

Press Release...



FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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Rep. Ford, Rev. Wilkerson & West Side Leaders Call for Murder-Free Austin

Announces Poster Contest in Campaign to Confront Gun Violence

CHICAGO – In efforts to reduce violence and in the face of a rising murder rate, state Rep. La Shawn Ford (D-Chicago) and community leaders kick off National Teenage Violence Prevention Week with a poster contest in a campaign to confront violence in the Austin community on the West Side of Chicago. The theme of the posters entered in the contest must be ‘Austin is a Murder-Free Zone’.

As chairman of the Illinois House Restorative Justice Committee, Ford recently advanced House Bill 2879 out of committee to the full House to create a Violence Prevention Task Force. The legislation provides that the Illinois African American Family Commission, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Illinois Latino Family Commission shall provide administrative and other support to the Task Force to organize community mental health providers in at-risk communities and provide state resources to public schools to assist with behavioral health.

“We need to take action now to prevent more murders in our state, and we must declare the Austin community in a state of emergency if we are serious about putting an end to the senseless deaths that plague our neighborhoods,” said Ford.

Ford joins Senior Pastor of the New Birth Christian Center, Dr. Robbie B. Wilkerson, in declaring Austin a Murder-Free Zone. Ford and Wilkerson are hosting a contest for residents of the Austin community in a search for the poster that best expresses Austin’s declaration as a Murder-Free Zone. The winning poster will be used in a campaign to fight gun violence in the Austin neighborhood, with the goal to have a poster in the window of every home and business in Austin.

“As a member of the faith community in Austin, I have witnessed first-hand the effects of gun violence in our neighborhood,” said Wilkerson. “It is time for us to move beyond discussions to bring real change. We cannot stand idly by and continue losing our loved ones. We must work together to remove activities that work to destabilize our community and leave us vulnerable to such acts of violence. I intend to work with Rep. Ford to bring together churches, community-based organizations, elected officials, educators, as well as law enforcement agents, to declare Austin a Murder-Free Zone.”

Ford believes that Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s ‘Strategic Vision’ for seven neighborhoods should include the Austin community to help reduce violence for families living in the West Side community.

“Austin has been neglected for far too long and we can not continue to be overlooked if we want the

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city to grow. In 2007 Austin lost the only traditional high school in the community, recently Austin lost its YMCA and now we are about to have up to seven elementary schools doors closed. Austin is filled with hard workers and is a community with a median household income of over \$32,000 annually, and we deserves better. We should be and we must be a part of the Mayor's grand plans," said Ford.

Ford continues to push for quality education in our schools, local economic opportunities, equal access to health care – including resources for mental health – and laws that keep deadly weapons out of the hands of criminals.

“We must work to create jobs, improve schools, and support mental health services for communities where drug and gang activity continue to cause the senseless loss of lives,” said Ford. “I will continue to work with community groups and residents to take back our streets and provide a brighter, safer future for our children.”

Ford represents the Eighth District, which includes parts of the West Side of Chicago, Oak Park, Berwyn, North Riverside, Brookfield, La Grange, La Grange Park and Western Springs.

For more information, contact one of Ford's constituent service offices: 816 S. Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park at 708-445-3673, 5104 W. Chicago Avenue in Chicago at 773-378-5902 or in the Stratton Office Building in Springfield at 217-782-5962. More information is found at www.lashawnford.com.

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