Justice Reinvestment: Defunding the Cook County Jail and Investing in Our Communities

We are calling on the Cook County Board of Commissioners to divest money from the failed and racist systems of policing, criminalization, and incarceration that have not kept our communities safe, and to instead invest that money in public services that promote community health and safety. These investments must be made equitably across the County, but must especially benefit Black and Brown communities most impacted by violence and incarceration.

From 2013 to 2020, the number of people incarcerated in Cook County Jail per day decreased from more than 10,000 to fewer than 5,000. Despite that massive reduction in incarceration, Cook County Jail’s $336 million budget is 26% higher than it was in 2013. The Sheriff’s overall budget is now $608 million, a 36% increase from 2013.

In the wake of the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, thousands of Cook County residents have taken to the streets demanding the defunding of police. Correcting the historic disregard for Black lives requires Cook County to defund the Cook County Jail and redirect resources from the jail’s budget to public services not administered by law enforcement, such as:

◊ **Housing:** 50% of renter households in Cook County are paying unaffordable housing costs. Cook County should invest large-scale resources in expanding the availability of high-quality affordable housing.

◊ **Health care:** Cook County should expand health care offerings and accessibility equitably in Black and Brown communities.

◊ **Mental health:** Cook County should expand mental health care and ensure that first responders for people in mental health crisis are mental health professionals and not police.

◊ **Restorative Justice:** Cook County should invest more resources in restorative justice programs that repair harm done to survivors of violence, focus on prevention, and engage in community accountability rather than just punishing people.

◊ **Job creation:** Cook County should use its resources to create living wage, public sector jobs for people in communities of color in areas such as education, environmental sustainability, and infrastructure.

Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation, The People’s Lobby, Chicago Community Bond Fund, National Nurses United, and Shriver Center on Poverty Law are leading this work. For more information or to get involved, contact April Friendly at afriendly@thepeopleslobbyusa.org.
Fact sources: The Chicago Crusader, datausa.io, Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University. This document updated 7/16.