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Cook County Commissioner Dennis Deer dies at 51, family says



Cook County Board Commissioner Dennis Deer, 2nd district, is first in line to file his re-election petitions at Cook County Administration Building on Nov. 27, 2017. Deer died on Sunday, according to a family statement. (José M. Osorio/Chicago Tribune)



By **A.D. QUIG** | aquig@chicagotribune.com | Chicago

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Dennis Deer, a Cook County commissioner from the West Side for seven years, died Sunday, according to a statement posted by Deer's family [on one of his social media](#) accounts. He was 51.

"Dr. Deer's passionate lifelong dedication made him a tireless servant to the community in areas of healthcare, education, economic development, employment and training, re-entry and affordable housing," the post read. "We deeply appreciate your love and concern as we navigate this life-changing event."

A self-described "servant-leader" and native of the city's West Side, Deer, a Democrat, has served on the [county board since 2017](#).

His family did not disclose the cause of death and requested privacy.

"We will share more details soon," the social media post stated.

At age 50, Deer last summer successfully [underwent an "extraordinarily" challenging](#) double lung transplant at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. The procedure was made more difficult because of a genetic condition in which Deer's chest organs were backwards. At the time, his lungs were failing due to polymyositis, a rare inflammatory disease.

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In the weeks following the surgery and again this spring, Deer participated in county board meetings remotely. He was absent at the most recent board meeting earlier this month.

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A leader of the vaunted political organization led by former Bobbie Steele and her son Robert, Deer was tapped by county Democrats to fill the 2nd district seat on the Cook County Board vacated in 2017 when Robert Steele [died at age 55 in 2017](#). Among Deer's first major board votes was to repeal the [controversial sweetened beverage tax](#). Deer went on to easily win his 2018 and 2022 elections.

A therapist with a PhD in Christian Psychology, Deer ran a drug treatment and counseling center in Lawndale before joining the board. He championed health — particularly mental health — as chair of the board’s Health and Hospitals committee. He spearheaded resolutions to declare both mental health and racism public health crises and spoke openly about his own post-traumatic stress after witnessing a death when he was 10 years old.

At a bill signing for a state mental health bill that aimed to increase workforce diversity and fill shortages in healthcare workers in 2022, Deer [told the Tribune](#) he had been called by constituents “countless times, not about issues in the county’s 2nd District, but because the callers knew about Deer’s background” and could not find another Black therapist.

Deer recently posted on social media about his pride at seeing his twin sons, Kaleb and Kanaan, graduate from Northern Illinois University and daughter, Trinity, graduate from Westinghouse College Prep. Deer is also survived by his wife, Barbara, who he described as his high school sweetheart.

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