

## LWVCC Criminal Justice Interest Group May 2019-May 2020

The LWVCC's Criminal Justice Interest Group started the year on a very positive note. Right after the last Annual Meeting we partnered up with the Health and Hospitals Committee and went on a very complete tour of the health services at the Cook County Jail. Known as Cermak Hospital, the CC Jail has expanded its health services for the detainees in many ways. They have a complete screening system when detainees enter the jail and assign them housing according to their health needs. They are all signed up for Medicaid or County Care when they leave. We also heard from 2 public officials about our recent "Update" report on Pretrial Systems. Both Chief Justice Anne Burke and CC Board President Toni Preckwinkle reached out and complimented our work. We met twice with the Chief Justice. In June, we attended a hearing of the Illinois Supreme Court's Commission on Pretrial Justice, a group that is writing a report on pretrial reforms. This hearing was dedicated to bail issues. (This Commission's report was due to be released in Dec. of 2019. The report was just released as I am writing this.)

In the summer and early fall of 2019 It became obvious to our group that we needed good data from all of the stakeholders in the Criminal Justice system in order to advocate for our recommendations stated in our report. For this issue, we sought the help of 4 people. Joe Ryan became our contact in the Sheriff's office. He gave us some of the Sheriff's programs within the jail, but most had too few enrolled to assess success. We contacted State's Attorney Kim Foxx's new data officers about the success of her diversion programs, but received an email that no data was available. We contacted Pam Rodriguez of TASC, Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities. She said that one of the biggest problems of trying to access accurate data was that different offices defined success in different ways. We finally contacted David Olson of Loyola University who did a great job of accessing data for the jail in 2014, but he is no longer doing that. Data frustration has not subsided.

Later in the fall, as it does every fall, the Cook County Board of Commissioners held its Budget Hearings through its Finance Committee. Through the LWVCC's Budget and Structure Committee we were invited to submit questions to each of the Criminal Justice Dept. heads. Although many did not answer these directly during the hearings, most of our questions were answered shortly afterward in a series of emails. All 5 ( the Sheriff, the Chief Judge, the head of JAC- Justice Advisory Council under the President, the State's Attorney, and the Public Defender) gave our questions serious consideration. What surprised us most came from the Sheriff's testimony. He said that he wanted all of the detainees who were on Electronic Monitoring to be under the jurisdiction of the Chief Judge. The Sheriff's staff has not still not reduced in size in relation to the reduced size of the jail population. He said he was willing to share staff with the Chief Judge for this purpose. We were then anxious to ask the Chief Judge how this would work? After 5 months of trying to get an appointment with Chief Judge Evans, we are still waiting. In those interim months, the Chief Judge has been under fire for faulty data concerning his bond court reforms. We are still anxious to discuss both issues with him.

Early in 2020 we were invited to help with 2 candidate Forums in preparation for the Illinois Primary in March. We submitted questions for both the States Attorney's Forum held at ABC TV and a Chicago Appleseed Forum for the candidates for Clerk of the Court. Many of our questions were asked.

As the Covi-19 pandemic hit, we had to cancel our in person meetings and have not yet met virtually. The issues that this pandemic have raised correspond to our desire to see pretrial de-

tainees charged with low level offenses not be incarcerated as they wait for adjudication of their cases. The CC Jail at the writing is down to 4300 detainees, the lowest level ( more than half) in over a decade. Judges now have the difficult decision of deciding who is a flight risk or danger to someone or the community and who must stay incarcerated as the infection rate rises.

Criminal Justice Reform has never been more important. The elimination of bail bill, the pre-trial fairness act, and other pieces of legislation are on hold as the General Assembly cannot meet. When things return to normal, the Criminal Justice Interest Group will have much to do. In the meantime we will be reading the new report mentioned in paragraph one.

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