



July 17, 2019

Gun Violence Close to Home

Early on Sunday morning, July 14, 2019, a drive-by shooting took place on the 800 block of LeClaire where I grew up, striking both people and property. Our family's car was struck by bullets during the drive-by while it was parked on the street. Flying bullets also flew through the front window of our neighbor's home, ultimately stopped by a love-seat's armrest. A 22 year old man was found dead in our alley.

No one is immune to violence in our city. I was lucky my family wasn't sitting in the vehicle when this happened. Though I was lucky, a lot of people on the West Side are not. Our city needs to take more aggressive steps to protect the people on the West Side and end this violence now. According to heyjackass.com (sorry, readers, but that is the name of the website), through July 15, 2019, 1408 people have been shot in Chicago, and 250 people have been shot and killed. Though some other communities have higher rates of deaths from gunshots, the Austin community leads all other community areas with the highest number of homicides in 2019, with 26 so far. 91.2% of the people killed died of gunshots. 82.1% of homicide victims are Black, and 13.5% are Hispanic. The 2019 homicide clearance rate is 9.1%, with no suspect charged in 219 of the 250 murders. It is estimated that Chicago murders in 2019 have cost society more than \$67 million.

How did the person obtain the gun that killed this young man? Where did the gun come from originally? What is the role for organizations such as Westside Health Authority that do violence prevention work? Could they have found out what the persons involved need - in terms of social support, trauma or mental health care, or jobs? It seems like the corner was an obvious hot spot - would a police presence just being there help to deter violence? On what should our state Violence Prevention Task Force, or Firearm Public Awareness Task Force - both which I initiated through legislation - best devote its efforts? There are many more questions, and we must work to find answers and solutions.

Let's contrast the violence in Chicago with the violence that drives many people from other countries to seek asylum in the United States. Each year, thousands of non-citizens arriving at the American border or already in the United States apply for asylum or protection from persecution in their own country.

Asylum seekers must navigate a challenging and complicated process that can involve multiple government agencies. Those granted asylum have the opportunity to apply to live in the United States permanently, receive certain benefits, and be reunited with their family members. The point of asylum is protection from immediate danger from another country.

Poor educational opportunities, low wages, higher costs of living, and violence in prominently Black communities have Black people fleeing and seeking asylum from the city's predominantly Black neighborhoods

on the South and West Sides. Three of Chicago's mostly Black communities - Austin (26 murders); Englewood (22 murders); and Garfield (East and West) (22 murders) lead the city as the deadliest communities in the city of Chicago in 2019.

Chicago is losing its African American population. "Once one of the biggest urban enclaves of African-Americans, peaking at 1.2 million in the 1980s, Chicago's black population is projected to drop to 665,000 by 2030, according to the Urban Institute," according to Josh McGhee of the Chicago Reporter.


It may seem reasonable that Black people in Chicago try escape war-torn areas of Chicago's neighborhoods – but Black people don't have to escape. We must show our numbers in the 2020 census by being counted, using our numbers to continue the fight for high-quality schools, safer communities, and healthy communities.

Black American citizens in the United States have the constitutional promise guaranteed to us because of years of protest and movements to secure equal rights and protections under the law. People are fighting and dying to get here and stay in America through the asylum process. The condition of the Blacks in America calls out for Blacks to demand better and fight with organizations. We need to push politicians, start new groups, and help make the change happen that we are looking for so our children feel safe in their own front yards.

Let's not run from our communities - let's join the fight to make our communities the BEST communities - let's help our brothers and sisters in the struggle and create change, block by block. We don't have to fear our government in America - our government should fear and serve us. We don't have to seek asylum from our own communities. Voting power can take advantage of the opportunities that asylum seekers from other countries are risking their lives to have in America.

Every person affected by the thousands of incidents of gun violence in our city knows that the senseless violence needs to stop so people don't feel the need to leave their homes and communities. We all must demand and work for an end to the ongoing chaos of illegal activity and violence on Chicago Avenue and LeClaire and many other parts of our city.

Sincerely,

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

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District