

**Testimony from HMPRG to the Cook County Health Board of Directors  
Delivered January 24, 2025**



Hello, my name is Wesley Epplin. I am the policy director at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, which focuses on social justice and health equity in Illinois.

Most of us want nothing more than to show care and support for our loved ones. Unfortunately and unjustly, the current federal administration, led by Donald Trump and his MAGA movement, is scapegoating people who have courageously come to the US seeking a better life. Several individuals and organizations, including Health & Medicine, gave similar testimony to this issue eight years ago. Here we are again.

President Trump and his staff are directing violent Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids on people, sowing fear and division. This reality threatens the mission of Cook County Health, both because people are fearful to leave their homes even to seek health care, and because there is some risk that ICE will not leave sensitive locations like health facilities alone.

While we are glad that Cook County Health is focused on training staff to support immigrant rights, as we shared this week in a meeting with Dr. Mikaitis and other CCH staff, we have concerns about the training and associated policies and protocols.

To be fair, there have been some improvements to the slides based at least in part on our feedback, and we're glad for that. Still, the training should be made to be mandatory and should be more fully reviewed with external partners to ensure the training and associated policies fully protect patients and workers.

Our main recommendation is to establish a committee to improve your efforts to support patients facing these increased threats. The committee should focus at minimum on these issues:

- Internal policies and procedures
- Staff training
- Making legal referrals
- Improved signage
- Monitoring community stress
- Following best practices related to care, support, and bedside manner.

Cook County Health should work with external immigrant rights and legal groups as members of this committee. We also recommend having Cook County Commissioner Alma Anaya, who has proactively provided her perspective to Cook County Health about these issues, as a leader of this committee.

Both Trump and Tom Homan, the director of ICE, have said that Chicago is a focus of raids on immigrant communities. The actions and threats of the Trump administration are designed to divide and intimidate people. They meant what they said, raids have begun. We don't know where the raids will happen next.

Part of your job is to do everything in your power as board members and CCH administration—to ensure that Cook County Health's hospitals and clinics are welcoming and affirming spaces that are as safe as possible for all patients who come through your doors. Thank you.

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