



Legislation Text

File #: 20-0161, **Version:** 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT OF COOK COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT DEPARTMENT AS A SEPARATE AND DISTINCT POLICE DEPARTMENT

WHEREAS, Section 810/15 of the Cook County Forest Preserve District Act, 70 ILCS 810/15, grants the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Board of Commissioners “the right and power to appoint and maintain a sufficient police force, the members of which may have and exercise police powers over the territory within such forest preserves for the preservation of the public peace, and the observance and enforcement of the ordinances and laws, such as are conferred upon and exercised by the police of organized cities and villages;” and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves of Cook County Law Enforcement Department serves and protects visitors and protects the Forest Preserves’ almost 70,000 acres of natural lands and property - one of the largest public conservation districts in the United States - by upholding and enforcing all state, county, and Forest Preserves laws and ordinances; and

WHEREAS, Forest Preserves officers are sworn officers who received additional training in conservation from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Forest Preserves’ Department of Resource Management, and archeological protection training from the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and perform a dual role: both the conventional duties of police officers and tasks and duties performed by conservation officers; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves Police are regularly engaged in duties and patrols specifically designed to enforce Forest Preserves of Cook County ordinances that protect the many important ecosystems in the Forest Preserves, including over 100 endangered species of plants and animals; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves Police welcome and ensure the safety of residents who make more than 62 million visits each year to the Forest Preserves of Cook County to explore and take respite in nature and Forest Preserves officers’ presence and role *as part of the Forest Preserve team* is crucial for the visitor experience from answering questions about amenities to directing traffic at large events. Each day, Forest Preserves police officers patrol the Preserves, by both traditional vehicular patrols and alternative patrols by foot, bike and other means. Forest Preserves police officers conducted 6,200 high-visibility alternative patrols on and off the trails last year; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves Police value diversity and are committed to enhancing their cultural competency through on-going training including a recent cultural awareness forum co-sponsored by the Department of Justice and the Chicago Commission on Human Relations to listen to different perspectives and have an honest conversation about what the Forest Preserves Police can do to be more culturally aware and welcoming to all residents, previous trainings on fostering a respectful workplace and working with people with disabilities, and will soon undergo training on implicit bias; and

WHEREAS, Sgt. Maninder Sangha of the Forest Preserve Police assists the Forest Preserves’ Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) team in creating a work culture that embraces diversity and is inclusive and welcoming to all Forest Preserves of Cook County employees, visitors, and partners and has developed strategies to advance racial equity by improving the hiring process, broaden outreach efforts, and improve access to training for all employees; and

WHEREAS, Deputy Commander Martin Hasler represents the Forest Preserves Police on the Chicago Commission on

Human Relations and Hate Crime Coalition to advocate for individuals and communities impacted by hate crimes; and

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserve Police support numerous events that promote equity and inclusivity within the Forest Preserves, including the annual *Peace in the Preserves* event attended by more than 700 participants to date and *Pride in the Preserves* event sponsored by the Northwest Side Coalition Against Racism and Hate; and

WHEREAS, Section 810/2.1 of the Cook County Forest Preserve District Act, 70 ILCS 810/2.1, defines this Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners as the Cook County Board of Commissioners; and

WHEREAS, each of these governing bodies and their respective Law Enforcement Committees have examined and appreciate the value, operational efficiencies, cost effectiveness, collective contribution and dedication of the officers of the Forest Preserves Law Enforcement Department, and the unique role of the department and its officers to the success of the organization and the safety of visitors and Cook County residents; and

WHEREAS, House Bill 2297 in the Illinois General Assembly proposes to eliminate this duly elected body's authority to authorize a sufficient police force, pre-empting local control of a vital operation within the regional treasure that is the Forest Preserves of Cook County; and

WHEREAS, House Bill 2297 would result in increased payroll cost for taxpayers to police the Forest Preserves by an estimated 20% to 25% and increase pension costs, if this vital function were taken on by the Cook County Sheriff's Office, or reduce the amount of law enforcement attention in the Forest Preserves; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Board of Commissioners does hereby oppose House Bill 2297 and support the men and women of the Forest Preserve Law Enforcement Department; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be sent to each member of the Illinois General Assembly.