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May 2, 2008



By Federal Express

President Todd H. Stroger and  
Members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners  
County Building  
118 N. Clark Street - Room 537  
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: Resolution of the American Council of Chief Defenders  
regarding Edwin A. Burnette and the need to maintain the independence  
of the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender

Dear President Stroger and Members of the Cook County Board:

The American Council of Chief Defenders (ACCD) respectfully submits the enclosed resolution in support of Edwin A. Burnette and the need to maintain the independence of the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender.

The ACCD is a national organization whose membership includes the leaders of state, county, and city public defender and assigned counsel agencies throughout the United States. Mr. Burnette is a leader within the ACCD and among public defenders nationwide.

The action undertaken by the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners to have Mr. Burnette removed from office appears to arise from a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the public defender. A public defender's obligations are grounded in the reality that he and his office occupy a unique place in any governmental structure. Unlike other government offices that are properly seen as extensions of the chief executive, the constitutional and ethical obligations of a public defender may at times compel him to protect the office's clients, even in the face of his employer's opposition. When Mr. Burnette advocates for the independence of his office and to keep caseloads within manageable limits, his actions are consistent with the highest standards of the profession. In these circumstances, his advocacy is essential to preserve his office's vital role in our adversarial system; a role that forms the bedrock upon which rests the legitimacy of our criminal justice system.

The citizens of Cook County are fortunate that an attorney with the integrity and courage of Mr. Burnette is their public defender. We urge the Board to retain Mr. Burnette for the benefit of the Cook County community. A representative of the ACCD will be present on May 7 and we request the opportunity to be heard during the course of the hearing.

Respectfully submitted,

Fern M. Laethem, Chair  
American Council of Chief Defenders

Enclosure