



Cook County Board Written Testimony Submission Re: Proposed Resolution to Discuss the Status of Protective Measures in the Cook County Criminal Justice System During COVID-19 (Item 20-2389)

April 23, 2020

To the Cook County Board of Commissioners:

First, thank you for introducing today's resolution seeking information about the conditions inside Cook County Jail and the safety of the more than 4,000 people currently incarcerated there. As you all know, the situation is dire and urgent, with more than 400 incarcerated people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and six people who have died so far. The spread of this illness and these deaths were all preventable.

Attached to this you will find an open letter to County officials outlining steps that should be taken to reduce the number of people in jail and ensure adequate protections for anyone remaining inside. Specifically, the letter calls for the release of people incarcerated on unaffordable money bonds, people over the age of 50, and people with compromised immune systems in Cook County Jail to protect public health. It also calls for expanded movement for people on electronic monitoring and an improvement in conditions for people who remain incarcerated in the jail during the pandemic. **This letter was originally [published](#) on March 13, 2020 and has now been endorsed by over 100 community-based, legal, and faith-based groups and unions.**

This incredible outpouring of concern about and advocacy on behalf of incarcerated community members has also been demonstrated through the participation of hundreds of people in a prayer vigil, call-in campaigns, and a car rally outside Cook County Jail. In addition, family members of currently incarcerated people have organized multiple protests.

The demands outlined in the letter were made nearly a month before Cook County Jail was identified as [the number one coronavirus hot spot](#) in the United States by the *New York Times* earlier this month. While progress has been made in reducing the number of people currently in the jail, many more people can and must be released. As the Sheriff's Office has now admitted in court filings, it is not possible for the over 4,000 people in Cook County Jail to practice social distancing. As a result, rapid spread of infection will continue inside the jail, ensuring many people become seriously ill and some die. This also ensures that our shared health care resources will be burdened, impacting all Cook County residents. **This human suffering is unnecessary and unacceptable. We urge the board to find ways to release more people from Cook County Jail on the fastest timeline possible.**