

Board Chair Raul Garza Opening Remarks As Prepared Cook County Health Preliminary FY2027 Budget

Today, the Cook County Health Board begins its consideration of the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget. This is one of the more difficult budgets our organization has faced in many years: not because Cook County Health failed to prepare, but because the federal funding cuts taking effect next year will have profound consequences for safety net healthcare providers across the country.

Over the past several years, this Board has worked closely with Dr. Mikaitis and the executive leadership team to strengthen the financial foundation of Cook County Health.

Together, we have pursued disciplined governance and thoughtful long-term planning. We have supported difficult operational decisions, invested in improving efficiency, strengthened financial oversight, reduced unnecessary spending, improved hiring practices, and focused on making Cook County Health a stronger, more resilient organization.

I'd like to thank Erik and the team for their hard work. Those efforts matter. They have positioned Cook County Health far better than we otherwise would have been. But there is a limit to what any health system can absorb when hundreds of thousands of residents are expected to lose health coverage while reimbursement declines and uncompensated care continues to rise dramatically.

This Board has remained steadfast in its responsibility to ensure Cook County Health fulfills its public mission. That mission has guided every decision we have made, and it will continue to guide every decision we make going forward.

Our responsibility is not simply to balance budgets. It is to preserve access to healthcare for the people who depend on this institution: the families who have nowhere else to turn, the patients managing chronic disease, the children needing specialty care, the seniors, the working families, and every resident who deserves quality healthcare regardless of their ability to pay or immigration status.

The proposed FY2027 budget reflects significant cost reductions and operational improvements already achieved throughout the organization. It also reflects the difficult reality that those efforts alone are no longer enough.

That is why the proposed 2027 budget is predicated on the health system receiving an additional \$40 million in County funding.

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This investment would preserve access to care, our dedicated workforce and sustain the mission this health system has carried out for generations.

We appreciate Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle's recognition of the extraordinary challenges these federal cuts create and her commitment to helping Cook County Health preserve access to care for the people who depend on us.

As a health system Board, we remain committed to strong governance, responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources, transparency, and accountability. We will carefully review this proposed budget over the coming weeks while remaining focused on our shared responsibility to ensure Cook County Health continues serving the people who need us most.

With that, I will turn the presentation over to Dr. Erik Mikaitis.