

Statement of

The Honorable Brandon Johnson
Mayor of the City of Chicago

before the

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives

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I have the great privilege and honor of serving as the Mayor of Chicago—the third largest city in the Nation and one of the most ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse cities in the world. Founded by a Black Haitian man and a Pottawattamie woman, Chicago is and always has been a proud city of immigrants. Generations of new arrivals, including the descendants of the enslaved during the Great Migration, have created a vibrant city where one in five residents is foreign-born and many more belong to immigrant communities. Each day, I wake up to serve every one of Chicago’s 77 unique neighborhoods and those who live in this great City.

When I became Mayor, I committed to promoting the safety and wellbeing of all our residents. To that end, my administration has been focused on creating and implementing public safety initiatives that benefit Chicagoans and that protect and support all communities. As a father of three living on the West Side of Chicago, I am as invested as anyone in making our City safer.

The working families of Chicago depend on our administration and the Chicago Police Department to provide a safe and secure city, and I have shown up for them by directing our City’s resources in ways that best achieve those goals.

Public safety is our top priority, and our administration has tackled it head-on. We launched the People’s Plan for Community Safety, a community-led initiative to address historic disinvestment and to work toward healing our communities. A key part of this plan involves building trust between Chicagoans and law enforcement by prioritizing transparency and expanding violence intervention. When I became Mayor, I saw a clear need to address the rising number of robberies. To reverse that trend, I directed the Chicago Police Department to establish a Robbery Task Force, with leaders from multiple police bureaus working together to apprehend offenders. Since that task force was launched last year, robberies have dropped by 25%

citywide. Because we understand that accountability helps reduce crime, we have hired and promoted over 200 detectives, and that increased our crime-clearance rates. And we have invested in equipment and technology—including the first upgrade of police helicopters in nearly two decades—so that Chicago police officers have the tools they need to effectively prevent and fight crime.

Effective crime-fighting also requires addressing the root causes of violence. We have made key investments in that effort, too: increasing access to safe and stable housing by adding almost 4,000 new units; expanding access to healthcare—especially mental healthcare—by opening three new mental health centers; and focusing on getting people, including our youth, well-paying jobs, with more than a 45% increase in youth summer jobs since I took office.

Chicago is a safer city as a result of these initiatives. The City is also safer because of our Welcoming City Ordinance. That law ensures that the City’s police is focused on the City’s law enforcement priorities. For forty years, Chicago has recognized that our policies toward civil immigration matters contribute to preventing and solving crimes, supporting victims, and maintaining public order. Established in 1985 by Mayor Harold Washington, Chicago’s policy was codified in 2006 and has been a part of the City’s law since then, with broad support from Chicagoans and numerous administrations. In 2018, Bruce Rauner, then the Republican Governor of Illinois, signed the TRUST Act, which, among other things, restricts local officials in Illinois from inquiring about a person’s immigration status.

City leaders have understood that fear of deportation would chill effective law enforcement by causing witnesses and victims to avoid cooperating with police, and that the cooperation of all persons, regardless of their immigration status, is essential to achieving the City’s goals of reducing crime, pursuing justice for victims, and promoting safety for all. Put simply, any actions that amplify fears of deportations make Chicago more dangerous.

As law enforcement leadership in Chicago and other cities will tell you, the principles underlying the Welcoming City Ordinance are as valid today as they have been for the past four decades. The Ordinance enables trusting and supportive relationships between local law enforcement and immigrant communities. When that trust is formed, undocumented immigrants come forward to report crimes to local law enforcement and provide information that helps the police solve those crimes. Law-abiding Chicago residents cooperate with local law enforcement because they do not fear that doing so will result in deportation or other negative

immigration consequences for them or their families. And that in turn promotes everyone's safety and brings criminals to justice. This is the key purpose of the Welcoming City Ordinance and similar legislation elsewhere, and it is why leaders of the Chicago Police Department have long supported this policy.

I know that there are myths about laws like ours—that they obstruct federal law or encourage the harboring of criminals. And I am sure we will hear many other mischaracterizations. But we must not let fearmongering obscure the overall trends. Every crime is tragic, but scapegoating entire communities is misleading, unjust, and beneath this body.

Neither the Welcoming City Ordinance nor any of our laws or policies prevent cooperation in criminal law enforcement. Chicago's law enforcement works tirelessly to investigate crime and bring perpetrators—regardless of their immigration status—to justice. They often do so in partnership with federal law enforcement. The Chicago Police Department regularly works with federal authorities on initiatives to get guns off our streets, to disrupt drug trafficking, and to prevent violent crime. Chicago police do not “harbor” criminals; we arrest them, often as a result of laws that allow all residents to feel safe in aiding the police.

Nor does the Welcoming City Ordinance impede or obstruct the federal government's civil immigration enforcement efforts. In Chicago, we follow all laws—federal state, and local. The Ordinance ensures that Chicago's law enforcement resources are devoted to City priorities, especially public safety. The law recognizes that we cannot fight crime effectively without the trust and cooperation of our immigrant communities. We have followed that approach for decades, and we will not abandon our laws now, especially in the face of gross mischaracterizations and disinformation.

The challenges that Chicago confronts are not unique, nor are they theoretical. Because of the efforts by others to politicize our Nation's immigration issues, we faced a crisis when I first arrived in office. Over 50,000 asylum seekers arrived in Chicago without coordination or care, with no thought for the humanity of those impacted, and without food, a place to go, or clothes to weather a Chicago winter. It was immediately apparent that the situation was not just a humanitarian issue, but one that would quickly become a public safety crisis if we did not find the means to provide for the basic needs of these individuals, thousands of whom were sheltering in police district stations and at our City's airports.

Many of those new arrivals were sent to Chicago for reasons that were performative rather than practical. But creating a problem and then complaining about it is not governing; it is grandstanding. We responded to those cruel stunts in a way that protected our residents and adhered to Chicago's values. We provided basic necessities to the best of our abilities, including food, temporary emergency shelter, and urgent medical care. And in the interest of public safety, my administration was the first to implement a bus safety ordinance that allowed us to manage orderly and safe intake of new arrivals to Chicago.

I recognize the public safety challenges that face Chicago, and the ongoing need to ensure a safe environment for all Chicagoans, one in which working people can thrive. We have more work to do, but we have made great strides. Violent crime is down in Chicago, and the City ended 2024 with its lowest homicide rate in five years. Our efforts to improve public safety by building trust with our communities, instead of by having Chicago police officers double as federal agents, are working.

I am proud to show up for Chicago and our residents to explain to this Committee what we are doing to keep our communities safe, and why the City's policies, adopted by local elected leaders, further those goals.

We also need Congress to do its part. That means Congress should pass long-overdue, comprehensive immigration reform. Congress should also support the programs that we know can help address the root causes of violence. I look forward to working with Congress and any willing partners in federal, state, and local governments on these important issues.