

**TESTIMONY ON THE FY2016 BUDGET PROPOSAL  
COOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS: FINANCE COMMITTEE  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2015  
ELISE M. HOUREN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

Good morning Chairman and Commissioners, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Elise Houren, Director of Government Relations for the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce represents over 1,000 businesses, their 400,000+ employees, and over \$24 billion in economic activity. Our members are the economic engine of the region and the state. Our members include corporate giants, some headquartered right here in Cook County, and neighborhood entrepreneurs located in your districts.

The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce recognizes Cook County Board President Preckwinkle's determination to craft a responsible, forward-looking Cook County FY2016 budget that is efficient and responsive to the needs of all Cook County citizens. President Preckwinkle and her team have made sincere efforts to not kick the can down the road, but to create a permanent sustainable finance plan that includes a capital plan. We recognize their hard-work and diligence in preparing this budget, and we commend President Preckwinkle for her leadership.

However, I am here before you today to express the Chamber's opposition to President Preckwinkle's proposal to expand the County amusement tax, just four months after a \$434 million sales tax increase. The Chamber believes the sales tax increase discussion should have been a part of the regular budget process for a reason: to avoid asking taxpayers for more money a second time. This body is now being asked to increase taxes by another \$20 million with the expansion of the amusement tax. An expanded amusement tax will negatively impact affordable entertainment options for working and low-income families and our seniors in Cook County, while increasing the challenges that businesses face to deliver a highly desired consumer product by all communities. This proposed expansion will

be yet another tax increase that will impact the business community and all those who utilize cable TV as a reliable, easy, and affordable form of entertainment, not to mention even at times educational for young children with shows like Sesame Street.

We have heard the need for economic development. But let's be honest, the business community continues to be over-taxed and regulated. In the past 14 months businesses have faced the following challenges:

- The proposed extension of the County amusement tax in this FY2016 budget;
- The recently increased Cook County sales tax by one percent which takes effect January 1 and will cost citizens a collective \$434 million; Chicago is set to have the highest sales tax in the country;
- A recently proposed County-only minimum wage increase that would reach \$13.75 by 2018; and,
- A City-only minimum wage increase indexed to inflation and reaching over \$13 by 2019.

We need businesses to be successful so that our communities continue to grow and thrive. In order to ensure our economy is successful we must be mindful not to place inhibiting policies on businesses. Consider how this impacts their ability to plan for the future. Uncertainty, more taxes, and more regulations; this is not a good combination to move the County forward. We hope you reconsider the expansion of the amusement tax as a part of the FY2016 budget.

The Chicagoland Chamber and the business community stand ready to be a partner in moving the County forward, but we stand opposed to the expansion of the amusement tax.

Thank you.