

**HMPRG testimony delivered to the Cook County Board of Commissioners at a FY2026 budget hearing, held on October 15, 2025**

Good afternoon. I'm Wesley Epplin. I'm the policy director at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group.

We are glad that the budget proposal includes a \$4M increase for the Cook County Department of Public Health. Still, the department will soon lose tens of millions in grant dollars and might lose more if threatened CDC cuts come to pass. We request a total increase of \$23 million for CCDPH for capacity to address health inequities, respond to public health problems, and prepare for public health emergencies.

We remain concerned about Cook County Health's finances and sustainability as federal cuts will harm the system. This board should shore up the system with local funding and develop progressive revenue dedicated to CCH and CCDPH.

We also call on you to protect all Cook County residents against Immigration and Customs Enforcement. ICE is viciously attacking our communities, assaulting, tear gassing, and kidnapping people. By their leadership's own admission, ICE is taking people based on how they look. ICE dehumanizes our neighbors with racism, xenophobia, and violence. This has got to stop.

What more can you do? Health & Medicine calls for this board to:

- Hold public hearings that include communities that have been targeted by ICE. These hearings should include Chief Judge Beach, State's Attorney Burke, Sheriff Dart, and CCH CEO Dr. Erik Makaitis.
  - Questions should include: 1) What has each official done to protect immigrants and others targeted by ICE? and 2) What more can each official do to protect Cook County residents? The board should ask these questions of itself, too.
- Cook County Health should be charged with:
  - Having weekly meetings of the Cook County Health Immigration Task Force, with actions resulting from these meetings
  - Convening CEOs of other hospitals and clinics to form a more united front and statement on protecting patients, families, and staff in health care settings.
- The board should develop and pass one or more ordinances that extend protections and imposes more limitations on ICE.
- This Board and CCH should actively support the Health Care Sanctity and Privacy Act, state legislation developed by ICIRR and the Legal Council for Health Justice.
- The board should charge and fund CCDPH to systematically monitor community trauma and stress in response to ICE activities, in collaboration with the Chicago Department of Public Health, so that the results can be looked at county-wide.
  - This is critical for both public health response and for accountability.
  - The departments should work with expert lawyers on developing documentation that could be useful for taking legal action against ICE for directly causing public health harm.

ICE's brutal assaults are an affront to human dignity and human rights. This is an emergency. You as our public officials should use your power and voice to help stop this. We should all ask ourselves, what more can we do to protect our communities? And then act accordingly.