

***TESTIMONY BEFORE BOARD OF COOK COUNTY
HEALTH AND HOSPITAL SYSTEM***

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From: Linda Rae Murray M.D. MPH

This month marks forty years since I graduated from the Abraham Lincoln College of Medicine. As a young doctor, I walked across the street to begin my residency training at Cook County Hospital. I chose County because it is the hospital of the people. I have spent almost half of my professional life as an employee of the health system.

Patient care is always rewarding, but often frustrating. When we, as a health care system, are under resourced, badly managed, or communicate poorly with our patients their suffering increases and more deaths occur.

Today, we have a new administration in Washington which brazenly threatens our communities. The “law and order” President emboldens official and vigilante actions against our patients. Youth are arbitrarily placed in the “gang database” without their knowledge or recourse to appeal. When street violence increases, the tension and anxiety is palpable in my patients. Our young people walk the streets in fear of each other and the police. Their parents and grandparents shed tears in our exam rooms as they grieve. That ICE and other police authorities use a gang database to separate our communities into “good and bad” people is not acceptable. Our youth deserve our protection.

My practice is composed of 99% Black people. I am confident that some of my patients are undocumented immigrants from Nigeria, Jamaica, Haiti, Nicaragua, Brazil and other parts of the African diaspora. Nationally, immigrants of African descent have a greater risk of being deported as a result of contact with the criminal justice system. Many of my patients are from the LGBTQ community and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The second most prevalent religion among my patients is Islam. In fact, native born American Muslims are predominantly African American. When Muslims are attacked repeatedly in the press; when the son of Mohamed Ali is challenged on re-entering his country; all of my patients who are Muslim, or young men, or Black are threatened. All of these oppressed and marginalized people deserve to feel safe in our care.

The issues and recommendations raised by the Public Health Woke coalition impact all communities and patients served by CCHHS. Immigration issues are not just of concern to one community, they are concern for all.

Trust will not be built by pretending that old and barely readable posters can substitute for Welcoming signage. Trust can not be built by playing games with the open meetings act; or by avoiding difficult discussions with this board and the public.

While I am now a retired voluntary physician I have observed this system for decades. As a resident physician I watched the first Health and Hospitals Governing Commission be abolished. As the President of the House Staff Union I was here when all the paychecks bounced. I have seen six different Presidents of the Cook County Board and countless executives and their management teams. I have served on a number of them, including a short stint in Dr. Shannon's job.

There is one thing I have learned. The survival of this system depends on leadership. Leadership means being willing to listen to staff, our unions, and the public yell at you. Leadership means dealing with unhappy elected officials. Leadership means looking at pitfalls down the road and trying to avoid them.

Take action to remind our patients that we will hold them safe. Take action in an open transparent manner that leverages the expertise of this Board. Make plans in a way that follows the leadership of impacted communities. A failure to take appropriate action means that County will be betraying its 150 year old mission. Do this now - because more difficult times are coming. Leadership requires working with organizations and communities that might make some uncomfortable. When threatened with destruction the County Health System has only been rescued by joining with the people and communities we are privileged to serve. Such joint actions are only possible when people trust our promise to live up to our vision and carry out our mission.