

October 19, 2023

Hello, Chairman Ervin, Vice-Chair Lee and the honorable members of the City Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of Family and Support Services' budget for 2024.

Our department's work is dedicated to serving the most vulnerable among our city, and I would like to start by thanking Mayor Brandon Johnson for his leadership and support for our mission. Mayor Johnson has made strategic investments in DFSS that will help connect Chicagoans to the services they need to thrive. It is important that our office continue to protect individuals who are most vulnerable and threatened by the gaps in the social services safety net. While we have turned the corner on the COVID-19 pandemic for health risks, many Chicagoans are still facing the financial impacts from the pandemic. DFSS is effectively delivering large-scale programs that help families stabilize their households and get back on their feet.

At DFSS, we are building stronger and safer communities to help families flourish and accomplish their goals. We are also creating pathways that allow residents to easily access services while building on best practices, using data and incorporating community feedback to innovate across all seven program divisions. One example of this is our successful partnership with United Way and Cook County to launch the 211 health and human services helpline in metro Chicago. 211 is a 24-7 helpline that connects residents with a Resource Navigator who can help them access a broad network of over 16,000 resources. Since going live in January of this year, 211 has already handled over 85,000 contacts, including website visits, from both Chicago and suburban Cook County residents with the top needs being housing and shelter, utility bill payment assistance, access to food, and mental health supports.

One of the programs that was administered in 2023 that I am most proud of was the Chicago Resilient Communities Pilot, one of the largest cash assistance programs in the country. This pilot began in 2022 and concluded with final payments in July. It provided \$500 in monthly cash payments to 5,000 Chicago households for a year. The Chicago Resilient Communities Pilot showed that a

large-scale cash assistance program can be carried out responsibly and efficiently. The preliminary results are showing that cash assistance can have a lasting impact on the recipients in ways that can't be achieved with other sources of public aid. Recipients indicated that they spent their money paying bills, paying down medical debt, purchasing groceries, and that the cash assistance had a positive impact on their mental health.

Recognizing that cash assistance enables families and individuals to determine what success looks for their unique situation, we also launched the Emergency Financial Assistance Program for Survivors of Gender Based Violence to provide \$1,000 one-time payments. To date, over 2,770 survivors have received \$1,000 one-time payments and the program will serve a total of 5,300 survivors by the end the year.

We continue to double down on our efforts for returning residents. DFSS launched the SPRING Forward program this year, investing \$9.6 million to serve returning residents with wrap-around employment and housing support services including a 12-month rental subsidy that ensures individuals have a stable place to land post-release. In 2023, DFSS recognized the need for a 5th Community Reentry Center on the West side of Chicago, and has invested an additional \$3M to serve returning residents on the South and West sides of Chicago.

We have also continued to address homelessness through a continuum of services from prevention to street outreach and placement into housing, supporting individuals to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring. DFSS is housing families through the Rapid Rehousing Program which supports households experiencing homelessness in finding a rental unit, along with receiving rental assistance and case management, for up to 24 months. To date, through rapid rehousing over 2,400 households have been successfully housed since October 2020 and we have prevented homelessness for over 2,750 households with rental assistance. This continuum of support will continue in 2024 .

This summer, One Summer Chicago increased enrollment by about 20% and employed over 24,700 youth. In 2024, we are expanding One Summer Chicago through an \$11.6M investment and will serve an additional 3,650 youth during the summer and 300 youth year-round. The youth of our city deserve a safe, bright future, and we have focused significant investments in this budget on their

development. We know that career exploration creates opportunities for life-long growth and we are grateful for the support these programs have received from the Mayor and members of City Council.

As we continue to build strategic programming, the department remains responsive to the emergent needs of our city. Despite facing unprecedented challenges with New Arrivals, DFSS continues to work alongside City agencies and partner organizations to meet the needs of those arriving in Chicago from the southern border. Today, we are strengthening our response and strategy to provide better access to shelter, expanded case management, legal services, and resettlement support that will enable New Arrivals to obtain the independence and self-sufficiency they need to rebuild their lives.

With your support, DFSS will continue to lead with equity and compassion, bringing services to the people who need them the most in our communities. Thank you for your continued partnership and collaboration.