



July 8, 2020

Violence and Mental Health

The epidemic of violence continues to destroy families and communities in Chicago. We need mental health support to match the police deployment on the South and West sides of Chicago.

Fifteen people were killed and 64 others wounded in shootings across Chicago over the 2020 Fourth of July weekend, according to the Chicago Sun-Times. Eleven of the weekend's victims were minors, and two of the children died from their injuries.

Whenever there are killings in schools or workplaces, trauma support is routinely sent in to help the people directly impacted by the acts of violence. The city of Chicago continues to experience deadly violence, and there has been no mental health response for the people affected in our communities.

In addition, I believe in the public health approach to violence, which sees violence as being preventable, not inevitable. We must curb violence and stop it before it starts. Preventing violence is not solely a punitive approach. We need a comprehensive approach to prevent violence, starting with immediate deployment of state, county, and city of health departments bringing in mental health support for the communities impacted by ongoing violence. We must strengthen the work of violence interrupters who are working now by augmenting their work with mental health outreach trauma workers.

Although Black and Latino people have similar rates of behavioral health disorders as the general population, they have substantially lower access to mental health and substance use treatment services, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In 2018, 69.4% of Black and 67.1% of Hispanic adults with any mental illness reported receiving NO treatment the previous year compared with 56.7% of the overall US population, according to a recent SAMHSA report.

I like to quote Rashad K. Saafir, Ph.D., President & CEO of the Bobby E. Wright Comprehensive Behavioral Health, because what he says is so important. Dr. Saafir says, "It is time that we recognize that violence in Black and Brown communities is deeply rooted in historical and cultural factors including racism and ethnocultural discrimination. These factors have produced social and environmental conditions that impair the ability of some Black and Brown people to contribute productively to the community. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

"Clearly violence, as witnessed in the city of Chicago last weekend affects the mental health of our community. If we are going to reduce gun violence and stop the senseless killing of our children, then we must find ways to improve the mental/behavioral health of those who commit acts of violence and heal those who are traumatized by it," says Dr. Saafir.

Violence is something that impacts all of us directly or indirectly and it will take all of us working together to save lives in Chicago and effectively bring care to the families that have been so greatly affected by violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Ford".

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District