

**Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago
Written Testimony for the Joint Hearing of the
Senate Committees of Human Services, and Public Health**

Co-Offered by

**Gina Cleggs, Vice President of Community Development and Outreach Services, and
Chairperson of the Catholic Charities Staff Taskforce on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
and**

Cary Rositas Sheftel, PhD, Director of Latino/Latinx Affairs for Catholic Charities

October 26, 2020

Committee members, thank you for the work you are doing in these important hearings, and thank you for the opportunity to present the following testimony. We write on both of our behalves as individuals in our roles, and on behalf of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago – and most importantly, to raise up the people we serve.

To address the context of this hearing, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago is committed to increasing behavioral health equity and inclusion in all communities of color negatively affected by historic disinvestment and limited resources. We join you here today with witness and action in recognizing the urgent need for change of the “why” communities of color lack behavioral health services.

Cardinal Cupich was plain in his words at Governor Pritzker’s media conference of faith leaders following the death of our brother, George Floyd, in June: “We must face facts...Why are we still asking these questions, and not moving heaven and earth to answer them, not with words, but with the systemic change it will take to finally right these wrongs?”

The “historic disinvestment and limited resources” noted above have been our societal choice. Again we affirm in the Cardinal’s words: “People of color suffer discrimination and indignities not only from racist individuals, but from the very structures erected by our society that were meant to protect the vulnerable.”

Today we are all here to attest to necessary transformation of the laws that underpin the establishment of exclusion. As individuals elected to represent all communities across Illinois, you have a responsibility to pass legislation that guarantees equal opportunity for employment and access to quality behavioral health services, education, housing, and health care. Our obligation to right historic wrongs and invest in long-neglected communities does not become less of a mandate during a crisis like the pandemic, but more of one.

We also know that better policies and reforms will only be as effective as, “the conversion of hearts, because what lives in the hearts of those who make and enforce our laws matters as much as the laws themselves.” The Church must also work urgently, both in its leadership and ministry, and especially in expansion of Catholic Charities’ low- or no-cost behavioral health services.

Catholic Charities accompanies and serves through culturally competent programs with understanding and connection. Together with our new CEO, Sally Blount, we and our colleagues acknowledge our own cultural identities and personal views about difference, and work hard to increase our knowledge, skills, and relevance. We and our colleagues provide a safe and supportive place free from all manner of harassment for program participants, our coworkers, and any others who come into our facilities and are part of our service delivery system. We and our colleagues are dedicated to providing behavioral health services – and all services – embedded in, and with respect for, each community, family, and person.

Catholic Charities has devoted millions of private dollars we have raised to behavioral health. Joyfully, we and our colleagues witness strong and thriving individuals and communities when services are accessed. But need continues to grow, outpacing public and private investment. Racism and inequality can only end if we contend with both the policies – and barriers like lack of funding – that perpetuate and preserve the economic and social inequality that we know is all around us.

Racism still thrives because society makes the choice to play host to its contagion. We must not waver or falter in our commitment to cleanse our hearts and act accordingly so that it will not infect our homes, and our children.

Thank you for allowing our words into your proceedings. Either of us, along with our colleagues, are available at any point to expand on these points for our future. To finish with Cardinal Cupich's words once again, "there is no room for bystanders."

Gina Cleggs gcleggs@catholiccharities.net

Cary Rositas Sheftel crositas@catholiccharities.net