**QUESTIONS FOR COMMISSIONERS TO ASK DURING THE**

**DEPARTMENT MEETINGS FOR THE 2020 BUDGET, 19-5916**

**Questions for Human Resources and/or Bureau of Technology**

1. Is the new attendance system (including finger recognition) working properly?
2. Is the County able to get information county-wide and by department about the number of days and number of employees for each category of absences (FMLA, sick days, workers’ comp, short-term disability, long-term disability)? Several years ago, such information was included in the Performance Management report, but it no longer is. Why not? How does the County compare to other government entities?
3. If this information is available, how are departments and the County as a whole using the information to determine whether and how the number of absences should and can be reduced?
4. Should there be a County-wide policy on FMLA, at least for non-union employees? If not, why not?

**Questions for Justice Advisory Council**

1. In the JAC’s "Operational Highlights” section of the budget, it was stated that the JAC distributed $2.5 million in grants this past year to community-based programs aimed at reducing recidivism. What criteria is used when deciding who shall receive these grants? Is there data to determine whether or not these programs actually do reduce recidivism?
2. Under “Program Description” of the budget, it is stated that the JAC receives grants from the federal and state governments as well as from private organizations. Could you give some examples of which governmental agencies you work with and which private groups as well?
3. Under the same section you stated that JAC advises those connected with the legislative agenda dealing with public safety. Could you give some examples of actual pieces of legislation upon which the JAC has advised?

**Background and Questions for the Assessor and Board of Review**

In 2017, the *Chicago Tribune* published a series of articles which raised serious questions about the accuracy of property assessments in Cook County. The articles noted the role of the ever-increasing number of appeals actually has led to more inequities among assessed properties, particularly between the more affluent areas (where residents are more likely to file appeals) and less affluent areas of the County.

The main mandate of the Assessor and Board of Review is to provide accurate assessments. There need to be performance metrics to capture whether and how well that mandate is being met.

However, the performance metrics being used in the 2020 Executive Budget and in the Performance Management process look to the number of appeals. That is one factor to be considered with regard to workload, but not performance. The ever-increasing number of appeals likely reflects the failure to accurately assess the property in the first place.

If the initial assessments become more accurate, and changes are made by the Assessor’s office in response to successful appeals, then the number of appeals should go down in the future, reducing the workloads of both the Assessor and the Board of Review. (In contrast, the 2020 Executive Budget for the Board of Review adds 16 FTEs and $752,616 over last year’s to deal with an expected further increase in appeals.)

The League submits that the **number and percentage of appeals that are granted should be documented as one way to determine the accuracy of assessments**. That information should begin to be collected, starting with the 2018 tax year that was just completed in 2019, or earlier if information is available. **As the accuracy of the initial assessments improves, the number of appeals granted should start to go down. The number of appeals will likely also go down as people find that their initial assessments are found to be accurate. The League recognizes that this may take several years as changes to past inaccurate assessments are made.**

In looking at the budgets of these two offices, we also have some questions in addition to recommending you collect information on the number of successful appeals:

**Questions for the Board of Review**

1. How many of the completed complaints in 2019 (and 2018 and 2017 if available) resulted in changes in assessed value?
2. What were the chief reasons for the changes?
3. Last year the number of people who were dedicated to dealing with complaints at the Property Tax Appeal Board was increased. What were the results as compared to past years’? For 2020, the number of FTEs for Program “35445- Property Tax Appeal Board” is proposed to be decreased by 2. What will be the effect?
4. For 2020, the number of FTEs in “10155-Administration” are to be increased from 12.1 to 23.1, or 11 new FTEs. Only 7 FTEs are being added to “35010-Assessment Appeal Review.” See page G-5 of Volume 2. Why so many for Administration when the text points to a need for more people to deal with appeals?

**Questions for the Assessor**

1. During 2019 (and for 2017 and 2018 if that is available), in addition to the total number of residential and total number of commercial assessments,
   1. what are the total number of successful appeals of residential and of commercial at the Assessor level?
   2. what are the total number of successful appeals of residential and of commercial at the Board of Review level?
2. Was an analysis done as to why the appeal was granted and whether other properties might also be affected? If so, were steps taken to modify the assessment process so future assessments of this and other properties would be accurate? If not, why not?
3. In the Program Description on p. F-5 of Volume 2, it is clear that the Assessor has reorganized the office. Under “10155 – Administration,” the number of FTEs went up from 10 to 55. Can you explain what all those people are doing and where they were listed under the 2019 Programs. Have their duties changed?
4. How close is the office to being found to be in substantial compliance under the *Shakman* case?

**Questions for Cook County Health**

1. Do CCH personnel participate at all during the union negotiations (salary and other items, like work rules)? If not, would you comment on any difficulties you have in cutting labor costs as a result of not participating in those negotiations?
2. Do you have any suggestions as to how the County (and Commissioners) can encourage other hospitals within Cook County to start providing more charity care?
3. Is the County requiring CCH to bear the costs for providing services that were previously provided by other areas under the County? Specifically, the mental health services provided to the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center? Or is the County covering those costs?
4. Are the costs of the Direct Access Program (over $230 million) contributing to the costs of charity care provided, or do you think this managed care program for those making less than or equal to 200% of the poverty level ultimately saves money that CCH would otherwise spend on emergency charity care? Do you think CCH can continue to bear the costs of this program?
5. What strategies is CCH using to bring down the overtime to the goal of 5%?

**Questions for the State’s Attorney**

1. Now that you have a new data analyst, what outcome data do you have for your various diversion programs? How do you use this data to determine how effective those programs are and whether changes should be made?
2. Do you also have outcome data for your Deferred Prosecution Program?

**Questions for the Public Defender**

1. Has your new mental health unit been successful? How do you know—by what measures are you determining effectiveness?

**Questions for the Clerk of the Circuit Court**

1. How close is the office to being found to be in substantial compliance under the *Shakman* case?

**Questions for the Recorder of Deeds**

1. How close is the office to being found to be in substantial compliance under the *Shakman* case?

**Questions for the Sheriff**

1. Which of your detainee programs are most effective and why?
2. By what measures do you determine if a program is effective or not?
3. Does it make sense for the Sheriff to continue to oversee some of those released on Electronic Monitoring, as opposed to having all under a single program under the Chief Judge?

**For the Chief Judge**

1. Does it make sense for the Sheriff to continue to oversee some of those released on Electronic Monitoring, as opposed to having all under a single program under the Chief Judge?