



OTHER VIEWS COMMENTARY

Chicago's public safety crisis threatens our whole city

Chicago cannot continue down this road, with a demoralized and understaffed police department and an under-resourced network of violence prevention groups.

By Alderman Matt O'Shea, Susan Lee | Sept 3, 2021, 12:41pm CDT

    SHARE



It is hard to look at the number of shootings and homicides in Chicago over the last 20 months and find a silver lining. By every measure, our city is in crisis and our

efforts to keep our communities and our police safe are simply falling short.

One of us is an alderman who serves on the advisory board of the Chicago Police Memorial Foundation and the board of the Chicago Police Chaplains Ministry. One of us is a former city official who helped develop and implement a community-based violence intervention plan for Chicago based on a strategy she led in Los Angeles. Despite our different roles, we both believe the people of Chicago are being presented with a false choice.

Some Chicagoans want a law and order approach. Some want a violence intervention approach. In Chicago today, we need both — at full strength.

Opinion

Let's start with the Chicago Police Department. Our officers are stretched thin and demoralized. Vacations have been cancelled, shifts extended and overtime is skyrocketing. According to the department, the number of police shot at rose from 12 in 2015 to 79 last year. So far this year, at least 39 officers have been shot or shot at, including Officer Ella French, who died from gunshot wounds in August. Her partner is still recovering from bullet wounds.

The stress on our officers and their families grows every day. Tragically, at least 10 Chicago police officers have taken their own lives since 2018. Across the nation, applications to be a police officer are down, and CPD is struggling to keep up with a wave of retirements. This includes dozens of mid-career police officers whose experience and maturity are sorely needed.

Today, our police department is at least 600 officers short of full strength and likely to be even more short-handed by the end of the year. Additionally, CPD has redeployed more than 1,000 officers out of neighborhood districts into citywide

teams that do not respond to 911 calls. This citywide deployment has compounded CPD's resource shortages in neighborhood districts and impacted 911 response services for our residents.

Simply put, we need more police officers, and we need them now. It's not at all clear where we will find qualified candidates — especially when the prevailing media narrative inaccurately portrays cops as the enemy.

On the violence prevention side, we have seen laudable efforts on the part of street outreach organizations. Research from Northwestern University and the University of Chicago shows that this violence intervention approach is beginning to bear fruit. In fact, the latest research from Northwestern shows that participants in Chicago CRED's program are half as likely to be shot or arrested compared to non-participants with similar backgrounds and characteristics. Clearly it is saving lives, but, as the report points out, it's not nearly at scale: "For every CRED participant, we found more than 20 other individuals with similar risk profiles who were not receiving similar services."

Other cities, such as Los Angeles, have seen success when effective, community-minded policing exists side-by-side with robust community-based violence intervention. As we consider how to invest federal relief dollars, let's avoid the false choice.

More police officers are needed to respond to 911 calls in our communities to create a deterrent to criminals, investigate shootings and deal with high-intensity situations. More outreach workers and social workers are needed to reach young people at risk before they commit crimes, prevent retaliatory shootings and steer them into the legal economy.

So far this year, Chicago has had more than 3,000 shootings, including more than 500 homicides, and we still have four months left in the year. From a purely economic standpoint, gun violence is costing Chicago billions of dollars every year. Every shooting prevented not only saves lives but also saves approximately \$1 million in policing, health care and related costs.

We're in crisis and we can't continue down this road with a demoralized, understaffed police department and an under-resourced network of violence prevention organizations. Our police department cannot continue with 12-hour shifts, cancelled days off and hundreds of millions in overtime.

At the same time, the violence prevention community cannot succeed by reaching only one in 20 young men at risk. With both approaches at full strength, however, we can make Chicago safer for everyone.

Matt O'Shea is alderman of Chicago's 19th Ward. Susan Lee is a former deputy mayor for public safety and now chief of policy and strategy at Chicago CRED.

Send letters to letters@suntimes.com.

NEXT UP IN COMMENTARY

Is the New York I used to know gone for good?

Federal mask mandate for air travel is over, but wearing one is still the best option

Food delivery apps helped my restaurant survive, thrive

Amazon workers' actions should ignite a labor revolution

Stay close, pull it out late? That's hardly a recipe for Bulls success against Bucks

Drawing fun out of a hat

MOST READ

Woman fatally shot in Lawndale

Rain can't wash away reality that Dodgers have gone where Cubs didn't try to go

Second City alum and prolific character actor Mike Hagerty dies

After years of not paying property taxes, Chinatown mall's owners face a new tax problem

Don't let the door hit you in the ...

Sponsored Content

Recommended by 



**Brooks
Ghost 14
Athletic
Running
Sneaker
Women's
Black
Running**
ShoeMall

**41 Old Toys
That Are
Worth
More Than
Your House**
BleacherBreaker

**Things
Flight
Attendants
Notice
About
Passenger
s In 3
Seconds**
Post Fun

**[Pics] A
Girl Gave A
Garbage
Man A
Cupcake
Every
Week Until
Her Dad**
Give It Love

**[Photos]
The Scene
That
Ended "I
Dream Of
Jeannie"
For Good**
Past Factory

**How Dogs
Cry For
Help: 3
Warning
Signs Your
Dog Is
Crying For
Help**
Dr. Marty
ProPower Plus

THE LATEST

ART

Immersive art experience featuring works of Monet, Renoir, Degas heading to Chicago

“Immersive Monet & The Impressionists” is the latest such experience to make its way to Chicago.

By Miriam Di Nunzio | May 9, 2022, 12:05pm CDT

WHITE SOX

Bummer to IL, Burger to Charlotte as White Sox reinstate Yoan Moncada, Joe Kelly

Aaron Bummer has right knee strain, lands on 15-day injured list.

By Daryl Van Schouwen | May 9, 2022, 11:56am CDT

CRIME

Lincoln Park robbery victim remains in critical condition after he was shot three times by duo wanted in 7 other North Side crimes

“Dakotah [Earley] is fighting as hard as he can right now,” his brother wrote Sunday.

By David Struett | May 9, 2022, 11:15am CDT

BEARS

Bears cut Ledarius Mack, sign six undrafted rookies

Mack, the brother of former Bears linebacker Khalil Mack, played in three games last season. The six players who were signed participated in last weekend’s rookie minicamp on a tryout basis.

By Mark Potash | May 9, 2022, 11:07am CDT

UKRAINE

Jill Biden pays surprise visit to Ukraine, meets first lady

The first ladies met at a school being used to temporarily house Ukrainian migrants.

By Associated Press | May 9, 2022, 11:04am CDT
