



Remarks of Langdon D. Neal, Chairman

Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

October 7, 2015

Good Morning, Chairman Austin, Vice Chairman Ervin, and members of the City Council. Thank you for having us here today to present the budget for the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago. With me today are key staff members: Secretary/Commissioner Marisel A. Hernandez; our Executive Director, Lance Gough; Assistant Executive Director, Kelly Bateman; Chief Legal Counsel, James M. Scanlon; Communications Director, James P. Allen; Voter Registration Manager Charles Holiday; Director of Human Resources and Fiscal Control, Peter Peso; and two key executive assistants, Kathy Ross and Yvonne Jones.

With this budget, I am pleased to emphasize three important messages:

- (1) The electoral franchise in Chicago is sound and continuing to lead the State of Illinois in the critical areas of accuracy, security and, above all, participation.
- (2) We are completing a successful year of election administration activities.
- (3) In 2016, we plan to do even more and even better, while spending even less.

The recent 2015 election year was eventful and rewarding, marked by ever more use of Early Voting and Vote By Mail, as well as Chicago leading the nation in voter turnout.

- We saw more than 142,000 ballots in Early Voting, compared to 73,000 in 2011.
- We saw more than 42,000 Vote By Mail, compared to 24,000 in 2011.
- Our 41% turnout was not only the higher than mayoral elections in New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Houston or Miami, but also best among any big-city mayoral elections anywhere in the Midwest.

- On both February 24 and April 7, we continued to report Election Night results very efficiently, with most all precincts reported before 10 p.m.;
- A key ingredient to that performance was this: The Chicago Election Board leads the nation in training and assigning more than 4,000 young people to administer each election: more than 2,000 high-school students as Judges of Election; another 1,700 Polling Place Administrators; and now more than 1,000 college students. Long ago, we partnered with Mikva Challenge and the Chicago Public Schools to recruit, train and place high school judges. Last year, we also teamed up with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law to do the same on our many college and university campuses. The Chicago Lawyers' Committee recently completed a study that determined that Chicago now also leads the United States in College Student Judges.

We also continued to work in the off-season on several important projects. Since the municipal elections, these activities have included:

- Making computer-system adaptations to ensure the smooth utilization of the new statewide Online Voter Registration System.
 - I am pleased to report that Chicago voters lead the way in use of this system, accounting for more than 31,000 or approximately 45% of the 68,000 voters who have used this system in Illinois.
- Re-programming the Electronic Poll Book system so that it will be able to handle Election-Day Registration in each of our 2,069 precincts at the March 15, 2016 Primary Election and the November 8, 2016 General Election.
- Introducing a new mobile platform at m.chicagoelections.com to make it even easier for voters to use cell phones and tablets to access the Online Voter Registration System or, on Election Day, find their polling place information so that they may use Same-Day Registration.

- Working to develop a voter canvass notice that will double as an election information mailing and an invitation to everyone to Vote By Mail ahead of the 2016 Primary Election. By doing this, we hope to reduce mailing and printing costs, while also helping more voters participate in the elections from the comfort of their homes.
- Preparing to offer online registration for our Judges of Election and other poll workers.

It is important to note that so much of this progress is rooted in an ambitious outreach effort implemented four years ago. In 2011, we organized and convened a notably large voter focus group called “Voter Engagement 2012.” Civic, business, community and labor leaders from across the city and the suburbs joined us at the UIC Forum for an all-day session. They were challenged brainstorm on how we could engage more voters in 2012 – and beyond in a different manner.

To date, we are not aware of any other jurisdiction in the United States that allows the voters to perform a critical analysis of our entire system so that they could tell us what to change.

The 140 audience members in that focus group stated that they wanted:

- Online Voter Registration
- Election Day Voter Registration, also known as “Same Day Registration”
- More use of the Internet to help Military/Overseas Voters
- Civics as a graduation requirement for High School

At the time, these were not part of the Election Code or state law. We lobbied this body, the Cook County Board of Commissioners and our State Legislators in order to bring the groups recommendations to fruition.

Today I am pleased to report that all of these goals have or will become law.

- The statewide Online Voter Registration System has already processed 68,000 new registrations and updates to existing registrations – and Chicago voters have led the

way in utilizing this fantastic system, accounting for more than 31,000 or 45% of the registrations logged so far.

- Election Day Registration will be offered at each of our 2,069 precincts at the March 2016 Primary Election.
- The Election Board is entering the fifth year of a program funded by the Department of Defense and the Federal Voting Assistance Program to provide mail-in absentee ballots to our Military and Overseas voters via the Internet.
- Lastly, this year, the Governor signed into law a bill that would mandate one semester of Civics instruction as a requirement to earn a high school diploma.

We could not have seen all of these positive changes without listening to our voters and then reporting out what they wanted.

We anticipate the need to concentrate our resources in the following areas:

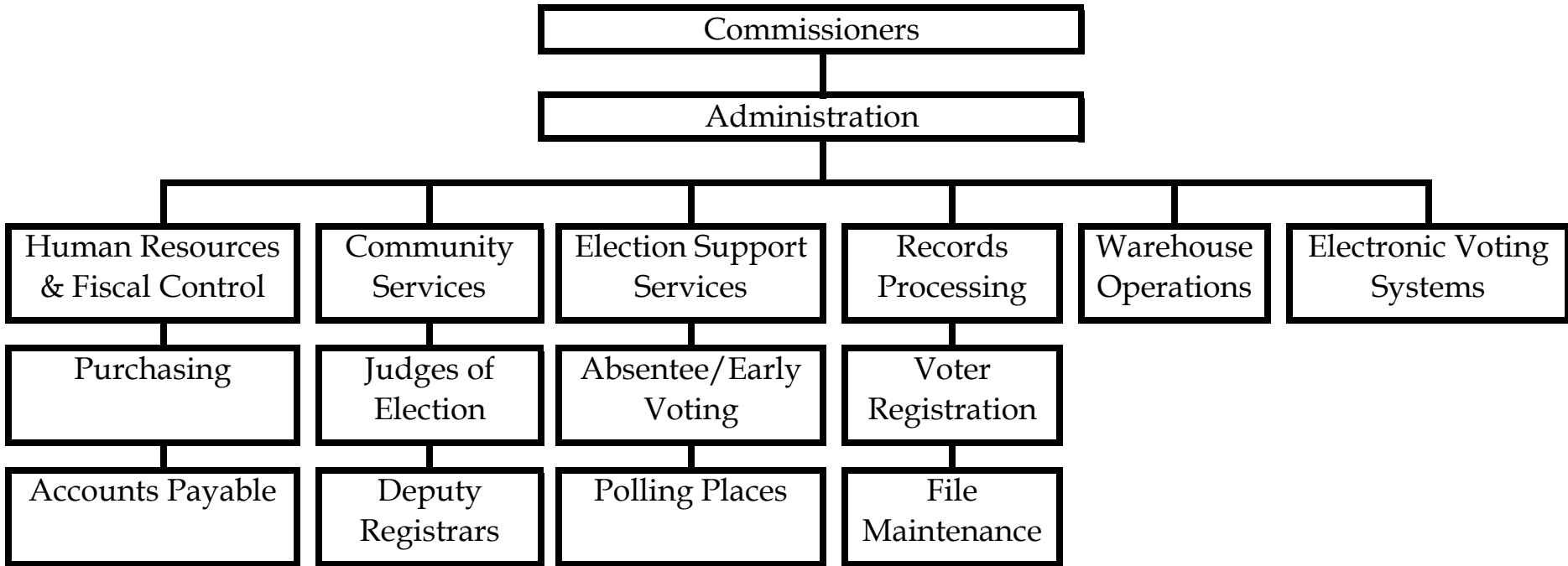
- Offering Election Day (Same-Day) Registration will require far more technology and training in every precinct. We will need two poll books in each precinct. We will need to increase training so that there is at least one person who is tested as an expert in Voter Registration in every precinct.
- The schedule for Early Voting will grow significantly. Early Voting will be offered for 40 days, starting nearly six weeks before Election Day and continuing through the Monday before Election Day.
- We anticipate increasing use of Vote By Mail significantly. With more Early Voting and more Vote By Mail, we hope to decrease the use of in-precinct voting. We also hope to be able to return to the Council with the capacity to look at cutting costs by reducing precincts or implementing area vote centers.
- The Board no longer will receive federal funding through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to offset the costs of running the larger and more expensive newer balloting systems.

We are holding the line on expenses by expanding automation and reducing the use of part-time staff during our peak periods. For example, we normally handle more than 300,000 new registrations and updated registrations during a Presidential Election year. It is our goal to promote the Online Voter Registration System so that we may process upward of 200,000 of these registrations in 2016 without handling paper forms and without manual data entry.

Additionally, we want the City Council to be aware that the Board of Election Commissioners must continue to explore the purchase of new balloting systems. Like many jurisdictions around the country, our voting equipment is now more than 10 years old. This is an issue, as reported recently by the Brennan Center on Justice, that will need to be addressed in coming years. Our goal is to pursue the possibility of transitioning toward a system built entirely of ballot scanners, without touch screens. We believe this will reduce our operational costs and provide us with much more flexibility in the years to come.

I look forward to answering your questions.

**Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago
Organization Chart**



The Commissioners are appointed by the Judges of the Circuit Court of Cook County, pursuant to the Election Code, to create an independent, quasi-judicial authority. The Commissioners oversee election administration for all elections conducted in the City of Chicago.