

**CITY OF CHICAGO – Department of Family and Support Services**

**2025 Budget Hearing – November 7, 2024**

**Brandie Knazze, Commissioner**

Good afternoon Chairman Ervin, Vice-Chair Lee and the honorable members of the City Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of Family and Support Services' (DFSS) 2025 budget.

I want to start by recognizing and thanking Mayor Brandon Johnson, the Office of Budget and Management, and the City Council members here today. In a time of financial constraint, when the needs of Chicagoans are significant, you are tasked with making difficult decisions which will impact hundreds of thousands of lives. Our department's work is dedicated to serving the most vulnerable in our city, and I want to thank you for your support of our mission. You will see strategic investments in this budget that will continue to help connect Chicagoans to the services that they need to thrive.

DFSS and our partners are champions at making the most out of difficult situations, and we continue to come together to innovate with our programming and create solutions for our clients. We pride ourselves on providing both efficient and effective services to Chicagoans with the highest level of need and moving the needle forward on creating a better, stronger, and safer Chicago for *everyone* who calls this city home.

This budget prioritizes programs that have demonstrated their value, investing in powerful, life-changing outcomes for Chicagoans. To help illustrate this point, I want to highlight some of the department's achievements this past year:

The Chicago Emergency Financial Assistance Program for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence is the largest cash assistance program in the nation that is dedicated to survivors. It provides one-time, \$1,000 assistance payments to survivors. To date, through a \$10.7 million investment, we have helped over 8,000 survivors and their families. This fund has helped us prove that cash assistance works for survivors, because it puts power back into *their* hands.

Flexible funding allows them to decide how to get to safety based on their own individual situations and needs. The program will continue next year through a \$3.95 million investment, allowing us to serve an additional 3,000 survivors.

Soon, we will also be piloting a new \$1 million program for 300 survivors of gender-based violence who arrive in emergency rooms, providing them with a supportive advocate who can help them develop a safety plan and connect to additional support services. DFSS is investing an additional \$400,000 this upcoming year to provide comprehensive Gender Based Violence trainings to frontline staff who may interact with or serve survivors in spaces like shelters, community centers and other locations, so they have the skills needed to work with survivors and connect them to supportive services.

Another pivotal program is the SPRING Forward pilot, which serves returning residents by pairing housing with workforce development and wraparound services. This initiative has successfully provided housing for 200 households, benefitting 263 individuals. In addition, 239 participants have completed job training programs. Currently, 59 clients are actively enrolled in the transitional jobs component of the program, and we are pleased to report that 106 participants have secured permanent employment.

Another way we provide effective and critical care to Chicagoans facing homelessness is through our Rapid Rehousing program, which has housed 3,000 households since October 2020. I am pleased to be able to say that this budget provides a \$7 million new investment for 2025. This new investment will be used to maintain housing and supportive services for 1,000 households that are already housed, and to house 360 new households through Accelerated Moving Events. This program prepares households for stability: Seventy-six percent of our program participants are able to maintain their own rent by the end of the subsidy. What the initial success of this program shows us is the importance of ongoing investment in flexible, adaptive housing solutions to ensure long-term stability for Chicago's most vulnerable residents.

In this budget, there is a new \$36.6 million investment in homeless services, bringing the total investment to \$115 million. We will continue to work to ensure equitable service access across populations and to build a long-term, resilient homelessness response network.

While our department supports those in crisis, we also actively provide opportunities to Chicagoans seeking an education. One scholarship our department administers, the Community Services Block Grant scholarship, will support 74 people this year, awarding a total of \$230,000. This money covers between \$1,000 and \$5,000 in tuition costs and book fees for students from low-income families.

I am also proud to say that this summer, we were able to offer more paid employment opportunities to our young people ages 14-24, more than any other year since the start of the pandemic – nearly 28,000 youth were employed this summer, 4,000 more than last year. The 2025 budget provides a new investment of \$19.9 million to support youth jobs, bringing the total investment in summer jobs to \$52 million. This investment package will support 30,000 employment opportunities in 2025 for Chicago’s young people including 200 peacekeepers.

I want to take a moment to recognize our department’s hard-working staff. They are the magic and the glue that make this work happen. The box today is filled with people who many days work late into the night and over weekends to ensure that our services are available to those that need them most. They, along with the 340 DFSS staff who are not in the chambers with us, are deeply and personally invested in serving the people of this City, and we are lucky to have them.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to serve this great City and represent the people I care about most – those who are unseen, unheard and are sometimes forgotten. I look forward to taking your questions. Thank you.