

Hello, I am Wesley Epplin and I serve as the Director of Health Equity at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group.

I am here today to speak about the need to increase the tax allocation for the Cook County Health & Hospital System in your budget. The health system, as you all know, has faced year after year of reductions in the county's tax allocation. Since the implementation of Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, the County has taken advantage of the increased Medicaid reimbursements to offset these cuts.

This made sense to a degree, but the system has had many increased costs in terms of equipment, technology, buildings, and staff demands for the complex modern health system. The system has no room for further cuts. Particularly now, as we face potential dramatic cuts nationally to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid, we must strengthen our local system.

As we've warned in past budget hearings, the cuts to the system came too fast and too steep, and that is especially obvious in this preliminary budget, showing a large shortfall for the system. **Health & Medicine is extremely concerned that [the preliminary budget](#) shows a shortfall of \$58.5 million for the Cook County Health & Hospital System.** (For reference: "*In the Health Fund, revenues are expected to increase by \$51 million and expenditures are projected to increase by \$110 million*").

The health system cannot absorb a cut in its revenues of nearly \$60 million, as this will lead to cuts in both services and staff, depleting the health system such that it can not fulfill its mission of providing high-quality healthcare to all people who come through its doors. This is an unacceptable cut and we expect our elected officials to fix this in the final budget. The health system provides lifesaving care to people from all walks of life, many of our most marginalized people, including health services to people in the county jail.

A well-funded health system is not an optional item in the budget. Our elected officials have a responsibility to find the money to fund the health system such that it can make sure that no one in the county goes without the human right to healthcare. Cuts in lifesaving health services are at stake. Further cuts will lead to a losing situation for the health system, as the patients who can choose to go somewhere else, those with insurance—go elsewhere—and the depleted system limps along with fewer services and overworked staff, barely able to provide for those who have been denied health insurance.

Health & Medicine urges you: Do not under-fund the Cook County Health and Hospital System. This is a matter of life and death for the patients the system serves and a vital safety net when people need it.

"Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhuman." said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We understand the pressures on the County's and the hospital system's budgets, but there is no way we can meet our collective responsibility to advancing a just civil society with an unjust health system. Again, I urge you, find the money to increase the county's tax allocation to the health system and erase this shortfall in the preliminary budget.

We must stand together and affirm: Healthcare is a human right—and it will not be denied to anyone in the County of Cook.