

Good afternoon Chairman Dowell, Vice Chairman Silverstein, and members of the City Council. Thank you for allowing me to join you today to present and discuss the Department of Law's proposed budget request for 2023.

As the chief legal officer, my main responsibilities include defending the City of Chicago and its duly enacted laws by providing legal representation to the City, its officials, and its agencies. In this role, I am also responsible for the oversight of the lawyers who manage litigation, transactional, and legislative projects covering a wide range of practice areas such as public finance, economic development, contracts, personal injury, civil rights, appeals, real estate and land use, and labor relations on behalf of the City of Chicago and its various departments.

The counsel and legal representation provided by the Law Department is done in service of the residents of Chicago and is guided by our commitment to make Chicago fairer, safer and more just for all Chicagoans. These core principles inform everything we do at the Department of Law.

In addition to handling the many lawsuits that are filed against the City which all of you are aware of, the Law Department also takes proactive measures and files lawsuits against entities that are harming Chicago residents through their actions. These affirmative actions often result in the collection of millions of dollars. For example, this past year, through our Affirmative Litigation Division, we supported gun violence reduction efforts through litigation against Westforth Sports, an Indiana gun dealer responsible for guns recovered in the city. The division also filed a lawsuit against several debt resolution firms that were exploiting hard working Chicagoans struggling to pay off debt by using unfair and deceptive business practices. The City entered into settlements with four opioids businesses that will generate tens of millions of dollars to fund City public health programs. And the City has continued the legal pursuit against online vaping companies that market the sale of tobacco products to young people. To date, this litigation alone has resulted in settlements with 60 vaping businesses and nearly \$2.4 million in fines and other remedies including bans on sales in Chicago.

Other Law Department divisions have also prevailed in cases which have resulted in the collection or preservation of more than \$12.4 million in taxpayer dollars.

The Law Department also seeks to strengthen the health and safety of our communities as well as preserve the quality of life our residents expect. Dedicated lawyers from our Buildings and License Enforcement division work closely with city departments to address public nuisances and unsafe buildings across the city. Guided by our core principles, the work we do on behalf of the City and its residents touches every level of our government.

The numerous services that the Law Department offers clients, and the city requires that the Law Department has a talented, skilled, and experienced legal team. Under my tenure to date, I have focused on bringing experienced attorneys into the department with the skill set to take on the complex issues that arise in the City while also ensuring diversity in ethnicity and gender among those hired.

Department of Law - Budget Hearing
Opening Statement for Celia Meza - Corporation Counsel
October 24, 2022

In the past year the Law Department hired a new Director of Attorney Recruitment and Professional Development, who at my direction has worked to update the Law Department's recruitment strategy to market vacancies to diverse mid-career and senior attorneys. Recognizing the virtual shift in recruiting, the Law Department has now engaged in more professional social media recruitment to include LinkedIn and other similar professional sites.

The Law Department's most recent recruitment success was in the revamp of the Summer 2022 Law Clerk program. The most significant change was in offering paid positions. By doing so, the goal was to attract students who are in high demand academically and seeking paid positions and those students with diverse backgrounds who may not have the financial ability to take unpaid clerkships. Marketing for the Summer 2022 Law Clerk program began in December 2021 and by the close of the application period in late February, more than 170 applications were received for the 11 budget funded positions.

The Law Department's selected clerks were from schools such as University of Chicago, Northwestern, University of Illinois, and other top law schools. Importantly, of the 11 law students who were apart of the program, **75%** were diverse in ethnicity and gender. As a point of comparison, last year's Summer Law Clerk class consisted of only **20%** diversity in ethnicity and gender.

The purposeful and direct marketing and recruitment strategy of the Summer 2022 Law Clerk program is confirmation that deliberative changes in the recruitment process across the law department as a whole together with the appropriate financial compensation works to attract talented and diverse candidates. The Law Department has made hiring a top priority and will continue to do so in the coming year.

CLOSING

In closing, I commit to you that I will continue to work with all of you and the City departments we represent to ensure the best outcome in all legal matters. Your support of our proposed 2023 budget will assist us in meeting that goal.

Thank you to Chairman Dowell and the members of the Budget Committee and Council members, for the opportunity to address you. I'm now happy to answer any of your questions.