

Sign-on Letter

To Mayor Lori Lightfoot:

We are a group of Chicago community members, organizers, stakeholders and faith leaders who are calling on you to immediately cease your misguided and harmful escalation of law enforcement in response to the uprisings over the past few months. As Mayor of Chicago you occupy one of the most powerful and influential platforms for change in our city, and we are facing a pivotal moment that begs for moral leadership. Unfortunately, your response has been to point fingers at other city leaders and [double down on the use of heavily armed, militarized police to protect property interests](#), all while [ignoring](#) the [urgent calls](#) for meaningful police reform.

The most recent unrest, triggered by the police shooting of Latrell Allen, follows decades of mistreatment, abuse, oppression and violence by Chicago police against Black and brown communities and reawakens painful memories of Laquan McDonald. Police have argued the shooting was necessary, [but they were not wearing body cameras and witnesses dispute how it happened](#). Instead of being transparent and immediately releasing information, law enforcement met protesters with yet more police violence. Allen's shooting came on the heels of repeated instances of police abusing protesters, including in incidents where peaceful protesters were [arrested](#), pushed [in front of police cruisers, tripped, pepper-sprayed, and beaten](#). In fact, the Chicago police union president has made clear that any efforts by police to demonstrate support for Black Lives Matter protests would be met with [disciplinary action](#).

All of this conflict has played out against the backdrop of a police department that is infamous for corrupt and racist policing. For decades, the Chicago police department [tortured people](#), including over 100 Black men, to force confessions or to get them to falsely incriminate co-defendants. A 2017 Department of Justice investigation concluded that the Chicago police department had ["violated the constitutional rights of residents for years, permitting racial bias against blacks, using excessive force and shooting people who did not pose immediate threats,"](#) and in 2019 the department was [placed under a consent decree](#). In the past decade alone, police misconduct has cost the city more than \$700 million on settlements and legal fees related to lawsuits alleging police brutality.

In the aftermath of Mr. Allen's shooting two weeks ago, the right thing for you to do would have been to hold the police accountable and address the pain and fear our community felt in the wake of yet another act of law enforcement violence. Instead, we witnessed that in your eyes, the destruction of property is a far graver sin than state-sanctioned anti-Black violence. You denied the righteousness of our indignation in the wake of another shooting by an historically corrupt police department, writing it off as criminal behavior that must be subdued through ever more

aggressive policing. You blamed other law enforcement officials, including [Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx](#), for the fury of protesters, ignoring the fact that Foxx - who came into office in the wake of the McDonald shooting- won the 2016 general election and her recent 2020 primary - despite being dramatically outspent - on the strength of her promises to reform Chicago's criminal legal system and hold police accountable. With your response, you are playing right into Donald Trump's narrative that Chicagoans are dangerous, chaotic criminals who must be "quelled" by heavy-handed law enforcement. You are directly fueling the cycle of police violence and distrust between law enforcement and Chicago residents.

We can and must do so much better if the unrest is ever to end. The Cook County Board [recently took an important, though symbolic, first step](#) to a reimagined public safety system by passing the Justice for Black Lives resolution. This resolution calls for the county to redirect funds from policing and incarceration to public services not administered by law enforcement. The movement to defund the police, which you reduced to a "[nice hashtag](#)," is actually far more than that. It encompasses substantial, transformational concepts, envisioning a public safety system that dramatically scales back the scope and depth of law enforcement responsibilities while investing in violence prevention programs, community health services, and non-law enforcement emergency response teams, among other things. It envisions a city where heavily militarized law enforcement are not dispatched for every social need or infraction, where police violence is a last resort instead of a common occurrence, and where historically abandoned communities are rebuilt. A [number of large cities](#) are embracing this vision, reducing their law enforcement budget so they can meaningfully implement other, far more effective strategies.

But doing this will take a true commitment that involves putting our city's money to a wholly different use. We have certainly invested heavily enough in the "law and order" strategy: This year, the [Chicago Police Department's budget](#) totaled \$1.68 billion, with [\\$5 million spent on policing every day](#). While you have offered support for directing \$7.5 million toward violence prevention programs, your 2020 budget proposal also features a [7 percent increase in the CPD budget](#) at a time when our city is facing budget shortfalls and other [cities across the country](#) are cutting back on police spending. In fact, Chicago is still spending [more on policing per person than at any time in the last half-century](#), despite a persistent drop in crime over the last two decades.

You were elected on a promise to change Chicago's Police Department. You recognized that "[\[a\] militarized response to the violence isn't what people want, and more to the point, it's not effective](#)." But your actions over the last few months belie your campaign commitments, and we urge you to abandon the course you are now on. Listen to the wounded and angry Black and brown Chicago communities — the same ones who voted enthusiastically for you — and make good on your promises by embracing a reimagined and transformed vision of public safety.

Signed,

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