

Hello. I am Wesley Epplin and I serve as the Director of Health Equity at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group. I am here today to follow up on my testimony from your last meeting, focused on ensuring that all patients and clients of the Cook County Health and Hospitals System are provided safe, affirming sanctuary in all of its facilities.

Health & Medicine is especially concerned and upset at the lack of publicly discernable action by CCHHS on this issue aside from establishing a task force. Your own health department within the system—which is showing strong leadership on this issue—as well as members of communities fighting for people’s rights, can provide examples of actions and expertise needed for your efforts.

The establishment of this taskforce at the last meeting is a helpful first step, and we appreciate this. That said, it is insufficient. We are concerned that there are only three board members on the task force, which avoids the open meetings act and so the public is unaware of its activities. We urge you to include all interested board members in task force leadership and to make these meetings public.

In the United States there are both longstanding and heightened threats to marginalized groups, including but not limited to immigrants, Muslims, people of color, gender non-conforming people, and others. In addition to the hatred and vitriol of the most recent national election, Federal agents have increased their intimidation tactics and deportations of immigrants which unjustly traumatizes and harms our communities. These fear tactics produce a barrier to healthcare and other essential services.

As a government agency, the health system has a responsibility to stand up for people within its jurisdiction and to make its facilities truly safe and affirming spaces.

I want to note that this is mission-critical, which is to say that you cannot fully implement the CCHHS mission without taking strong action on this issue.

I also note and want to credit the Health System with the emphasis on health equity in its strategic plan. The focus on health equity requires consistently standing up for social justice, *which requires standing up against social injustice.*

The immediate past President of the American Public Health Association, Dr. Camara Jones is a national expert on health equity and public health.

Dr. Jones defines health equity as a process of assurance of the conditions for optimal health for all people. She says that health equity requires at least 3 things:

- **Valuing all individuals and populations equally**
- **Recognizing and rectifying historical injustices**
- **Providing resources according to need**

There's no way to advance health equity—to engage in this process of assurance—without affirming safety and sanctuary for all people in health system facilities. So, CCHHS can neither stay true to its mission nor implement its strategic plan without proactively affirming and ensuring patient and client safety. Health & Medicine Policy Research Group urges that your task force take swift action to do this, using the guidance we have shared with you, to make task force meetings public, and to engage with members of the public on this issue.

We remain willing and available partners to help provide guidance and support. We also remain vigilant and expect you to act on this urgent matter.

As a member of the local public health community and of the public of Cook County, I'm urging you to stand up with me—to stand with Health & Medicine—and the many community members demanding justice for all marginalized groups. And we urge that you stand up for all of our community members, our brothers and sisters, our neighbors. People's health, healthcare, and lives are at stake.