

Budget Statement of Marisel A. Hernandez, Chair

Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago

November 18, 2024

We are pleased to present our 2025 Budget for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, which represents the spending plan for the upcoming year and includes initial preparations for the 2026 Midterm Primary and General Elections and the adjoining Chicago Electoral Board sessions which will begin in November 2025. There will be no elections held in Chicago in 2025.

The Chicago Board of Elections oversees one of the largest election operations in the United States. 2024 was a challenging year for election authorities in our state and across the country, but we are happy to say that both the March 19th Primary and November 5th General Elections in Chicago saw little to no public safety incidents or major threats or interferences in our democratic process.

We could not do it alone. We thank the Chicago City Council as well as the countless City workers, public agencies and partners, law enforcement officials, and volunteers for their continued assistance in administering our city's elections.

We are proud to say that both elections were fully staffed with poll workers, and for both elections, nearly one fourth of our poll workforce was made up of high school and colleges students. We thank our partners at Mikva Challenge, Chicago Public Schools, City Colleges of Chicago, and more for their ongoing efforts in recruiting students to serve their community.

We also saw that Chicago's voters continue to use both Early Voting and Voting By Mail to cast their ballots. Early Voting proved especially popular this last election, which means we also saw long lines at many locations, including on Election Day. We hope to work with the Chicago City Council to continue to increase resources for these programs heading into future election years, as well as locate potential new Early Voting sites and retire old sites where voter demand has outgrown the amount of space available.

Let me provide a quick snapshot of 2024:

- The Board administered the March 19, 2024 Presidential Primary Election and is finishing conducting the November 5, 2024 Presidential General Election.
- The Board introduced new e-pollbooks with increased functionality and assistance for poll workers and voters.
- The Board managed two Electoral Board sessions with over 100 objections filed against candidates, including the new Chicago Elected School Board office.
- In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Justice and our partners at Equip for Equality, the Board has continued to improve accessibility at polling places in Chicago, including expanding Curbside Voting at vote centers and precinct polling places on Election Day assisted by our new e-pollbooks. The City now has only 30 precinct polling places that remain Low-to-No Accessibility, a new record as we work to get that number down to zero.
- The Board conducted a mail canvass to all registered voters in Chicago to properly check and clean the voter rolls.

Additionally, we now have over 160,000 Chicagoans registered for the Permanent Vote By Mail Roster and we expect thousands more to continue to sign up for this program. These voters are often the first to receive their ballots and the first to return them back to the Board and we appreciate their enthusiasm.

Working with our community partners and nonprofits, the Board increased the number of Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Polish, Korean, and Tagalog poll workers serving precincts that receive Limited English Proficiency (LEP) assistance and staffing on Election Day.

In December 2023, we unveiled our new ChicagoElections.Gov website to provide a more user-friendly and accessible experience for the voters of Chicago, including a new online Vote By Mail application and Voter Information Lookup Tool, a new Search Bar function, and automatic translations in over 72 languages. In 2025 we look forward to improving it further with enhanced election results pages, interactive voter turnout maps, new accessibility requirements, and new language access resources.

Currently, we are planning to host a Voter Forum on Saturday, April 5, 2025 at Harold Washington College where we will welcome voters and community organizations from across the city to provide their feedback on the 2024 Chicago's elections, new election laws and proposed legislation, and what resources they want to see moving forward. This will be an update to our 2012 Voter Forum and we will create a report cataloguing this feedback and data that we will make public and share directly with the Chicago City Council. The Board is also planning a City-wide online survey to be emailed to all registered voters welcoming their feedback on multiple topics.

Looking to next year, the Board of Election Commissioners has recommended a budget of \$28,507,734.

This spending plan reflects several items, including:

- Finish administering the November 5, 2024 Presidential Election and prepare for the 2026 Midterm Elections and adjoining Chicago Electoral Board sessions;
- Developing a Chicago Elections mobile app for smartphones and tablets to reach voters with additional election and polling place information;
- Continue to develop the new ChicagoElections.Gov website, including voter turnout mapping and joint vote totals between Cook County and the City of Chicago;
- Lease a new Downtown Voting Supersite location for 2026's elections;
- Register voters and recruit election judges at events throughout the year in coordination with community partners;
- Create new poll worker and voter training videos centered around new equipment and digital tools;
- Expanding community outreach and voter education via neighborhood events, hiring fairs, and social media;
- Implement additional legislative changes to Chicago Elected School Board districts;
- Conduct the 2025 Mail Canvass to all Chicago registered voters;
- Maintain and service all voting equipment, computers, and security systems;
- Increased postage rates for mailings; and
- Continuing to work with the U.S. Department of Justice, Equip for Equality, and City agencies toward achieving 100% accessible polling places.

To all the members of the Chicago City Council: we appreciate your ongoing support of our mission to administer transparent, impartial, and accurate elections for the voters of Chicago.

We are happy to answer your questions.