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CIVIC FEDERATION SUPPORTS LEANER COOK COUNTY BUDGET, OPERATIONAL REFORMS

(CHICAGO) The Civic Federation will announce its support for the proposed \$3.0 billion FY2011 Cook County budget at a public hearing today. The plan cuts expenditures and employee headcount while committing to a full repeal of the sales tax increase. The full 61-page report is available on the Civic Federation website, www.civicfed.org.

“The Civic Federation commends Board President Preckwinkle and her team for starting the long-overdue process of reforming Cook County operations,” said Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation. “The Federation still has many concerns about the County’s financial future, but we are encouraged by the new administration’s work to right-size a unit of government that has long been plagued by mismanagement and bloat.”

President Preckwinkle’s effort to reduce County expenditures has resulted in significant budget reductions. The FY2011 budget projects a reduction in staffing of approximately 7%. Departments have reduced their budgets by an average of 16%, with the County General Funds budget as a whole declining by 2.3% from the FY2010 adopted budget. While across-the-board cuts are not the ideal way to reduce government spending, a lack of financial management in the past has made them necessary.

County administration has begun to implement many of the recommendations from the Civic Federation’s Cook County Modernization report, including reforms to purchasing and a proposal to include performance management in the budgeting process. The Federation supports these measures and will issue a report on the progress made by the new administration after the first 100 days in office are completed.

Today’s report also details the Federation’s concerns related to Cook County’s financial future. Despite significant efforts to close a \$487 million budget deficit, the County will likely continue to have budgetary shortfalls due to cost drivers such as personnel expenses, the repeal of the remaining portion of the sales tax increase and the declining health of the County’s pension funds. The Federation cautions that County leadership will need to work to ensure follow-through on the proposed budget cuts and cost controls. The Federation recommends that the County immediately mobilize to develop a long-term financial plan, which will help the administration prepare for future challenges and engage stakeholders and taxpayers in the process of determining the County’s service priorities.

The Civic Federation is additionally concerned about the future of the Cook County Health and Hospitals System Board. The Health System is starting to implement its five-year strategic plan, which will involve major actions and changes in the kinds of health services delivered by the County. Such changes will require significant oversight by Health Board members. The Federation encourages the County Board and the Health System to work together to develop a system to fill future vacancies on the Health System Board and maintain the System’s independence.

The Civic Federation is an independent, non-partisan government research organization founded in 1894. The Federation’s membership includes business and professional leaders from a wide range of Chicago area corporations, professional service firms and institutions. For more information, please visit the Federation’s website at www.civicfed.org.

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