

**STATEMENT OF CORPORATION COUNSEL MARK FLESSNER
IN SUPPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LAW'S PROPOSED 2021
BUDGET**

NOVEMBER 10, 2020

Good morning Chairman Dowell, members of the Budget Committee and members of the City Council. On behalf of the Chicago Department of Law (DOL), thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of DOL's proposed 2021 budget.

These past several months have been one of the most dynamic and challenging periods of my legal career. The work being done in the Law Department is critical to our City's well-being and evolution from a time of great stress to one of recovery and normalcy.

As the City strives under Mayor Lightfoot to be a more equitable place for all residents and to navigate through the Covid-19 pandemic, we are often on the cutting edge of legal efforts to write into law the way we want our City to work. This manifests itself in many areas of our department, including Affirmative Litigation, Police Reform & Federal Civil Rights work, Constitutional & Commercial Law, Appeals and more. We have a lot of work to do, and we are doing it very well.

Especially during this time of pandemic, I am proud of the way our team has adapted and performed, particularly as courtroom procedures instantly changed in March and

continue to evolve. I would have never imagined the number of hearings, arguments and other legal activities being conducted primarily over the internet.

I have also met with every alderman and their staffs at least once to discuss your concerns, including the legal and budgetary challenges that the City faces. As the City's law firm, we provide the City and its employees with legal representation on a wide range of issues, and we are cognizant of the need to control and reduce costs where we can.

Due to the time limits on my remarks, I cannot go into detail about all the good work being done in the Law Department but let me name a few highlights. To underscore, the Law Department is both revenue generating and integral to defending the City's interests.

One: Protecting Residents, Communities and Chicago's Values.

We have continued our vigorous efforts to resist unlawful actions by private and governmental entities, including the Trump Administration. Since forming in mid-2018, our Affirmative Litigation Division has filed or joined eight lawsuits as well as about 35 amicus briefs and comments challenging Trump Administration actions. The Division also pursued dozens of civil-enforcement matters that have resulted in more than \$14 million in settlements in the City's favor.

Two: Reforming the Police Department. We continue to work closely with the Mayor's Office and the Chicago Police Department (CPD) on complying with the Consent Decree.

While the Police Department is adopting and implementing further improvements, the Law Department actively works to keep the independent monitor and the court informed of the progress. In the roughly 22 months since the Consent Decree was approved, we have worked with various stakeholders to implement required reform to ensure that CPD makes meaningful and lasting changes.

Three: Pursuing Revenue and Protecting City Finances. We are vigilant in ensuring that the City of Chicago collects the revenues we are owed. In 2019, we collected more than \$186 million in fines and other debt from one of our divisions. This is a credit to our attorneys and staff who possess specialized expertise in this important function. We also facilitate \$100s of millions in financing.

Four: Defending the City against baseless lawsuits. This might not come as a surprise to you, but we are sued on a nearly daily basis and we use our experience and talent to make sure that the City's interests are properly and necessarily represented, from defending trip-and-fall cases to major class actions. The work we do in our Constitutional & Commercial group is often at the forefront of daily news, as is that done by our Federal Civil Rights Litigation and Appeals groups.

Again, there are many more activities that we undertake every day – too many to enumerate – and I will be happy to answer your questions about these shortly.

To wrap up, there is no doubt that the year ahead will be challenging for the City and for the Law Department. While we eagerly anticipate an effective coronavirus vaccine and the peace of mind it may bring to residents, we will continue our efforts to support the Mayor's agenda for a more equitable and fiscally responsible Chicago. The financial and legal challenges will be significant, and I can state with full confidence on behalf of my team that we are up to the task.

It is a great honor leading the Department of Law and our remarkable roster of dedicated and talented attorneys and staff, who embody what it means to undertake meaningful public service. I look forward to working with all of you on behalf of the residents of the City of Chicago in 2021.

Once again, thank you Chairman Dowell. I look forward to answering your questions.

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