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2025 Chicago budget needs to prioritize youth jobs, housing and public health, alders and residents say

By Tonia Hill

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Ald. Jessie Fuentes (26th Ward) speaks during a press conference with GoodKidsMadCity youth organizers in City Hall to urge the Johnson administration to fund their Peacekeeping program for the 2025 budget on October 22, 2024. Photo by Tonia Hill for The TRiIBE®

Mayor Brandon Johnson is just days away from delivering his second budget address to the Chicago City Council, which is happening two weeks later than expected.

As with each budget season, there's a mix of emotions, including anxiety and uncertainty. Those feelings have carried over and are heightened this year because of the city's current financial picture. The projected shortfall for the 2025 budget is nearly \$1 billion, and the

Chicago City Council must approve a balanced budget by Dec. 31.

"We're starting later than we normally would, so the timing feels a little off," Ald. Maria Hadden (49th Ward) said. "We all know we're facing a very large budget deficit, and we don't really have any indication from the administration on what we're going to see."

The question is: how will the Johnson administration close that gap? According to Oct. 28 news reports from both [The Chicago Tribune](#) and [Crain's Chicago Business](#), Johnson is expected to propose a significant property tax increase during his budget proposal on Wednesday to close the 2025 budget shortfall.



Ald. Pat Dowell (3rd Ward) speaks during a Nov. 15 City Council meeting. Photo by Ash Lane for The TRIIBE®

This move is a departure from Johnson's campaign promise not to raise property taxes. While specifics on what services and programs Johnson will prioritize in the upcoming budget remain to be seen, he is not backing away from his commitment to a holistic and people-centered approach to violence and institutional harms caused by previous administrations.

"We're going to do everything in our power to preserve and expand those opportunities for

our people,” Johnson said on Oct. 22, referring to jobs, mental health services, housing and safe communities. “I’m going to invest in people. That’s what my commitment has been, and that’s what it remains.”

In the weeks leading up to Johnson’s budget address, organizers and city residents have advocated at City Hall against cuts to programs and services and, in some cases, for increased investment in departments like the Chicago Department of Public Health (CPDH).

The TRiBE spoke with organizers and elected leaders about their priorities for the 2025 budget, which include continued investment for programs around homelessness and affordable housing, public and mental health services, youth employment, violence prevention, economic development and child care. Below is a closer look at the key issues they want prioritized.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT / VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

In the city’s 2024 budget, Johnson pledged an additional \$76 million to expand youth employment opportunities, an increase of \$11 million from the city’s 2023 budget. Over the summer, 27,793 young people were employed through the city’s One Summer Chicago (OSC) employment program, just a few hundred shy of the administration’s goal of employing 28,000 young people.

Since its inception, GoodKids MadCity (GKMC), a youth-led community organization, has focused on reducing inter-communal violence and over-policing while working to flip negative perceptions about youth. Their pilot peacekeeping program kicked off on the South Side this summer and employed 101 young people.

“We have trauma and pain, anger, rage and also fear at such a young age,” said Michael Granbery, a youth organizer with GKMC. “We are afraid to lose another loved one to violence, so we attempt to hurt people first before they hurt us.”

The peacekeeping pilot program uses healing, restorative justice practices, and a holistic approach to violence prevention. The Department of Family and Supportive Services in the city’s 2024 budget made funding for the program possible.



This summer 100 young people are part of GoodKids MadCity's Peacekeeping pilot program. Participants form a support circle daily at their work site in West Englewood on July 3, 2024. Photo by Ash Lane for The TRIIBE®

On Oct. 22, youth organizers with GKMC and alders Jessie Fuentes (26th Ward) and Lamont Robinson (4th Ward) gathered at City Hall to discuss the success of the peacekeeping pilot program. They advocated for the Johnson administration and City Council members to continue to fund the program next summer and pass the Peacebook Ordinance. The hope is to double the number of young people employed in the program next summer.

"Youth employment is important to this mayor. Building a safer city is important to this mayor. We don't see any problems in expanding the pilot program to have a further reach this summer," Fuentes said. "We want to make sure that we continue to serve the communities that are most impacted by gun violence in the city of Chicago."

Through the Peacebook Ordinance, GKMC aims to create peaceful and safe communities where young people can thrive. By overseeing peace hubs and safe zones, GKMC aims to reduce gun violence by at least 60 percent. They aim to do so through the youth peacekeeper program, peace book mobile application, peace collectives and a citywide commission to provide healing resources for those impacted by violence.

During his remarks, Granbery also emphasized the strengths of the peacekeeping program and how it has provided him and his friends with helpful tools that more young people need access to.

“Passing the Peacebook [Ordinance] means we get the healing and justice we deserve,” Granbery added. “We get to host more peace circles and resolve conflict like we do right now at my school. My friends and I could be on the streets right now, but instead, we want other youth to get paid to push peace like us and access healing circles like us.”

Following an Oct. 22 City Council meeting, Johnson praised GKMC’s efforts through the peacekeeping program and reiterated his support for the passage of the Peacebook Ordinance.

“These are remarkable young people who want to participate in transforming our city, and so that type of participation and engagement from our young people is critical,” Johnson said.

“We have to find ways to continue to support this effort because it’s going to take all of us to build safer communities.”

Increasing job opportunities for youth is part of Johnson’s administration’s multipronged approach to addressing Chicago’s violence holistically and not punitively. Sixty percent of the young people who received jobs in 2023 were Black, according to Johnson.

The Progressive Caucus, of which Fuentes is a member, also laid out its budget priorities ahead of Johnson’s Oct. 30 budget address. The Progressive Caucus calls for a \$40 million investment in violence prevention programs that address root causes of violence, foster trust and promote healing within neighborhoods.

HOMELESSNESS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The lack of affordable housing and homelessness have been longstanding issues in Chicago. The influx of Central American migrants over the past two years has intensified these challenges and highlighted tensions between Black residents and new arrivals. Some Black residents have voiced frustration with city leaders, contrasting the rapid response to assist new arrivals with what they’ve perceived as limited support for homeless residents lacking access to affordable housing. However, now that fewer migrants are coming to Chicago, the

city announced it would operate **one shelter system**, meaning that the city will consolidate the New Arrivals system with its existing shelter system.

For the upcoming 2025 budget, Hadden and alders in Progressive Caucus are looking for programs to continue to receive funding, including \$18 million for rapid re-housing and increased shelter beds city-wide, \$11 million for flexible housing funds, funding to implement a universal portal for its affordable housing units, funding to guarantee legal representation for tenants that are facing eviction and more.

Last month, Hadden and Gibert Villegas (36th Ward) introduced a new ordinance that would help streamline locating affordable housing citywide.

"So when we're giving TIF dollars or some DOH grant to a housing development project, they have to maintain a certain number of affordable and accessible units," Hadden explained. "We don't have a way to track those currently in the city, and we think we should. Not only a way to track them but constituents in Chicago could also say: 'I'm looking for affordable housing. Let me go to the city's website and find out where there are guaranteed affordable housing units that I can then go and apply to.'"

During his first budget, Johnson championed the passage of Bring Chicago Home. He also carved out \$250 million to invest in homelessness and support services, such as the **rapid re-housing** and **permanent supportive housing** programs. Homelessness disproportionately affects Black Chicagoans.

According to data from DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies, nearly half of Chicago renters spend more than **30 percent of their income** on housing.

The City Council's Black Aldermanic Caucus (CABC) is also prioritizing housing and business development projects in its recommendations to the Johnson administration, according to Ald. Stephanie Coleman (16th Ward), who leads the caucus.

"We're coming to this budget with an approach of bonds deals and making sure that we prioritize projects that have already been our RFP'd (request for proposal) and that we have developers to make sure that we get those projects..to break ground and cut ribbons," Coleman said.

Coleman is referring to neighborhood investment projects receiving funding through the city's new Housing and Economic Development (HED) bond.

In June, Johnson announced that the Wood Street Farm Expansion and the Austin

Community Health Hub would be among the first neighborhood investment projects funded by the city's HED bond. Located in West Englewood and Austin, each project will receive up to \$5 million in bond-funded assistance to support construction costs.

PUBLIC HEALTH / MENTAL HEALTH

In the city's 2024 budget, the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) budget increased by three percent from \$1,907,521,688 in 2023 to \$1,998,869,599 for 2024. That same year, the Chicago Department of Public Health's (CDPH) total budget was over \$887 million, an **eight percent** decrease from 2023, when the budget figure was over \$972 million.

CDPH receives about eight percent of its funding from the city's corporate fund, while the police budget is about 35 percent of the city's corporate fund.

On Oct. 16, mental health and public health advocates, along with community members, gathered in the Loop to urge Johnson's administration to increase CDPH funding by \$25 million in the 2025 budget, bringing the total local funding to \$101 million.

Public health advocates say the increased funding will address staffing levels, race, and class health inequities citywide and provide programming and services for mental healthcare, immunizations, STD and HIV testing, maternal care, abortion care and food safety.



Mental health and public health advocates gathered in the Loop near City Hall to urge the Johnson administration to increase funding for public health on Oct. 16, 2024. Photo by Ash Lane for The TRiBE®

“Unfortunately, there are reports that Mayor Johnson is considering cuts to the health department’s budget, but to our officials, we say no, we can’t have that. There must be no cuts to public health,” Wesley Epplin said. He’s the policy director at the [Health & Medicine Policy Research Group](#).

“We say, find the money elsewhere and instead, invest more into public health,” he added. “For example, every 16 days, the city of Chicago spends on police what it spends all year on public health. We need our officials to shift some funds toward public health now.”

Treatment Not Trauma, were among some of Johnson’s campaign promises that were incorporated into the 2024 budget. The 2024 budget also included investments such as \$43 million to fund existing mental health clinics and reopen two closed clinics. In May, Johnson announced the reopening of the [Roseland Mental Health Clinic](#) by the end of 2024 and the expansion of clinical services at Legler Regional Library in West Garfield Park and a city-run clinic in Pilsen.

In addition, Johnson added \$15.9 million to double the staff of the CDPH’s Care 911 alternative response program that began under former mayor Lori Lightfoot in 2021. In

September, the Johnson administration announced that public health staff would now handle the city's alternate 911 response.

CHILD CARE

Rising childcare costs are impacting families, especially working-class families, according to Hadden. The Progressive Caucus supports SEIU's Childcare for All pilot program and is urging the Johnson administration to allocate \$5 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) relief funds to support it. A recent [report by SEIU Illinois](#) found that low wages for childcare workers are prompting them to leave the field, leading to childcare center closures that hurt both workers and families seeking services. Issues with childcare access and staffing have been longstanding but have worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Many of us represent a lot of working families with kids and know that the childcare piece is just a struggle as costs go up everywhere. Finding ways to make it easier for people with kids to have reliable, safe child care was important to us," Hadden said. The SEIU is a union representing healthcare, child care, home care and nursing home workers in the Midwest.

In 2021, the city of Chicago under Mayor Lori Lightfoot, received roughly \$1.9 billion from the federal government to aid in COVID pandemic response and recovery efforts.

Under federal guidelines, the city must decide where these funds will be allocated by December 31, 2024, and all relief funds must be spent by December 31, 2026. Funds not spent by the deadline must be returned to the federal government.

"It's natural for people to ask: 'Well, it's a year of budget cuts. Do you think it's okay to ask for these? The city is here to serve people,'" Hadden said. "All of these budgetary dollars should be going towards services for the constituents of the city of Chicago."

Following Johnson's budget address this week, his recommendations will be submitted to the City Council's Committee on Budget and Government Operations for review.

The committee will conduct a series of budget hearings from now until December to evaluate the proposed budget. Illinois law requires the City Council to hold at least one public hearing to gather input from city residents.

City Council members may propose amendments to the mayor's budget recommendations during this process. After the hearings, these amendments are incorporated into the final budget, which is then submitted for a vote by the full Council. The budget, also known as the annual appropriation ordinance, must be approved by Dec. 31.

Tonia Hill is a multimedia reporter for *The TRiiBE*.

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