

Budget Statement of Marisel A. Hernandez, Chair

Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

October 27, 2023

We are pleased to present our 2024 Budget for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, which represents the spending plan for the upcoming March 19, 2024 Presidential Primary Election and the November 5, 2024 Presidential General Election.

The Chicago Board of Elections oversees one of the largest election operations in the United States and we are prepared to meet head on the many challenges facing election authorities in our current environment. We thank the Chicago City Council as well as the countless City workers, public agencies and partners, law enforcement officials, and volunteers for their continued assistance in administering our city's elections.

We are proud to say the recent February 28, 2023 Municipal and April 4, 2023 Run-Off Elections in Chicago ran smoothly and safely, were fully staffed with poll workers, and saw increased voter turnout from previous years. Let me provide a quick snapshot:

- The February 28th Election saw the most Vote By Mail ballots cast in a Chicago Municipal Election ever.
- The April 4th Election saw the most Early Voting ballots cast in a Chicago Municipal Election ever and the most total ballots cast since February 23, 1999.
- For the first time, the majority of ballots cast for both municipal elections came from this record-breaking participation in Early Voting and Voting By Mail.

Last year, we completed precinct consolidation across all wards as part of the decennial redistricting process and in compliance with a new state mandate requiring 1,800 voters per precinct. This consolidation helps us fully staff Election Day with poll workers and saves approximately \$2 million in funding for every election moving forward. The Election Code requires the readjustment of precincts after each Presidential Election, and the Board will continue to identify additional precincts for consolidation.

Working with our community partners and nonprofits, the Board increased the number of precincts that receive Limited English Proficiency (LEP) assistance and bilingual staffing on Election Day. Additionally, over 70% of advertising funding was spent in non-English language media, including in Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Polish, Korean, and Tagalog publications.

The Board has recently completed a canvass mailing to the over 1.6 million registered voters in Chicago to keep our voter rolls accurate and up to date ahead of 2024. We continue to invest and expand the footprint of Voting By Mail, which we expect to increase in a higher voter turnout year like 2024. Moreover, nearly 130,000 voters are now signed up for the Permanent Vote By Mail Roster in Chicago and we expect many new voters to join by next year.

We look forward to unveiling our new and improved ChicagoElections.Gov website in mid-December, which will provide a more user-friendly and accessible experience for the voters of Chicago, including a new online Vote By Mail application and Voter Information Lookup Tool.

The Board is in the process of receiving 2,800 new electronic pollbooks to be put in use for the 2024 Presidential Elections, and which provide an intuitive and streamlined check-in process for both poll workers and voters alike, sync with modern election management systems, and are expected to last 20 years before replacement.

We have taken great strides to improve accessibility at all polling places in Chicago. In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Justice and Equip for Equality, we developed a new three-tier ADA compliance reporting system for polling places to better communicate specific information about each site's accessibility status and the best options for voters with disabilities, as well as an expanded Curbside Voting program at vote centers and precinct polling places on Election Day assisted by our new e-pollbooks.

And thanks to the City's investment last year, over 500 Chicago election ledgers and pollbooks dated 1880 through 1980 - a century's worth of records - have been successfully treated for mold remediation and are now stored in Special Collections at the Harold Washington Library for future research and digitization. This was a two-year project in the making and we thank our partners at the Chicago Public Library.

Looking to next year, the Board of Election Commissioners has recommended a budget of \$34,482,421.

This spending plan reflects several items, including:

- Administering the March 19, 2024 Presidential Primary Election and November 5, 2024 Presidential General Election in Chicago;
- Managing Chicago Electoral Board meetings and activity, which will likely involve a higher number of objection hearings than in the 2023 Municipal Elections;
- Preparing for increased Early Voting and Vote By Mail turnout for a Presidential Election year;
- Implementing the new maps for the Chicago Elected School Board as soon as they are approved by state legislators;
- Developing a Chicago Elections mobile app for smartphones and tablets to reach voters with additional election and polling place information;
- Expanding community outreach and voter education via neighborhood events, hiring fairs, and social media;
- Recruiting and training qualified judges and poll workers;
- Maintaining and servicing all voting equipment, computers, and security systems;
- Improving internal IT, cybersecurity, and Voter Registration systems;
- Increasing postage rates for mailings and ballots; and
- Continuing to work with the U.S. Department of Justice, Equip for Equality, and City agencies toward achieving 100% accessible polling places.

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.