

Budget Statement of Marisel A. Hernandez, Chair

Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

October 13, 2022

We are pleased to present our 2023 Budget for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, which represents the spending plan for the upcoming February 28, 2023 Municipal Election and the April 4, 2023 Run-Off Election.

Supporting free and fair elections is more important than ever. To the members of the Chicago City Council, thank you for your continued dedication to defending democracy during a challenging time for election authorities. We also thank the countless City workers, public agencies and partners, law enforcement officials, and volunteers for their continued assistance in administering Chicago's elections.

This proposed 2023 budget invests in the future of voting in Chicago as we continue to modernize our election system. This includes developing a new website, updating our e-pollbook equipment, improving our IT and cybersecurity systems, and increasing access to Early Voting and Voting By Mail in our city.

2022 has come with many challenges, but also many opportunities and successes. Let me give you a quick snapshot of the most recent June 28, 2022 Primary Election:

- 341,901 ballots cast for a 22.81% voter turnout in the City of Chicago
- 24.32% of people chose to Early Vote, with 83,138 ballots cast
- 26.57% of people chose to Vote By Mail, with 90,853 ballots cast
- 49.11% of people chose to vote on Election Day, with 167,910 ballots cast

Unfortunately, that is the second lowest recorded voter turnout for an election in Chicago. And while nearly 7,700 voters stepped up to serve as poll workers for Election Day, it was still a challenge to fully staff polling places throughout our city. Finally, continued supply chain issues, increased vendor prices, staffing shortages, and mail delays is making outreach to voters slower and more expensive.

Despite these obstacles, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners is confronting these issues head-on before the upcoming 2022-2024 elections through increased investment in pre-election and Election Day voting, amplified communications and outreach, and through the recent redistricting and precinct consolidation process.

In April 2022, the Board mailed a voter canvass to all 1.5 million-plus registered Chicago voters which informed voters of their option to join the Permanent Vote By Mail Roster. This netted over 100,000 applicants for the Permanent Roster who will now automatically receive their ballots at home ahead of every election, including the upcoming November 8, 2022 General Election.

The Board has increased its voter communications footprint with active social media accounts, newsletters, videos, and podcasts. The Board hired full-time staff Community Service Representatives for the Spanish and Hindi language communities, and increased media advertising and outreach in minority language communities.

The Board has completed the redistricting of all 50 Wards and all precincts in Chicago to reflect the new city ward map passed by City Council in May 2022. Throughout this process, we have worked closely with Chicago City Council members for their feedback and guidance on combining precincts within their wards. The Board has also completed mapping the 22 Chicago Police Districts for voters to prepare for the new District Council

elected office. These new boundaries are now in effect for the November 8, 2022 General Election and upcoming 2023 Municipal Elections.

The Board studied and consolidated precincts for a current total of 1,290 precincts in Chicago, reducing 779 from the previous 2,069 precincts. For comparison, during the last redistricting process in 2012, the Board reduced precincts from 2,570 to 2,069, for a total reduction of 501 precincts. For the November 2022 election, the average number of precincts per ward will be 26, and the average number of voters per precinct will be 1,165.

The most immediate impact is the reduction in the number of election judges needed across the city for a more cost-effective and manageable Election Day in Chicago. We now need only 6,450 Election Judges for each election moving forward, instead of the previous 10,345 needed. We expect to have every precinct polling place fully staffed to assist our voters.

It's also important to note that this did not dramatically decrease the number of precinct polling places for the upcoming November 8th General Election, as 945 physical polling places will now be serving 1,290 precincts. Precinct consolidation also allows the Board to continue to eliminate inaccessible polling places and focus on identifying accessible public locations that are ADA compliant for all voters in Chicago.

We also want to thank Mikva Challenge and local Chicago schools for our ongoing partnerships to provide student election judges - in the June 28th Primary, we had more than 450 high school and college students serve as poll workers.

Looking to next year, the Board of Election Commissioners has recommended a budget of **\$56,602,820**.

This spending plan reflects several items, including:

- Preparation for 2023 candidate filings, Electoral Board meetings and activity, and objection hearings, as we expect this to be a very fulsome Electoral Board season with likely over 1,000 candidates filing to be on the ballot for the February 28, 2023 Municipal Election, including the new office for Chicago Police Department District Councils;
- Overhauling the chicagoelections.gov website for a more user-friendly and accessible experience;
- Purchasing new e-poll books that can sync with modern election management systems, which are expected to last 20 years before replacement;
- Restoration and preservation of historical election poll books and records, some over 130 years old;
- Recruiting and training qualified judges and poll workers;
- Maintaining and servicing all voting equipment, computers, and security systems;
- Increased advertising to reach voters online and in community publications;
- Additional mailings to inform voters of their new ward and precinct boundaries;
- Increasing accessibility and security at precinct polling locations;
- Translations and increased language-accessibility;
- Increasing postage rates for mailings and ballots; and
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and additional public safety preparations.

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.