

Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice

An Affiliate of Appleseed

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To the Illinois Supreme Court:

Recently, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle issued a proposal for this court to review and help reform the management of criminal cases in Cook County. The goal is to address the issues of protracted case processing times and costly stays in the perpetually crowded Cook County jail. We at Chicago Appleseed, a long-standing nongovernmental organization that works with government partners to introduce evidence-based improvements in the administration of justice, agree and support the underlying principles of this request. In our view, the greatest obstacle to the effective administration of justice has been a lack of coordination between the criminal justice stakeholders to reform the manner in which the average case travels through the system.

Over the past 20 years, in response to the influx of non-violent drug offenders and the overcrowded jail, Cook County created 19 Specialty Courts, a drug school, a deferred prosecution program, various conditional probation programs, along with many other post-plea and pre-plea diversion programs. While we applaud the stakeholders in the Cook County criminal justice system for embracing the concept of diversion, the reality is that these specialty courts hear too few cases, and do not coordinate the manner through which these cases flow through the court system. In order to truly impact criminal justice in Cook County, all aspects of court management need to be addressed in a coordinated way so that diversion, differentiated case management, and early assessment are expanded, and thousands of defendants—not tens or hundreds—have access to them.

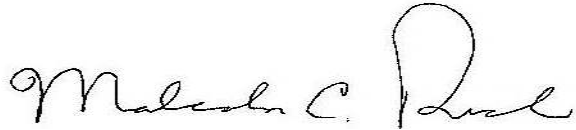
Presently, previous barriers to a coordinated criminal justice system are breaking down. Resources are becoming available through the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act to extend treatment to substance dependent criminal justice populations. Furthermore, there are well-meaning people in each of the agencies and branches of government that would like to address this problem. All that is missing is a neutral authority that can serve to facilitate such a process. We believe that the Illinois Supreme Court is ideally suited to this role, as other state supreme courts throughout the country have demonstrated.

To assist the Illinois Supreme Court in its deliberation we are including a research memorandum and proposal on the actions other state supreme courts have taken in response to similar concerns. In our proposal we discuss the following: (1) why a coordinated reform is needed in Cook County; (2) issues delaying implementation of such a system; (3) the action taken by other state supreme courts when faced with similar issues; and (4) a proposal of the action this Court should take. Namely, we recommend that the Illinois Supreme Court call for a public conference on coordination amongst the stakeholders and bringing evidence-based practices ‘to scale’ while

also creating a commission of Cook County criminal justice stakeholders to develop and implement such a system. And finally, we discuss several critical issues which the conference or commission should address.

To further assist the Court, Chicago Appleseed is willing to provide further research and investigative support to help realize a convening of the stakeholders and the formulation of a comprehensive diversion system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malcolm C. Rich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Malcolm Rich, Executive Director
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