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From State Representative La Shawn K. Ford

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Ford Passes Bipartisan Measure to Reform Cook County Bail System

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – To reduce the negative impact of the criminal justice system in Cook County on low income individuals and minorities cleared of criminal charges, state Rep. La Shawn K. Ford, D-Chicago, recently passed legislation unanimously that would limit the amount of money the county clerk can retain as a bond processing fee.

“As the Chairman of the House Restorative Justice Committee, we have a mission to help reform the criminal justice system and ensure that everyone, regardless of their race or socio-economic status, is treated fairly,” said Ford. “This measure is a step in that direction and should reduce the population in Cook County Jail, which will in turn reduce the burden on taxpayers.”

Under current law, after a defendant is cleared of a crime or charges are dropped, a county clerk must return 90 percent of the amount that the individual deposited to make bail and keeps 10 percent as a bail bond cost. For example, if bail is set at \$20,000, the defendant must pay a bond of \$2,000 to the clerk. Following dismissal or acquittal, the clerk returns \$1,800 to the defendant and keeps \$200 as a bail bond cost. House Bill 1119 limits the amount to \$100 that the Cook County Clerk can retain as a bond processing fee.

“This is a commonsense, bipartisan bill that reforms the bail system in Cook County which disproportionately hurts low-income people,” said Rep. Ron Sandack, R-Downers Grove. “I look forward to finding common ground with Rep. Ford and the entire General Assembly as we continue to tackle the challenges our state faces.”

“I am pleased that the Illinois House unanimously passed our initiative to eliminate excessive charges for bail bond processing fees in Cook County, an issue that is unjust and disproportionately impacts low-income people and minorities,” said Cook County Commissioner John Fritchey, D-12th, a long-time criminal justice reform advocate who has worked closely with Representative Ford on this issue. “I am grateful to Representatives Ford and Sandack for their bi-partisan leadership on this issue, and I am cautiously optimistic that the Senate will also pass this overdue reform. While much more work remains to be done in the criminal justice reform arena, this is a great step in that direction.”

House Bill 1119 passed the House unanimously and now awaits consideration before the Senate.

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