

# Chicago curfew for teens draws concern from community members

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CHICAGO, IL - APRIL 15: Women walk with signs through the Millennium Park as they protest during a rally on April 15, 2021, in Chicago. The rally is held in protest of the killing of 13-year-old Adam Toledo by a Chicago Police officer on March 29. The video of the fatal shooting was released on Thursday to the general public by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability more than two weeks after the incident took place. (Photo by Kamil Krzaczynski/Getty Images)

The Chicago City Council has officially implemented a citywide curfew for minors. On May 17, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot signed an executive order that would alter the city's 30-year-old curfew for minors. Last week, the curfew became permanent after approval from the Chicago City Council, with the measure approved by a 30-19 vote. The new law will expand to include 17-year-olds and will prohibit unaccompanied minors from being outdoors any day of the week between 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Lightfoot signed the order days after 16-year-old Seandell Holliday was fatally shot in the city's Millennium Park on May 14. In addition to the citywide rule, Lightfoot has banned unaccompanied minors from Millennium Park beginning at 6 p.m. Thursday through Sunday.

“It gives me no pleasure to impose these rules and restrictions. But having exhausted every other opportunity, every other tool and remedy, we’ve got to go to this next step to make sure that our jewel of Millennium Park is available and open to everyone,” Lightfoot said during a press conference on May 16.

Critics of the new curfew have expressed frustration over which demographics are more likely to be targeted.

“All the evidence-based research says this doesn’t work. For [Lightfoot], her priority is to get reelected, and reelection for her will run through the same amount of people that fund this campaign, and those are people who have a problem with Black and brown kids downtown,” said Mueze Bawany, a high school teacher and candidate for the 50th Ward Alderman seat.

In 2021, the city of Chicago recorded that 80% of fatal and non-fatal shootings were Black victims, and when looking at data for juvenile victims, the number was slightly higher at 82.2%.

The number of fatal and non-fatal shooting victims per 10,000 residents was the highest in West and South Side neighborhoods, where Englewood, Fuller Park, and East Garfield Park “account for a disproportionate share of violence.” From 2015-19, all three neighborhoods had a Black population of over 85%. In addition, the admission rate for Black youth in Illinois detention centers was disproportionately higher compared to white, Asian, and American Indian/Native American populations in 2018. For every 1,000 incarcerations that year, Black youth accounted for 23.5 while white youth accounted for 3.2.

“When Adam Toledo was killed by the Chicago police, the mayor spoke about how we had failed him as a city. In the years since then, young people are in the same conditions with seemingly no efforts being made to increase resources,” said Jamyle Cannon, the founder of The Bloc, a boxing gym based in West Humboldt Park offering free boxing lessons and after-school enrichment for West Side youth.

In 2020, in response to the killings of George Floyd and 13-year-old Adam Toledo by law enforcement, the city issued the Comprehensive Plan to Reduce Violence in Chicago. While the plan provided broad solutions to the problem, such as “expand[ing] supportive programming for youth at highest risk of violence involvement” and “acknowledg[ing] and remedy[ing] past harms between the Chicago Police Department and communities they serve,” critics say Lightfoot’s subsequent ordinances and executive orders take a step back from the plan, disproportionately impacting Black and brown youth in the city.

“A lot of young people are dealing with a high level of trauma,” Cannon said. “They are in places where there is no way to deal with that trauma. When you come up in a space where you can expect someone to be killed within a quarter mile of your home a few times a year, that’s going to affect the way you interact with people.”

In 2021, Lori Lightfoot brought forth the Victims Justice Ordinance, which would allow the city to sue gang members and seize their assets. The ordinance was delayed by the Public Safety Council in February. The ordinance was a confusing and regressive move to many criminal justice advocates in Chicago, considering fatal and non-fatal shootings linked to gangs have been decreasing in Chicago since the mid-2010s.

Gun violence has been a mainstay in Chicago for decades, garnering failed preventive measures by key politicians that ultimately don't address the systems of inequity and racism. Criminal justice advocates worry that enforcement of the new curfew could further traumatize Black and brown youth in the city, opening the door for racial profiling and surveillance, with clear racist undertones of who is allowed in the city's downtown spaces.

“For so long grassroots organizations were underfunded, so now we have a bunch of young people that have just not had the space and the prosocial activities they needed for them to make better choices,” said Wendy Jones, the executive director for the Youth Peace Center for Roseland, a nonprofit providing a variety of services for youth and their families. “We have to provide more resources for them to deal with their traumas in school and outside of school. And we also have to provide support to their families.”

Gun violence is not an isolated problem, but a result of various economic and social variables. In Chicago, fatal and non-fatal shootings are concentrated in disinvested neighborhoods on the West and South Sides, highly surveilled and policed by the Chicago Police Department.

The 1968 Chicago Riots in response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. resulted in the destruction of mostly the West Side and some South Side neighborhoods. In the years after, the city strategically did not rebuild, encouraging blight and economic stagnation in the communities.

“We don't have the conditions to have consistent success in our communities. We have to listen to kids and their wants in interventions that we offer,” Cannon said.



## Sayou Cooper

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