Sengstacke Health Center. I am the principal for MKR Executive Services, a company that specializes in assisting consumers in obtaining personal health records while assuring the quality of overall health maintenance and care.

The Provident Hospital Advisory Council Members met on July 14<sup>th</sup> to review updates and the proposed plans for the 2022 budget, and we are especially excited to hear that Cook County Health will re-establish ICU operations, restore ambulance runs, general surgery, and specialty care services at Provident. We are also excited to learn that you will expand services including hemodialysis, ophthalmology, and surgical services. As I was able to attend the new Dialysis Center ribbon-cutting ceremony, I know that these changes will make Provident once again prominent in my community.

I am writing to support the Cook County Health Fiscal Year 2022 budget. The proposed \$71M budget takes into consideration healthcare disparities in the community. As the pandemic has shown us, these services are vital to the health of the residents and the community. Enhancing the System and adding essential services ensure the residents are kept safe and healthy during the pandemic and beyond.

Your support for being there for us in the community is very much appreciated. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Marilyn K. Render





1 North LaSalle Street  
Suite 4100  
Chicago, IL 60602

August 23, 2021

Board of Directors  
Cook County Health  
1950 W. Polk  
Chicago, IL 60612

**RE: Fiscal Year 2022 Cook County Health Budget**

My name is LaShun James, Regional Vice President of Community and Business Development with Addus Homecare. Please accept this letter as a written testimony of my experience working with the Cook County Health Systems as an Advisory Council member of four health centers as well as a Home and Community based Provider contracted with County Care.

Addus Homecare is a national provider of Personal Care, Home Health and Hospice services for seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. In Illinois, Addus have contracted with the Illinois Department on Aging's Community Care Program for more than 40 years. In addition, we coordinate and work closely with County Care and other Managed Care Organizations throughout the State of Illinois to provide Home and Community Based to assist clients with their activities of daily living and as result, allowing them to remain in their own homes with improved quality of life.

I can truly say that Cook County Health Systems is a leading resource providing an array of services for seniors, children, and families. As an Advisory Council member of four health centers, I have and continue to witness the amazing work that is happening especially with the expansion of services at the Provident Health Center. To point out some key areas of continued growth are:

- Addressing health disparities by investing in navigation and access positions in specialty
- Increased County Care membership utilization of CCH by \$5M
- 3% rate increase in County Care Per Member Per Month
- New initiatives such as new service lines, expanded eligibility to undocumented population

Thank you for the opportunity to share the great healthcare improvements, initiatives, and growth Cook County Health Systems and the Advisory Councils are making by being steadfast in its efforts continue community engagement resulting in great health outcomes across Cook County. I look forward to our continue partnership as an advisory council member and with Addus Homecare.

Sincerely,

LaShun James

Regional Vice President  
Community & Business Development

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August 19, 2021

Board of Directors  
Cook County Health  
1950 W. Polk  
Chicago, IL 60612

RE: Cook County FY22 Budget Proposal

Dear Directors:

I am Holly Rotman-Zaid, the Director of Medical Respite & Families in Transition for Housing Forward. Housing Forward is a leading provider of service for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Our mission is to transition people from crisis to Housing Stability.

Housing Forward has been working with 2 Cook County Housing Programs for the last 4 years: 1) Illinois Department of Housing Authority (security deposits for apartments); 2) WIN II- a permanent Supportive Housing program.

But I am excited to be here tonight to tell you about the newest program that I am intimately involved in with Cook County Health. Our program is called the “Medical Respite Center”. What is Medical Respite? It is an acute and post-acute care for folks experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover while living on the streets or in a shelter from a physical illness or injury but are not ill enough to be in the hospital. Medical Respite = Recuperative Care. Our Medical Respite Center has served 68 households since December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 and we currently have 17 clients in residency.

Cook County Health and Housing Forward would like to ask you to continue the funding of this program through 2021 and into the future so that we can continue to serve clients from Suburban Cook Hospitals as well as from Stroger & Provident Hospitals.

I would like to share a short story of how this program has been effective for one client: William Roberts (not his real name, of course) had been in Housing Forward’s congregate shelters and then in our Interim Housing Program but was unsuccessful at

moving forward due to his lack of management and understanding of his Type I Diabetes. He was going at that time to the hospital on average of twice a week for various reasons.

We accepted William into the Medical Respite Center to assist in getting his Diabetes under control and to wind down his overuse of the Emergency Departments. With the daily interactions with our staff (RN's, Medical Assistants, and case managers) within 3 months this client had made much progress in managing his insulin intake along with his food and beverage intake.

He is now in his own apartment through our Rapid Re-Housing Program (which is a short-term HUD supportive housing program). He is participating in a Training program in the mornings that deal with work & life skills and has a part-time job through our Workforce Development program in the afternoons preparing to be able to find a job outside of Housing Forward.

I would urge you to consider continuing this funding so that we can continue our important work and have many more successes like William's in this program.

Sincerely,

**HOLLY ROTMAN-ZAID**  
Director of Medical Respite  
& Families in Transition  
HOUSING FORWARD  
211 Oak Park Ave #134  
Oak Park, IL 60302

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



## **For economic and racial justice**

67 E. Madison St., Suite 2000, Chicago, IL 60603  
312.263.3830 | povertylaw.org

### **Testimony to the Cook County Board for the Budget Hearing- 8/24/2021**

My name is Stephanie Altman and I am the Director of Healthcare Justice and the Senior Director of Policy at the Shriver Center on Poverty Law. We represent low-income and racially and ethnically diverse populations in Cook County. Many of our clients are uninsured and underinsured and rely on Cook County Hospital and Health Services for preventative and specialty care. In particular, many of our clients are immigrants who are undocumented and therefore are not eligible for public health insurance coverage under Medicaid or the ACA Marketplace. Cook County health systems care for our clients regardless of their lack of health coverage, ability to pay or immigration status. This care is critical to the populations we serve who would have no other access to care if Cook County health systems were not a welcoming place for them. Our clients covered by Medicaid rely on the CountyCare health plan and the Medical Home Network for comprehensive health care including care management. CountyCare and MHN are critical to serving our communities by providing health services; improving health outcomes; addressing the social determinants of health; providing care coordination; and reducing racial and ethnic health inequities.

Shriver Center considers Cook County health systems as not just as a health provider but as a community partner, welcoming center, community employer and economic engine. CCBHS is also an active part of our Protect Our Care Illinois and Protecting Immigrant Families Illinois Coalitions. We look forward to continuing to partner with Cook County health systems on the continuing enrollment of immigrants 65 and older in the Illinois Immigrant Senior Health Program and, in May 2022, to the expansion of the program to immigrants ages 55-64. We strongly support the passage of an adequately funded budget for the health system, the hospital, and CountyCare to care for these newly eligible populations as well as to continue to provide healthcare access to all of our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Stephanie Altman