



Remarks of Marisel A. Hernandez, Chairwoman  
Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago  
October 18, 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen of the City Council, my name is Marisel Hernandez and I am the Chairwoman of the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago. I am proud to report to you today that the electoral franchise in Chicago is sound and breaking new ground in technology and services for our voters. With me today are: Executive Director Lance Gough; Assistant Executive Director Kelly Bateman; Legal Counsel James M. Scanlon; Communications Director Jim Allen; Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Peter Peso; and two people the City Council staff know very well, Executive Assistants Kathy Ross and Yvonne Jones.

I thank you for having us here today to answer questions about the budget for the coming year.

Currently, the Chicago Election Board is managing the latest in a series of the most historic elections in our 130-year history. The Board is seeing strong voter interest and enthusiasm, just as we did in 2008 and 2012.

There have been a number of remarkable trends:

- The Board has seen a last-minute crush of voter registrations, with approximately 100,000 new registrations and name-and-address changes in these last two months, with still many more to come through both the online registration system, as well as in person throughout Early Voting and, then, on Election Day.
- For the group of voters who wait until the last possible day, Election Day, the Board is gearing up for as many as 100,000 registrations. We led the State of Illinois in the March Primary with more than 35,000 Election Day registrations,

address changes and name changes in the Precinct Polling Places. We anticipate far more in the week leading up to November 8 as well as Election Day itself.

- To prepare for this activity, we are taking many steps aimed at preventing lines on Election Day. These steps include:
  - (1) promoting Early Voting and Vote By Mail;
  - (2) promoting online registration with an Illinois driver's license or Illinois state ID card;
  - (3) opening the new Loop Super Site at 15 W. Washington to boost citywide capacity for Early Voting and Registration;
  - (4) training and placing an Election Coordinator in each of our 2,069 precincts to help facilitate Election Day Registrations;
  - (5) placing a third Electronic Poll Book in the two dozen precincts where we saw the most Election Day Registration in March; and,
  - (6) communicating with our college and university administrators to help us to urge their students to register during Early Voting through Nov. 7, and not wait until Election Day.
  
- As you know, at the 2014 Primary, the Chicago Election Board became the first election authority in Illinois to offer Electronic Poll Books in every precinct. Since then, we have worked with our vendor to upgrade the hardware and the software for this system to be able to accommodate faster morning updates, Election Day Registration and better redirection for voters who arrive in the wrong polling place. Now, the person who shows up at the wrong place can provide their cell phone and receive a text with the correct precinct and polling place site name and address.
  
- Our voter rolls have approximately 1.56 million active registrations. At the same time we are processing new voters and record changes, we also are striving to keep the rolls clean. We are hopeful that the Illinois State Board of Elections will be able to work with the Illinois Department of Public Health to gain access to a

nationwide database of death and birth records. That, in turn, will help all Illinois jurisdictions discover, verify, document and cancel any local registration if we determine that the person died in another state, such as Arizona or Florida.

- In terms of youth engagement, the Chicago Election Board will have more than 2,300 high school and college students staffing our polling places. The Board far and away leads the nation in this regard, and the success of this effort stands as one of our greatest sources of pride.
- Lastly, we're bracing for a very strong voter turnout during Early Voting and on Election Day.

In advance of the upcoming election, the Board will be mailing notices to approximately 1.2 million voter households with information on their Election Day polling place, Early Voting sites and Vote By Mail. We also will be emphasizing our web site at [www.chicagoelections.com](http://www.chicagoelections.com), and its mobile version. Both the mailing and the web site are geared to giving voters the answer to their single most important and frequently-asked question: Where Do I Vote?

Looking to next year, the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago has a recommended budget from the City of \$10,724,299.

Because our elections run in a four-year cycle, the best comparison to FY2017 is FY2013. In FY2013, our expenditures totaled more than \$10 million, as we conducted a Special Primary and Special Election in the Second Congressional District. Similarly, in FY2017, we will be conducting a Special Election for the Office of Alderman in the 4th Ward in February. There will be virtually no net increase in our overall expenditures.

In preparing this budget, the Board has paid close attention to the City's need to conserve its financial resources. At the same time, the Board must follow state and federal mandates by the legislative, judicial and executive branches to administer transparent, impartial and accurate election systems that fulfill the needs of the citizens of the City of Chicago.

To this end, we are holding the line on costs through the use of technology, especially with the advent of online voter registration, which helps us manage records more efficiently and reduce manual data entry and related overtime expenses. Similarly, we have replaced our Voter Registration and Election Management System. The newer system simplifies tasks related to polling places and election judge assignment. Additionally, we have continued to introduce new online systems for voters to use to apply to become election judges and to apply for Vote By Mail ballots, as required by state law.

During 2017, we will be performing a full canvass of the city's voter rolls, reviewing all of our polling places citywide, evaluating options for new balloting equipment, and laying the groundwork for the 2018 Primary with petition circulation, petition filing and petition objections.

During 2017, the Board will be examining the possibilities for implementing a more cost-effective, transparent and reliable system of ballot scanners. If we move forward with a change, this would require significant testing, state certification and program changes, including training for Election Judges and community outreach with voters. We believe an upgrade of our existing equipment is necessary. A shift to newer equipment also would allow for more flexibility in election administration and reductions in costs for ballot printing.

Additionally, we want to use our Loop Super Site as a springboard to begin to examine the option of Universal Vote Centers with lawmakers in Springfield. If we can operate Universal Vote Centers across the city with scanners that allow for ballot-on-demand printing, we may be able to manage elections and more easily ensure:

- Every site is fully accessible to all voters of all physical abilities.
- Similar to Early Voting, every voter is in the “right” place to cast a ballot, even if they're not in their specific precinct.
- Every polling place has more staff members who can receive specialized training to be certified to be able to address every voters' issue.

In closing, I want to emphasize something very important. We at the Chicago Election Board are very fortunate for the assistance we receive not only through the City Council, but also the leaders of so many public agencies: our Chicago Public Schools, our Police Department, the Department of Fleet & Facility Management, the Chicago Public Library, the Chicago Park District, City Colleges and a variety of other agencies. These agencies are critical to our ability to offer successful Early Voting and Election Day Voting programs.

Perhaps the best example of that spirit of cooperation came recently with the Department of Fleet & Facility Management, which did an excellent job of helping us rapidly convert the shell of a former Walgreen's drug store into a new Loop Super Site for Early Voting and Registration. That Super Site will help us handle three times as many voters every day as our old basement site, which is now being used to help process what we hope will be a modern record for Vote By Mail ballots. These developments are the key reasons that we remain cautiously optimistic that we can avoid long lines in most precincts on Election Day. And these developments are the key reasons that officials from the United States Election Assistance Commission will be coming to Chicago in the weeks ahead.

With that, I look forward to answering your questions.