

**TESTIMONY ON THE COOK COUNTY RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS ACT  
FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2015**

**ELISE HOUREN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

Good afternoon Chairman and Commissioners. I am Elise Houren, the 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 Chicago, and neighborhood entrepreneurs located in your districts.

The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce stands opposed to the Cook County Responsible Business Act. We have yet to see the dust settle on the recent one percent sales tax increase, and we are back here today discussing a minimum wage increase. It is irresponsible to propose a minimum wage hike at the County level when it is already challenging to do business in Cook County and Chicago.

In the past 14 months the business community has faced some hard-hitting policies:

- The recent one percent increase in the Cook County sales tax- Chicago now has the highest sales tax in the country;
- A 2016 County budget proposal to expand the County amusement tax;
- A City-only minimum wage increase indexed to inflation and reaching over \$13 by 2019; and
- A potential City-only paid sick leave mandate.

Not to mention that today the Chamber is also down in Springfield testifying against a further shift of the largest property tax in Chicago's history onto employers- businesses big and small- and renters.

Businesses want certainty and to be able to plan for the future which is why we stand before you ready to be responsible partners in moving the County forward. However, with continued mandates and regulations that have unintended consequences, businesses remain uncertain and their growth capabilities become more and more constricted, ultimately resulting in loss of jobs and further cost-saving measures being taken by businesses.

In addition, the Chamber has serious concerns regarding:

- The County's authority to implement such an ordinance;
- The massive reporting requirements on employers; and,
- The overall punitive nature of the proposal.

I ask that you seriously consider the overall business and economic climate in the County. Now is not the time to rapidly push through another mandate.

There is increasing anecdotal evidence that the unintended consequences of wage mandates are very real:

- Since the implementation of the Chicago-only minimum wage hike, employees have not seen an overwhelming growth in their salaries, as their hours have been cut or their jobs have been eliminated; and
- Businesses have raised product prices.

The Chicagoland Chamber urges you to make the responsible choice and reject this proposed ordinance. We cannot continue to burden the employers of the County, who spur economic growth and create jobs throughout Cook County. The Chamber stands opposed to this proposed ordinance.

Thank you.