



August 16, 2017

Violence in Austin

This week I will take a break on the series of letters on education as I am in Springfield to continue to negotiate with Governor Rauner concerning his veto of SB 1, a bill that would bring almost \$500 million new dollars to Chicago Public Schools, because we need to talk about something else very close to home, literally a life and death issue.

On Sunday, August 13, 2017, at about 11:15 a.m., just before service at Friendship Baptist Church at Jackson and Laramie in South Austin, Pastor Reginald E. Bachus and his congregation had their day of pray interrupted when two men who were coming into church were shot and killed on the church steps. One of the men, Emmanuel Fleming, who served as an usher at the church, was accompanied by his three young children, all under the age of 10. "It's just hard for me to believe that something like this could happen on a Sunday morning," Pastor Bachus said. "Two young men on their way to church. ... I think that's the hardest part for me to grasp." I send my condolences to the families of those killed and the church congregation.

I attended a community meeting and a press conference on Monday, the day after the shooting. Alderman Chris Taliaferro, Commissioner Barbara McGowan and I had the privilege of talking with a teacher who suggested that we make parents more accountable. Congressman Danny K. Davis expressed the need for the community to come together. We heard from A.J., a precinct captain of the 37th Ward and a resident of the Austin community, who demanded that people take back our community and demand respect. We heard Ald. Jason Ervin express the need for the pastor of the church to do more outside the walls of the church. We heard from veteran James T. Smith demand more accountability from Chicago Public Schools (CPS), while urging parents to get involved by running for local school council (LSC). We heard Antwan Day speak about liquor stores that are open until 4 a.m., and how easy it is to get a gun in the community. Maretta Brown-Miller from the Chicago Park District invited families to come to the parks and join their programs. Clifton "Booney" McFowler, Jr., Street Intervention Specialist from Build, Inc., said when he was in a gang, the church was off limits for violence. As an Austin resident, Zerlina Smith cried for peace in the community, for children and families.

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) must catch the killers if we are going to stop all of the many murders in the city of Chicago. CPD currently solve only about 30 percent of the city's homicides, says a department spokesman, Anthony Guglielmi. In Houston, a city of comparable size, that figure is 56 percent, according to a spokesman for the Houston Police Department. In Philadelphia, it's 49 percent. It seems like you can get away with murder in Chicago. I know of a few cases that continue to be unsolved. In 2011, 18 year old Devin Dyer was killed in Austin. He is the grandson of Crystal Dyer, of Gone Again Travel. His case is just one of the many cases that remain open, with no leads to the killers.

In 1987, Michael Jackson wrote his hit, Man in the Mirror -
"I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer

If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself, and then make a change”.

Let's unite, as each of us strives to make the world a better place by first starting with the person in the mirror. We will have a Peace March on August 26, 2017, at 6:30 p.m., kicking off at Central and Lake and ending at Jackson and Laramie, with family members of those killed leading the march. Please join us, if you can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSF', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District