



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chicago Voters See City on the Brink of Fiscal Collapse, Demand Honest Leadership and Drastic Action in New Poll by Leading a Better Chicago

71% of voters believe bankruptcy is a stark possibility if left unresolved

CHICAGO – September 28, 2025 – A new poll commissioned by [*Leading a Better Chicago*](#) reveals that an overwhelming majority of voters recognize the depth of the city’s financial crisis and fear the consequences if it isn’t addressed, while they share deep distrust in current leadership and are calling for a candid, bold approach to restoring fiscal stability.

The poll was conducted by Hart Research between September 9 and 14 and surveyed 601 registered voters across Chicago (margin of error $\pm 4.1\%$). The results show a city united in its concern: 71% of voters believe bankruptcy is a real possibility if current budget problems aren’t solved, while 70% say the city is already spending far too much on borrowing costs, a consequence of the city’s rock-bottom bond rating—the lowest of any major U.S. city.

No Confidence in City Leadership

Chicagoans don’t believe their current leaders are being straight with them about the scope of the crisis, nor do they trust them to take the drastic action needed to fix it.

- A majority have little or no confidence in Mayor Brandon Johnson or City Council to address the deficit.
- One-third of voters say they have “no confidence at all” in either.
- 83% believe city leaders have not been honest with residents about the scope of the problem.

A Broken Legacy of Short-Term Fixes

Voters point squarely to decisions by past and present leaders as the cause of today’s crisis:

- 75% blame asset sales used to plug budget holes.
- 74% cite excessive borrowing and reliance on one-time revenues that has saddled the city with unsustainable debt.

This cycle of mismanagement has left the city with few options and even less trust from voters.

What Chicagoans Want

Chicagoans are caught in a bind: they want reliable services but recoil at paying more for them. They oppose cuts to core programs and everyday essentials—like garbage collection or universal income pilots—and they don’t want new taxes on items that directly hit their wallets, such as streaming, Amazon purchases, or haircuts.

However, voters suggest they could be prepared to support bold, realistic solutions:

- Over 7 in 10 agree the city must face its problems honestly and take drastic action—including spending cuts and taxes.
- Even among tax-sensitive voters, a majority 53% say they would respect leaders who are honest about the need for taxes as part of the solution.
- There is strong support for innovative approaches, including cutting business costs, offering tax incentives for employers (85%), and consolidating services across government agencies (73%).

Most importantly, voters are open to a leader who can speak honestly about taxes—someone who will level with residents about the hard trade-offs ahead, rather than kick the can down the road. A majority (71%) of tax-sensitive voters nonetheless agree they would “respect leaders who have the honesty to make taxes a part of the budget discussion,” according to the poll.

“Chicagoans know the city is in crisis,” said Leading a Better Chicago founder Bill Quinlan. “Voters aren’t looking for another candidate with one eye on the next office, but for a leader who will level with them, make tough choices, and put the city’s future above politics. No more denial or delay — Chicagoans want urgent, honest action to prevent financial collapse. *Leading a Better Chicago* stands ready to help provide those solutions, convene experts and community leaders, and support the kind of leadership the city needs now.”

About Leading a Better Chicago

[Leading a Better Chicago](#) is a movement built for this moment. Its mission is to introduce innovative ideas, practical solutions, and serious leadership to the problems the city can’t afford to ignore — from public safety to finances, education to livability.

Quinlan, an attorney and civic leader who helped stabilize Chicago Public Schools leadership during its high-stakes contract standoff with the Chicago Teachers Union, founded the 501(c)(4) to take on the city’s biggest challenges: shaky finances, public safety, education, housing, and transit. The group takes a structured, data-driven approach to policy development: first, defining the scope of each problem through research and best practices from other cities; convening expert and civic committees to develop and stress-test practical solutions; then, bring proposals to Chicago neighborhoods through assemblies and engagement to ensure they reflect community priorities; and finally, publish a comprehensive roadmap and advocate for its adoption.