

## **Remarks of Marisel A. Hernandez, Chair**

### **Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago**

**September 28, 2021**

To the members of the Chicago City Council, thank you for your continued service and dedication to the people of our city. Joining you today are Executive Director Charles Holiday, Jr.; Board Commissioner William Kresse; Assistant Executive Director Sandra Aspera; Legal Counsel Adam Lasker; Finance Director Kimberly Carrillo-Walker; Public Information Director Max Bever; Executive Assistant Kathy Ross; and Executive Assistant Cassandra Molina.

Together, we are pleased to present our 2022 budget for the Board of Election Commissioners, which represents the spending plan for the upcoming June 28<sup>th</sup> Primary and November 8<sup>th</sup> General Elections, as well as initial preparations for the February 2023 Municipal Election and the April 2023 Run-Off Election.

Robust participation in elections is essential for our democracy. It allows voters to have a say in their future, select the elected officials who will lead and make decisions for their communities, and helps create lasting change in our city, county, state, and country.

As you may know, the Chicago Board of Elections oversees one of the largest election operations in the United States. Our mission to safeguard the integrity and cybersecurity of our elections, as well as protect the safety of our poll workers, is more important than ever.

2020 saw one of the most challenging election cycles we have ever experienced in our 136-year history, but it also saw many new triumphs. Let me provide a quick snapshot of the most recent Nov. 2020 General Election:

- Chicago saw 1.16 million ballots cast, the highest for a Presidential Election in 36 years.
- Over 13,300 voters in Chicago stepped up to serve as election judges and coordinators, the highest number of hired poll workers in recent history.
- We also saw a record-breaking number of voters largely powered by the success of expanding Early Voting and Vote By Mail options and availability for voters. For the first time last year, more than 70% of the ballots cast in Chicago were through a combination of Early Voting and Vote By Mail.
- The Board quadrupled all previous records for Vote By Mail with more than 500,000 applications, of which more than 450,000 of those ballots - more than 90% - were returned by mail and at new Secured Drop Boxes inside Early Voting locations. This was also the first election with the Secured Drop Box option for Vote By Mail voters.

In short, giving voters more options and flexibility to cast their ballots during an ongoing pandemic improved participation dramatically and proved to be both inclusive and cost-effective. Fully utilizing Early Voting and Universal Voting locations for these purposes (including at the United Center for the very first time) helped us place less stress on the 2,069 precinct polling places on Election Day - where the other 30% of voting took place - and avoid long lines and allow for social distancing during 2020.

I want to thank the many public agencies and countless City workers, law enforcement officials, and volunteers for their continued assistance in administering free and fair elections in Chicago.

I also want to highlight our ongoing partnerships with Mikva Challenge and local schools in Chicago. In 2020, we had more than 2,200 high school and college students serve as poll workers. This was the highest number in the nation, and we look forward to continuing to involve as many young people as we can in our democracy in 2022 and beyond.

Looking to next year, **the Board of Election Commissioners has recommended a budget of \$25,578,604.**

The Board is confident this spending plan prepares us to meet all challenges head-on in the future. We have done an extensive review of our services and equipment to identify opportunities for savings and efficiencies.

We have also been preparing and implementing changes that were approved by the General Assembly and Governor this year. As part of these updates, Chicago voters will soon be able to make the choice to join a permanent roster for Vote By Mail so that they will automatically receive mail-in ballots ahead of each election.

The next set of elections will also be the first with new legislative, ward, and precinct maps created from the new Census data - which means changing boundaries for voters and candidates alike. We will begin notifying voters of their new election information as soon as the finalized maps are certified.

This spending plan reflects several items, including:

- A full city-wide canvass and mailing to update the voter rolls, including a redesign that allows voters to join the permanent Vote By Mail roster, pre-select their political party for primaries, and update their registration signatures as needed;
- Recruiting and training qualified judges and poll workers;
- Candidate filings, Electoral Board meetings and activity, and objection hearings;
- Maintaining and servicing all voting equipment, computers, and security systems;
- Mailings to inform voters of their new ward and precinct boundaries;
- Ensuring and increasing accessibility at precinct polling locations;
- Translations and increased language-accessibility to meet Cook County and federal standards;
- Increasing postage rates for mailings and ballots; and
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and additional public safety preparations.

As a final point of order, we want to thank our former Commissioner Jonathan T. Swain for his more than five years of service to the voters of Chicago. Commissioner Swain is a true person of integrity and has been an ever-present advocate in protecting the most important function of our democracy – the right to

vote. During his tenure, he has helped the Board administer nine elections and has worked tirelessly with staff to improve Chicagoans' access to the ballot box. We thank him and wish him the best in the next chapter of his distinguished career.

To all the members of the Chicago City Council: we appreciate your ongoing support of our mission to administer transparent, impartial, and accurate elections for the voters of Chicago.

We are happy to answer your questions.