



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



October 16, 2025

***Mayor Brandon Johnson's Prepared Remarks
FY2026 Protecting Chicago Budget***

Good morning, thank you all for joining us.

I want to thank my Budget and Finance Team – my Budget Director Annette Guzman; our Chief Financial Officer Jill Jaworski, our City Comptroller Michael Belsky, and their teams for their hard work on this year's budget.

I also want to thank our Chief of Policy, my Executive team, our Commissioners and City workers, and the Mayor's Office staff who work tirelessly on behalf of our city.

I'd like to recognize the public officials from the State, County, the Board of Education, and other municipalities who have joined us this morning. Your partnership and leadership is essential to a thriving Chicago.

I'd also like to thank the coalition of community organizations, labor unions, cultural, civic, and philanthropic institutions, business, and faith leaders who are with us today. Chicago wouldn't be Chicago without you all. You are the Soul of Chicago.

I want to especially thank the assembled members of the City Council. You are going to hear a lot about the great things that we've accomplished for the city of Chicago over the last two and a half years. But whether it's mental health, affordable housing, community safety, economic development and youth jobs, or flood relief – none of it – none of it – would be possible, without the champions here today.

Can we give a hand to our City Councilmembers delivering for the people of Chicago?

This year's budget, the Protecting Chicago budget, acknowledges a harsh reality that I think we can all agree on: we are living through unprecedented times.

As I speak here this morning about our budget, we have National Guard troops from Texas waiting on a court order to deploy to our streets; our federal government is in a shutdown with no end in sight; we have bands of armed, masked men with long guns and armored vehicles who have shot residents with no transparency and no oversight.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



We have ICE agents harassing Chicagoans, shooting pepper balls at faith leaders, and detaining journalists.

We had Border Patrol detain a member of our City Council for simply asking to see their warrant. We had a mother, screaming, pulled from her car while she was in line to pick up her children from school. We had Chicagoans in South Shore woken up in the middle of the night to the sound of Blackhawk helicopters and doors busted down.

One resident told the media, “They put Black people in one van and immigrants in another.” That gets to the core of the issue. When they come for any of us, they come for all of us.

They are even pitting law enforcement against law enforcement – these unaccountable federal agents have tear-gassed our police officers on two separate occasions. The president of the United States called for my imprisonment, as well as the Governor’s, for the ‘crime’ of disagreeing with him.

Now, they are trying to militarize and occupy our city. But it’s not just the boots on the ground. Perhaps even more devastating have been the economic attacks - the Trump Cuts.

The Trump Cuts to public health, the cuts to public safety, to Medicaid and SNAP, to services that address homelessness and drug addiction, his cuts to violence prevention, his cuts to public education and transportation. This is not rhetoric – this is reality:

Trump’s budget cuts \$1 trillion from Medicaid. The Trump administration is enacting the largest cut to SNAP in our nation’s history, and Trump’s tariffs are driving up the cost of food. That’s why, we are not including the Grocery Tax in our budget proposal.

Billions were cut from housing for the unhoused – Putting 170,000 Americans at risk of homelessness. In Chicago, we still believe that the solution to homelessness is housing. That’s why you will find an increase in funding for homelessness services and our Rapid Rehousing program, which has already connected thousands of Chicagoans from street encampments into long-term stable housing.

\$2.1 billion withheld from the Red Line Extension - I don’t have to tell you all that South Siders have fought for 50 years for this transformative investment – and Trump just cut it without a second thought.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



With the expiration of the ESSER funds and the funds that were withheld by Trump over our Black Student Success Plan, our public school system is losing more than \$1.8 billion dollars. The money that should be going to our public schools is instead going to Border Patrol and billionaires.

That's why this budget proposal includes the largest City investment in our public schools in the history of Chicago through a historic one-billion-dollar TIF surplus.

These funds will ensure that we are protecting our young people from the Trump administration's attempts to dismantle and privatize our public education system, that we are protecting special education teachers, restoring funding for our Black student success plan, and making sure our lowest-paid workers receive their pensions. The City will do its part while we continue to work with our partners at the state to deliver on the \$1.6 billion promise of evidence-based funding for CPS.

These funds will also provide additional revenue for our City Colleges, Libraries, and our Parks so that Chicagoans can continue to pursue their educations and enjoy our city, no matter their zip code.

We are making these historic investments because the Trump cuts will have a real impact on the poor and working people of Chicago, and they will degrade the quality of life for all Chicagoans.

That is what we must understand more than anything else in this moment. We are all connected; we all have a shared destiny as a city. We will prosper together or we will flounder alone.

As Dr. Martin Luther King warned us sixty years ago, "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. As long as there is poverty in this world, no man can be totally rich – even if he has a billion dollars."

And here's the reality, you all: There's never been a better time to be a billionaire in America. There's never been a better time to be a large corporation in our country.

The President's budget, the OBBBA, represents the largest upward transfer of wealth from the working class and middle class to the ultra-rich in our nation's history.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

We are talking about a trillion-dollar windfall in tax cuts for corporations, while low-income Chicagoans are facing higher costs.

Look, Chicago is the tenth-wealthiest city in the entire world. We have 127,000 millionaires. We have 290 hundred-millionaires and we have 24 billionaires.

At the same time, 1 in 4 Chicagoans under the age of 18 lives in poverty. Tens of thousands of our Chicago Public School students do not have stable housing. In some of our neighborhoods on the South and West Side, we have a poverty rate of over 50%.

This intense and growing wealth inequality is not sustainable for our city. We can not separate the immense wealth of the few from the poverty and insecurity of the many.

What happens in Old Town affects me in Austin. What happens in Auburn Gresham affects you in Rogers Park. What happens to our downtown affects our neighborhoods and what happens on the far Northwest Side can be felt on the Far Southwest Side. We are one city, we can be broken down into Sides and into wards and neighborhoods, but we can never be truly detached from the responsibility we have, one to another.

That is why, in this budget – as I have said for months – we will be asking large corporations to put a little more skin in the game. That is not out of spite – that is because our city as a whole will benefit if we can continue to maintain our investments in the face of these attacks from the federal government.

The Protecting Chicago budget protects Chicagoans from Trump's Cuts and his attacks on our city; it protects the services and programs that Chicagoans rely upon; and it protects low-income and middle-class Chicagoans from bearing even more of the tax burden.

To protect the programs that Chicagoans use every day, we established our Budget Working Group in April – bringing together a cross-section of our city – representatives from the business community, civic organizations, labor unions, and community leaders – all coming together to offer ideas and recommendations. Nothing was off the table. And, of the more than 80 recommendations they put forward, many of them are incorporated into this budget, saving taxpayers more than \$200 million dollars in cost reductions.

These savings are not decisions we take lightly. Even as our headcount has declined year over year, we are calling for a targeted hiring freeze so that we can protect the programs we are currently funding.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

We also worked closely with our City vendors to achieve significant contract savings in this budget – we met our goal this year, and we expect to do even better next year.

We went through all of the City’s real estate holdings and found opportunities to consolidate office space, sell properties, and terminate leases to save millions of dollars in this budget.

The savings you will find in this budget are not quick fixes. They are not cheap accounting tricks.

In fact, this budget contains more structural reforms than one-time fixes. We take our fiscal responsibility seriously because it is that discipline that will allow us to continue to make critical investments in the years to come.

This budget is also heavily informed by the grassroots, from the bottom up – both our community budget roundtables, where we heard directly from Chicagoans from every walk of life, and from our more informal budget town halls on the South, West, and North Sides, where we heard from community groups and neighborhood leaders. This budget is also the product of their work – decades of organizing that put forward these demands and brought us to this moment.

But the truth is that many of the most transformative recommendations that we got from our budget community roundtables and our working group require approval at the State level.

Many of the proposals in our budget wouldn’t even be necessary if the progressive demands for a billionaire’s tax, a tax on services, or the elimination of corporate tax loopholes were met at the state level.

We will continue to work with our coalition of community and labor, and our elected allies in Springfield, and with Governor Pritzker, with Speaker Welch, and with President Harmon to move our agenda for Chicago at the State level.

We will work side by side with anyone across the state who wants to champion real progressive revenue – just know, that you have a partner – the City of Chicago – with the courage and the fortitude to take on that fight with you.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

We will continue to fight to move our agenda for progressive revenue to fund public transportation, public education, and to fight back against these federal attacks, together.

Even with the limited authority we do have, we have found new and creative ways of making sure that the tax burden doesn't fall on poor and working people.

Our budget proposal asks large corporations and the ultra-wealthy to chip in more so that working families are not burdened with higher property taxes or grocery taxes, or garbage fees.

This year, it's likely that new assessments will be raising property values and the taxes that go along with it. And that's why, as promised, my budget proposal includes NO property tax increase.

Instead of asking our residents to sacrifice even more, we are asking large corporations and Big Tech companies that have made trillions of dollars to pitch in a little bit more. Instead of asking Woodlawn, and Englewood, and Uptown to pay more, we are asking Twitter, and Amazon, and Meta to put more skin in the game. Instead of asking seniors living on fixed incomes in Austin and South Shore to sacrifice, we are asking Big Business to chip in.

We are doing that in a few ways:

First, we are proposing raising the PPLT - the Personal Property Lease Tax – this is our tax on the cloud computing companies like Salesforce and Amazon.

With the rise of artificial intelligence, this industry is growing exponentially.

And these Big Tech corporations got hundreds of billions of dollars from the Trump tax cuts. We are proposing that they invest some of those profits into the people of Chicago.

We are increasing the rate by just a few points to raise hundreds of millions in new revenue to fund critical services for all Chicagoans.

The second method we are using to raise revenue from these Big Tech companies is a new, innovative tax that we will be introducing as a special revenue fund, which we are calling the Social Media Amusement and Responsibility Tax - the SMART Tax.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

For far too long, we have allowed social media companies to collect our data and sell it for profit. They've implemented more and more aggressive strategies to get Chicagoans addicted to their apps. As a result, we've seen significantly higher trends in depression, anxiety, and mental illness – especially in our young people.

This has become a serious public health issue, one that was acknowledged by the Surgeon General. Just like we tax other addictive vices that are bad for our health, like nicotine and tobacco, it is far past time we treat social media companies the same way.

That's why we are putting forward this new tax – the first of its kind in the nation – that will tax social media companies to fund our network of City-run free Mental Health clinics and our mental health crisis response teams.

That revenue would go towards the mental health clinic we reopened in Roseland on the Far South Side. It would go to our clinic in Pilsen and the mental health professionals we added to the Legler Library on the West Side. It would allow us to continue to maintain and expand our mental health network throughout the city so that every Chicagoan, no matter where they live, can access adequate mental health care.

Mental health is an issue where it costs us more to not invest. When prior administrations shuttered mental health clinics a decade ago, it didn't just impact those who were being directly served by the clinics. The impact is felt in the families who lost loved ones to suicide and drug overdoses. I know firsthand the pain that families experience when they lose a loved one to addiction and untreated trauma.

And all Chicagoans paid for that decision in their everyday quality of life. Residents who should be getting the care they need from a trained mental health professional were instead falling into homelessness; they were now on our train platforms, or in Cook County Jail. Every day, we see Chicagoans who are clearly in need of a mental health crisis response, but past administrations have failed to find the revenue to properly fund these services.

Well, we are not afraid of taking on Big Tech to fund free mental health care for Chicagoans.

To protect these services moving forward, we are moving funding for our crisis response teams off of the federal ARPA funding stream and into the Corporate fund, so that they form a permanent part of our yearly budget process. That is how we protect these funds from federal clawbacks and grant terminations.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



The fees in this budget are targeted at those who can afford to contribute more to our city. We are increasing our Yacht Tax – our boat mooring fee -- because we think that it's only fair to ask Chicagoans with the means to pay a little bit more.

One issue we heard time and time again is the problem of absentee and out-of-state landowners, vacant buildings, and lots sitting dormant for decades. Our Special Collections Unit, which we established under our Department of Law, is taking on the banks and financial entities that are buying up vacant land for speculation and the slumlords who allow their properties to fall into disrepair.

At the beginning of this year, some of you may remember we took on the worst landowner in Chicago – Suzie B. Wilson. We took her to court and we won back millions of dollars for taxpayers and more than 800 lots across the South and West Sides.

The days of the vacant buildings and lots sitting dormant for decades while taxpayers foot the bill for inspections and maintenance are over. We are going to be even more aggressive in reclaiming and redeveloping these vacant lots.

That's why we are increasing our vacant building renewal fee in this budget. Our message is simple: the land in our communities is not for Private Equity speculation - it's for people. Either build something or we will take it over and build something for the community.

So, we are asking Big Tech to chip in, we are asking corporate landlords and yacht-owners to chip in, but we are also asking the larger corporations to step up in this moment. We are asking them to chip in specifically to fund community safety because: there has never been a more important time to invest in safety in the history of our city.

Our investments in safety have been working; it is these critical investments that have allowed us to make this past summer the safest summer in Chicago in sixty years.

Our investments in our detectives in particular, overhauling the division; restructuring the teams; strategically deploying our officers, utilizing new technologies that allow us to actually solve crimes.

But with all the progress we have made, we still have the Trump Cuts to public safety threatening to undermine our work.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



\$468 million in proposed cuts to the ATF – CPD has worked hard to get more than 20,000 illegal guns off the streets since we’ve taken office, and the president is cutting the agency that’s responsible for stopping the endless flow of guns trafficked into our city.

\$800 million cut from violence prevention and community violence intervention, including more than \$30 million for organizations right here in Chicago.

\$51 million cut from UASI grant for Chicago – those are direct cuts to police, fire, and emergency management that will have a real impact on our city.

This is a moment that asks us to be strategic and judicious with our resources. As part of the effort to conserve resources across the board, we are modernizing important aspects of our police department.

The Superintendent is taking concrete steps, with our full support, to rein in overtime costs for our officers. He has managed to bring down the number of hours of overtime year over year, but there is still more work to do. We will be freezing vacancies unlikely to be filled to save roughly \$30 million dollars in this budget.

Importantly, this will not cut the number of officers in our neighborhoods. We will also protect all positions that are critical to continue making progress towards full consent decree compliance and constitutional policing.

We are civilianizing more positions, which will save us upwards of \$100M in the coming years and free up our sworn officers from administrative duties. Let’s be clear: policing should not be about paperwork. So, all of our reforms are about getting our officers into the community and away from their desks.

We will modernize, we will make smart, targeted adjustments where needed, we will work with our department and OPSA to get more officers back on the street, but we simply cannot afford to reduce our investments in safety.

With all the progress that we have made this year, I am the first person to say that we still have a long way to go, and we must move with urgency.

When we have a historic decline in shootings of almost 40% in one year, when we double the national trend in crime reduction; when we cut homicides by almost a third; that is not the time to pat ourselves on the back; that is the time to double down on what’s working.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



We need to support our officers on the streets, we need to add more community violence intervention workers, more mental health professionals, more funding for youth jobs, more of everything that works.

We can save lives – we can save hundreds of lives every year if we get this right. If we decide to take a step backward, if we defund the programs that have helped us make this past summer the safest summer in a generation, we will not only reverse the progress we have made; we will also play into the hands of the far-right who want to paint our city as dangerous and lawless.

I'm not going to sugar-coat it: if we fail to invest in community safety in this budget at historic levels, the federal government will try to use that as a justification for a military occupation of our city.

Never have the stakes been so high, and yet, never has the opportunity in front of us been so great.

We believe in real community safety. We believe that every single resource should be expended towards building sustainable, safe communities. Not with a military occupation, but with fully-resourced communities.

When I say that one shooting, one homicide is too many, I mean that every single act of violence is unacceptable because of the trauma it causes for the victim and their loved ones. It ripples out in the community. It impacts our young people for the rest of their lives. For those of us who have lost friends and loved ones, we know that the pain never really goes away.

Our goal as a city should be zero shootings and zero homicides. We owe it to the Chicagoans who have lost loved ones to gun violence to solve this challenge once and for all.

We have had this crisis for six decades – we cannot use the same strategies that got us here and expect different results. We must be bold, we must try things that have not been tried before. We must continue the progress we have made, and frankly, you all, we must go much further, with real urgency.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



I have complete faith in our Police leadership. Superintendent Snelling has done a tremendous job of rebuilding morale on the force, and they have done incredible work. But the solution is never going to come from policing alone. The safest communities do not have the most police, they have the most resources.

That's why we are proud to announce the establishment of a new fund - the Community Safety Fund – a permanent, \$100 million dollar fund that will ensure that we have the resources to continue to invest in the strategies that work.

The Community Safety fund will fund a number of programs that are critical to building a much safer city.

First – we need to invest in mental health resources for our police officers and first responders. Every day, they meet Chicagoans on their worst day. They show up after shootings, they spend time with the victims and families, they put their lives on the line and their arms around Chicagoans racked by grief.

The psychological toll that takes is real. Officers who are struggling with mental health challenges are a danger to themselves and to our communities. We have lost too many officers to this trauma because this problem has not been treated with the seriousness it deserves. That ends today, with the Community Safety Fund.

Second – if we are serious about solving gun violence, we must invest in prevention. We cannot just show up after the fact; we need to be there before violence erupts and build the relationships and community ties necessary to keep people safe.

That's why we are establishing one of the largest permanent funds for violence prevention of any city in the country.

We will be able to deploy street outreach workers and Community Violence Intervention workers, targeted on the blocks that see the most violence, to help us drive down shootings and de-escalate disputes. Research has shown that violence prevention workers have driven down shootings by more than 40% in some of the most difficult blocks in our city. We need to build on this progress and go further.

Third – this fund will also direct resources to our gender-based violence programs. Federal funding for these programs has run out, and our federal government has abandoned victims and survivors, so the City of Chicago is stepping up, particularly now, during



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Domestic Violence Awareness month, when we see an alarming rise in gender-based violence in our city and in our country, we must meet this moment with sustained investment. Survivors deserve our love and support, but they also deserve our financial resources, and this fund will do just that.

Finally, funding from the Community Safety Fund will go towards a wide array of youth programs - our diversion programs, our youth activations, and most of all, our summer youth jobs programs. These are programs that help our young people get on the right path. We cannot raise our children in detention centers and jails and expect them to succeed. Our young people need structure and accountability, but they also need opportunity and resources that set them up for success.

Look, I know you all remember that we set an ambitious goal last year to hire 29,000 young people. Well, today, I am pleased to tell you all that we blew past our goal and hired 31,119 young people this summer – a more than 50% increase since we've taken office.

I'm proud that this budget dedicates even more funds to our summer employment programs which will allow us to pay our young people at a higher rate than last year. We know this makes a difference because we hear it directly from the young people in these programs.

Ask Alanda Morris, who told us her experience with our summer employment programs helped her build her character and her confidence. The skills she developed led her directly to her full-time job as an aviation mechanic today.

Or ask Dereon Wiley, who participated in our pilot program with Streets and Sanitation and labor. That pilot program led to a full-time job with Streets and Sans; he said it allowed him to contribute to his family and his community; and he said his dream now is to one day become a Commissioner.

Mental health services; community violence intervention; victim services; gender-based violence; youth programs – We are paying for all of this with a fee on the largest corporations in Chicago. 97% of businesses will not be impacted by this new fee, which we are calling the Community Safety Surcharge. Our mom and pop stores, our local restaurants, our small and medium-sized businesses will not pay a penny more in taxes.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

But we are asking the top 3% of the absolute largest businesses in our city, those who have seen tremendous success and exceedingly high profits, to chip in so that we can build a safer city for all Chicagoans.

Some parts of the business community have already voluntarily put tens of millions of dollars into violence prevention programs, and the County and the State have made significant investments in this work – this fee will make sure that large corporations contribute their part to building a safer city.

We've heard time and time again from the business community that safety is their number one priority – that's why, to those who say this fee is anti-business, I say that investing in building a much safer city is the most pro-business investment we could possibly make. A safer city will attract more talented young people; it will attract additional investment and jobs; and it will improve the quality of life for all Chicagoans, in every neighborhood.

In closing, let me just say that this budget is based on the premise that the programs that Chicagoans rely upon are worth protecting. We can't respond to Trump's Cuts and the attacks on our city with speeches and press conferences; we must take concrete action. We must respond to his tax cuts for the ultra-rich with new taxes on billionaires and large corporations.

We must respond to the illegal attempts to strip funding from our city with a strong and persistent legal effort – that's why you will find additional funding for our Department of Law in this budget.

They stole billions from our public transit system and our public education system because they are saying they benefit Black Chicago. We have never violated the law or discriminated against anyone, but let's also be clear: There is nothing wrong with making sure that the communities that have been historically excluded from City contracts have a fair shot in participating today.

That's not discrimination – that's just basic fairness.

So we will use our investments in our Department of Law to fight until every federal dollar that has been illegally stolen from Chicago by the Trump administration is returned in full. We will be relentless until every single penny is restored.

Our investments in affordable housing and our neighborhoods are also worth protecting.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



We have cut ribbons across the city, we have put shovels in the ground, and more than anything, we have Cut the Tape on the bureaucracy that has slowed us down in the past.

Out of 107 recommendations that were put forward to make it easier to build in Chicago, ranging across 14 different City departments and agencies, I am proud to say that 90% of the recommendations have either been completed or are in the process of being completed today.

It is critical that we make Chicago as easy as possible to build because it is that dynamism, that endless pursuit of innovation, that keeps our city vibrant and our economy strong.

We are doing our part as local government – we have built, rehabbed, or preserved more than 4,000 affordable units already, with another 1,600 units under construction and almost 5,000 more units in the pipeline. We are converting our vacant office spaces downtown into affordable units and our vacant lots into owner-occupied housing while welcoming billions in new investments across our city.

As we develop our city, it's also critical that we take steps to protect our environment and continue the fight for environmental justice that started right here in Chicago. This budget delivers on the promise to rebuild the Department of Environment by expanding its staff significantly while continuing to invest in programs that reduce our emissions.

In this moment, we must be intentional about responding to the targeted attacks by the Trump administration against those who are most vulnerable with additional protections for our people.

For Chicagoans who are at risk of falling into homelessness, we have our first dedicated position to advocate for Renters' Rights and additional investments in our shelters.

For Chicagoans with disabilities, we will continue investing in our Home Modification Program.

For our seniors, we are protecting our investment in our Satellite Senior Centers so that our elders have access to resources and a sense of community.

For LGBTQ Chicagoans, we are hiring the first-ever dedicated City staff to advocate for the queer community.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



For our resident returning from incarceration, we are earmarking our Cannabis funding to support our Office of Reentry and job training programs.

And we will continue to build and expand on our Know Your Rights campaigns and strengthen our protections for immigrant communities in Chicago.

We will protect every community that is under attack in Chicago because we are one city, and what happens to one of us affects all of us.

In short: Chicago is worth protecting. This is our city. We bend to no one, and we cannot be broken.

They chose the wrong city to pick a fight with. We are Chicago. We've been through a lot worse than this. We will come out of this period stronger and more united as a city than we have ever been before.

I look forward to talking through this proposal with the City Council and incorporating your ideas for how we can maintain our investments during these unprecedented times.

Thank you, and God bless you all, and God bless the people of Chicago.