

ISSUE AREA 1

CRIME & SAFETY

CHICAGO'S ENROLLMENT CRISIS SERIES

This issue brief is part of Kids First Chicago's second installment on Chicago's enrollment crisis focused on parent-led solutions to address the crisis. In January 2022, we released *Chicago's Enrollment Crisis Part One: Examining Root Causes*, which analyzed the primary drivers of Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) enrollment decline using available school enrollment, population, and census report data.

Chicago's Enrollment Crisis Part Two: Adopting Parent-led Solutions is the culmination of nearly two years of research and discussion with Chicago families, who offered their time and insights to help make the city a better place for families like theirs. For more information, visit kidsfirstchicago.org/enrollment-solutions.



ABOUT KIDS FIRST CHICAGO

Kids First Chicago’s mission is to dramatically improve education for Chicago’s children by ensuring their families are the respected authorities on what their kids need and decision-makers in their kids’ education. We do this by partnering with families to support them in gaining the resources, access, and voice they need to achieve their vision for their children.

We imagine a Chicago where Black and Brown parents have a prominent voice in shaping their communities so that every child has access to a world-class education—the kind that opens the doors to new opportunities in college, career, and life. An education where **100% of our students graduate with the confidence, knowledge, and skills to shape our city for the better.**

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	3
RECOMMENDATIONS	4
Increase Security Measures and Expand Alternative Crisis Response Strategies	4
Sustainably Fund Community Violence Intervention Programs	6
Provide Workforce Development and Housing Support for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals	7
Establish a State-level Capital Program for Neighborhood Improvement Projects that Explicitly Focus on Improving Safety	8
CONCLUSION: FAMILIES NEED ACTION NOW	9

\$7 BILLION

Chicago's 695 homicides in 2022 collectively cost the city almost \$7 billion in criminal justice and medical costs, lost wages and earnings, diminished property values, and reduced quality of life.

OVERVIEW

“Creo que esta es una de las causas de que las Familias se muden porque todos queremos vivir en un lugar seguro para que nuestros hijos se forjen un mejor futuro.” -LUZ MARIA FLORES

Translation. "I think this is one of the reasons why families move is because we all want to live in a safe place so that our children can build a better future."

In our workshops, Chicago families identified crime and safety concerns as the primary reason for the city's declining population and its struggle to attract new families. They noted how high crime and safety concerns in certain communities is causing fear and anxiety among students, teachers, and parents, leading to decreased attendance and reluctance to participate in school activities. Parents discussed their belief that crime is also causing increased teacher turnover and vacancy rates due to constant stress and potential danger. In some communities, safety concerns have depressed participation in extracurricular activities and after-school programs, negatively impacting students' social and emotional development. Moreover, parents' involvement in their children's education, such as attending school events, has also been deterred.

Some schools in high-crime areas have been forced to allocate resources to address safety issues, diverting funds from educational programs. Negative reputations in schools in high-crime communities can further discourage potential families from enrolling their children, resulting in a cycle of declining enrollment and resources.

To address crime and safety issues in Chicago, parents and caregivers recommend a balanced, comprehensive approach to eradicate the current scourge of violent crime while also addressing its root causes. **Chicago voters agree.** In advance of the April 2023 Mayoral Runoff, nearly six in 10 voters chose prevention compared to about four in 10 who backed a tough on crime strategy.¹

This approach includes addressing the root causes of violence, such as economic and housing insecurity; investing in alternatives to traditional policing, including community violence intervention programs; and pairing improved policing strategies with a renewed focus on training, accountability, and police-community relations.

¹ GQR poll on Chicago's Mayoral Race, April 2023. The data are based on 811 respondents interviewed from March 31- April 4, 2023, and represent the regional, age and gender composition of the estimated likely voters in Chicago. [Detailed results of the poll can be found here.](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE SECURITY MEASURES AND EXPAND ALTERNATIVE CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES

ALLOCATE INCREASED FUNDING TO CRIME PREVENTION INITIATIVES & ADOPT POLICING REFORMS

The City of Chicago should hire more security personnel, expand the use of proven policing technologies, and increase police patrols in high-crime areas. This will make it more difficult and deter criminals from committing crimes, and help law enforcement officials catch criminals after they have committed a crime. However, these investments must be paired with efforts to restore public trust in law enforcement. Therefore, the City of Chicago should ensure that law enforcement officials are held more accountable for their actions, revamp training for law enforcement officials on how to effectively and respectfully interact with the public, and invest in community-based programs that promote positive relationships between law enforcement officials and the community.

Nationally, police departments spend an average of 60 hours on firearms training and 44 hours on self-defense. But agencies only provide an average of eight hours of training for less-lethal weapons, like Tasers.² Additionally, police departments only offer an average of eight hours in mediation skills training and only 39% of agencies mandate that all officers go through conflict management training.³

In Illinois, there is no requirement for law enforcement personnel to receive training in the use of less lethal weapons or to undergo conflict resolution skills training.⁴

² Gutierrez, David, "Why police training must be reformed," Harvard, Kennedy School, [Why Police Training Must be Reformed | The Institute of Politics at Harvard University](#).

³ Ibid.

⁴ The recently enacted SAFE-T Act included a new 6-hour use of force tactics requirement once every three years, which is to include de-escalation. Public Act 101-0652, (50 ILCS 705/10.6 new), [Letter Bill 1..764 \(ilga.gov\)](#).

"Yo creo que si es bueno tener policia y seguridad porque chicago es peligroso pero deberían tener policías que son justos y tratan a todos los mismos sin que importen el color de piel." - SAMANTHA SALINAS

Translation. "I believe that it is good to have police and security because Chicago is dangerous, but they should have police officers who are fair and treat everyone the same regardless of skin color."

WHAT PARENTS SHARED

- They would like to see increased security measures to deter crimes, including more cameras near schools. There were concerns with the difference in police response times depending on where one lived, and there was a perception that police were not being deployed to high-crime areas with the regularity required to successfully deter and prevent crime. There were also multiple comments about increasing security measures on the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA).
- They believe law enforcement should be held more accountable for their actions. They identified the need for better relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Parents want law enforcement to receive de-escalation training and be trauma informed, while also noting law enforcement should be more culturally competent in the communities they are deployed to protect.

EXPAND THE CITY OF CHICAGO'S 911 ALTERNATIVE CRISIS RESPONSE AND ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM TO ALL 77 COMMUNITY AREAS AND BROADEN SCOPE OF SERVICES

The City's Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) program should be expanded to cover all 77 of Chicago's community areas and be available seven days a week with expanded hours of operation. In addition, CARE teams responsibilities should be broadened to include 911 calls related to substance use and homelessness.

A recent analysis of eight cities found that between 21 and 38 percent of 911 calls are related to mental health, substance use, homelessness, and other quality of life concerns—all matters that arguably could be better addressed by personnel other than police.⁵ In Chicago alone, there are approximately 175 behavioral health-related 911 calls each day.⁶

"I have heard stories from clients who have had negative – and many times traumatic – experiences with emergency response personnel. If this interaction was handled by a mental health professional, it would be so much more effective." - COURTNEY RITESMA

WHAT PARENTS SHARED

- They want to scale the CARE program to all communities, providing service seven days a week with expanded hours of operation.
- They believe the CARE program can prevent accidents or erroneous decisions from law enforcement since officers are not best equipped to respond to mental health crises.
- Some felt the CARE program should exclude police officers entirely if the call is flagged as a mental health crisis to avoid triggering responses to traumatic policing experiences.
- They noted how marketing of the CARE program should be expanded to additional languages to broaden awareness.

WHAT IS THE CITY OF CHICAGO'S CRISIS ASSISTANCE RESPONSE AND ENGAGEMENT (CARE) PROGRAM?

In September 2021, the City of Chicago launched the CARE program to ensure that individuals experiencing a mental health crisis are assisted by teams of behavioral health professionals, with resources to address their unmet health and social needs. CARES teams respond to 911 calls with a team consisting of a Chicago Fire Department (CFD) Community Paramedic, a Chicago Department of Public Health (CPDH) Mental Health Clinician, and a Chicago Police Department Crisis Intervention Team (CPD CIT) Officer. Currently, CARE teams respond Monday – Friday, 10:30am-4pm in 11 pilot areas.

⁵ Curry, Jim, Laura Sloan, Walter K. Rush, Chinmoy Gulrajani. The Changing Landscape of Mental Health Crisis Response in the United States. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, Mar 2023, 51 (1) 6-12; DOI: 10.29158/JAAPL.220111-22

⁶ Heffernan, Shannon, and Chip Mitchell. "Chicago Is Expanding the Types of 911 Calls That Get a Mental Health Response." WBEZ Chicago, February 27, 2023. <https://www.wbez.org/stories/chicago-to-route-more-911-calls-to-mental-health-responders/b86c8501-8282-4d67-989b-2c8ffb9206aa>.

50% REDUCTION

in gunshot injuries among participants of Chicago CRED's program after only 18 months.

SUSTAINABLY FUND COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

“We have to provide our young people with these opportunities. There used to be a Ceasefire in almost all of the major neighborhoods and then they shut them down. Those intervention specialists helped and changed so many lives.”

- JEMALYTH FANARA

The State of Illinois and City of Chicago should increase investment in and scale proven local community violence intervention (CVI) programs, including the Heartland Alliance-led READI Chicago, the Metropolitan Family Services-led Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P), and Chicago CRED.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION (CVI) PROGRAMS?

Community violence intervention (CVI) programs use trained experts to intervene in and de-escalate violent disputes while offering wraparound services to persons who are at a high risk of violence.

A study by Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research suggests that Metropolitan Family Services-led Communities Partnering 4 Peace (CP4P) participants are less likely to be victimized or arrested for gun violence, while University of Chicago Crime Lab research has similarly optimistic preliminary findings regarding READI Chicago. Chicago's CRED program saw a 50% reduction in gunshot injuries among its participants in only 18 months after implementation.⁷

WHAT PARENTS SHARED

- They noted that the infusion of COVID-19 relief funds was pivotal in resourcing CVI programs; however, as pandemic funding diminishes, they felt it was essential for state and local government to step in with sustained investments, securing dedicated and enduring funding sources for these initiatives.
- They believe that intervention programs should be deployed equitably across the city.
- They noted the importance of ensuring CVI is a community-informed effort and that community members should be involved in the decision-making process regarding the selection of the CVI programs and organizations.

⁷ Steve Hendershot. “Violence-Intervention Efforts Aim to Disrupt Culture of Retaliation.” *Crain's Chicago Business*, October 24, 2022. <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/craains-forum-safer-chicago/chicagos-violence-intervention-programs-aim-disrupt-retaliations>.

PROVIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING SUPPORT FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

The State of Illinois, the City of Chicago, and Chicago's civic (corporate and philanthropic) community should provide funding for workforce development programs and access to jobs for people who have previously been incarcerated or are at high-risk of incarceration. This funding should include access to wraparound and holistic supports most effective at ensuring participant success.

"People committing crimes are just trying to survive. They don't have basic needs, which leads to them being forced to commit crime. They have a record and can't get a job. They need to feed their family."

- FAREEDA MUHAMMAD

The Bureau of Justice Statistics claims that approximately **60% of formerly incarcerated individuals struggle with unemployment** – which contributes to poverty for those who have been in prison – and many more face severe discrimination when accessing housing, education, and other vital resources.⁸

WHAT PARENTS SHARED

- They liked the strategy to create programs that holistically support formerly incarcerated individuals, saying everyone deserves a second chance.
- They noted how a lack of access to quality jobs can create a vicious cycle of unemployment. Some parents mentioned that it was imperative for programs to partner with businesses to guarantee employment for individuals who complete training programs.
- Some expressed reservations, saying that the severity of the crime is important to consider to help ensure the safety of other employees.

⁸ Prison Policy Initiative. "New Data on Formerly Incarcerated People's Employment Reveal Labor Market Injustices." February 8, 2022. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/02/08/employment/>.

⁹ Cook, Thea, Sebastian Hanna Love, Sam Washington, Anthony Barr, Insha Rahman, Blake Paradis, and Andre M. Perry. "A New Community Safety Blueprint: How the Federal Government Can Address Violence and Harm through a Public Health Approach." Brookings, September 21, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-new-community-safety-blueprint-how-the-federal-government-can-address-violence-and-harm-through-a-public-health-approach/>

PILOT A SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

"I know that housing is hard on everyone right now; I can't imagine how it is for a formerly incarcerated individual. This proposal would create an environment where these individuals can get the help, they need to become model citizens."

- VANESSA SHAWNATA

The City of Chicago should establish a pilot program to temporarily provide formerly incarcerated people who meet certain criteria with supportive housing and other wraparound services.

Supportive housing for people recently released from prison provides employment support, counseling, and other vital reentry services, and has been found to reduce re-arrest rates by 40% and re-incarceration by 61% in the year following release.⁹

WHAT IS A PILOT PROGRAM?

Pilot programs are new initiatives implemented on a limited basis as a test or trial. As part of any pilot, program implementers should collect data to show whether the new program has potential to succeed on a larger scale or whether it should be discontinued.

WHAT PARENTS SHARED

- They felt the recommendation would provide a second chance to formerly incarcerated people by providing housing security and wraparound services that help integrate the person back into society.
- Some thought the program should create eligibility criteria based on the nature of the criminal offense – and should not be offered to individuals convicted of violent crimes.
- Some conceded they would not like to live next to a property housing formerly incarcerated individuals and shared concerns about where housing options would be provided (e.g. near schools)

29% REDUCTION

in violent crime in Philadelphia when vacant lots in high-poverty neighborhoods were cleaned and transformed.

ESTABLISH A STATE-LEVEL CAPITAL PROGRAM FOR NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS THAT EXPLICITLY FOCUS ON IMPROVING SAFETY

“Just imagine if we had more investment and could do this in the neighborhoods that need it most.” - COURTNEY RITSEMA

The State of Illinois should establish a competitive capital program for Neighborhood Improvement Projects that specifically have “safety” outcomes in mind. Projects targeting specific neighborhood-level hot spots for violence should be prioritized.

In Philadelphia, researchers found transforming and cleaning vacant lots in high-poverty neighborhoods led to a 29% reduction in violent crime, as well as a 22% decrease in burglaries and a 30% reduction in nuisances – things like vandalism, public drunkenness and illegal dumping.¹⁰ Another Philadelphia-based project to remediate abandoned homes was associated with a 39% reduction in firearm assaults and, given the low remodeling cost, returned hundreds of dollars for every dollar invested.¹¹

WHAT PARENTS SHARED

- They strongly supported the recommendation and noted that, apart from improving safety, the investments will create a more beautiful city.
- They noted the importance of centering the community in decision-making and that involving community members will create more buy-in and respect for the investment.
- Some cautioned that investments should be made with an equity lens and all communities should have the opportunity to apply.
- Some expressed caution about the investments leading to gentrification.

WHAT IS A CAPITAL PROJECT?

A Capital Project is the construction, expansion, renovation, or replacement for an existing facility or asset, often called infrastructure. Examples include parks, urban farming spaces, schools, street lights, and other assets.

¹⁰ Sasko, Claire. “Philly Study: Cleaning Vacant Land Can Significantly Reduce Crime.” *Philadelphia Magazine*, February 28, 2018. <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2018/02/28/vacant-lots-crime-philly/>.

¹¹ Cook, Thea, Sebastian Hanna Love, Sam Washington, Anthony Barr, Insha Rahman, Blake Paradis, and Andre M. Perry. “A New Community Safety Blueprint: How the Federal Government Can Address Violence and Harm through a Public Health Approach.” Brookings, September 21, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-new-community-safety-blueprint-how-the-federal-government-can-address-violence-and-harm-through-a-public-health-approach/>

CONCLUSION: FAMILIES NEED ACTION NOW

Chicago has always been a dynamic tapestry of culture, innovation, and diversity, but we face an urgent challenge. Families, the cornerstone of any thriving society, are leaving our great city. By listening to parents, we can create an environment that attracts and retains families, boosting our city's vibrancy, prosperity, and long-term stability.

Thank you for joining us on this crucial exploration of the issues affecting Chicago's families. Together, we can create a brighter future for our great city.



**KIDS FIRST
CHICAGO**

LEARN MORE

We invite you to dive deeper into other issue briefs, available for download on our website. Visit kidsfirstchicago.org/enrollment-solutions.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact José Pacas, Hal Woods, or any member of our team at Kids First Chicago to explore our analysis further.

Contact us at kidsfirstchicago.org/our-team.

© 2024 KIDS FIRST CHICAGO
DO NOT REVISE OR MODIFY. MUST
ACKNOWLEDGE KIDS FIRST CHICAGO.

Permission to cite any part of this work must be obtained from Kids First Chicago. Materials are provided at no cost; no fees or charges may be associated with any of the Kids First Chicago materials without prior written approval.