March 22, 2016

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle

Cook County Board President

Cook County Board of Commissioners

118 North Clark Street

Chicago, IL 60602

RE: Letter of Support for Cook County’s Ordinance

Dear President Preckwinkle & Members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners:

To protect the public health and safety, the signatories to this letter are in strong support of Cook County’s proposed ordinance (16-1983) that would require pharmaceutical manufacturers to pay for the costs of an expanded collection program to provide Cook County residents with appropriate disposal facilities for their unused and expired medications. People living in Cook County currently face considerable obstacles to safe disposal of pharmaceuticals. The ordinance’s safe drug stewardship program will ensure that the people of Cook County have access to free, safe, and convenient collection sites to properly dispose of pharmaceuticals.

The proper disposal of medications is critical to reducing the risks of prescription drug abuse and poisoning. Prescription drug abuse is on the rise, especially among teens and seniors. Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health indicate that about 15 million people aged 12 or older used prescription drugs non-medically in the past year. When people don’t know how to dispose of their medicines safely, unused or expired meds can accumulate at home posing risks. Easy access to unused drugs can exacerbate the growing problem of prescription drug abuse.

The proper disposal of medications protects our health by reducing harmful pharmaceutical residues, particularly hormone products, in our waterways. Disposal of leftover medications by flushing, which is all too common in the absence of a rational disposal system, contributes to pharmaceutical pollution that threatens public health by entering our water supply and food web. According to Chicago’s 2011 annual water quality report, trace amounts of sex hormones and prescription drugs were detected in treated drinking water pumped to more than 7 million people in Chicago and its suburbs. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District does not currently remove pharmaceuticals from the sewage effluent that is discharged into Cook County waterways. Technological upgrades would cost far more than the simple pollution prevention measure in the proposed ordinance, and would not fully address the problem in the way that prevention can. For these reasons, we urge you to pass this ordinance, which we believe is critical to improving the public health and safety of our communities.

 We note also that pharmaceutical manufacturers are subject to similar drug stewardship programs in several other counties in the United States, including Alameda, California, which passed a similar ordinance in July 24, 2012, which was upheld in a legal challenge in United States Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Such programs also exist in other countries, including France, Spain, Mexico, Brazil and some provinces in Canada.

 The National Association of Counties passed a resolution supporting pharmaceutical manufacturer financing of drug disposal programs. Cook County, as one of the largest counties in the US, is in a position to demonstrate national leadership and the adoption of a sound ordinance here may encourage other jurisdictions to pass similar ordinances across the country to protect the health and safety of those communities.

 For all of these reasons, we strongly urge your support of proposed ordinance 16-1983.

Sincerely,

cc: Commissioner Richard R. Boykin; Commissioner Robert Steele; Commissioner Jerry “Iceman” Butler; Commissioner Stanley Moore; Commissioner Deborah Sims; Commissioner Joan Patricia Murphy; Commissioner Jesus G. Garcia; Commissioner Luis Arroyo, Jr.; Commissioner Peter N. Silvestri; Commissioner Bridget Gainer; Commissioner John P. Daley; Commissioner John A. Fritchey; Commissioner Larry Suffredin; Commissioner Gregg Goslin; Commissioner Tim O. Schneider; Commissioner Jeffrey R. Tobolski; Commissioner Sean M. Morrison