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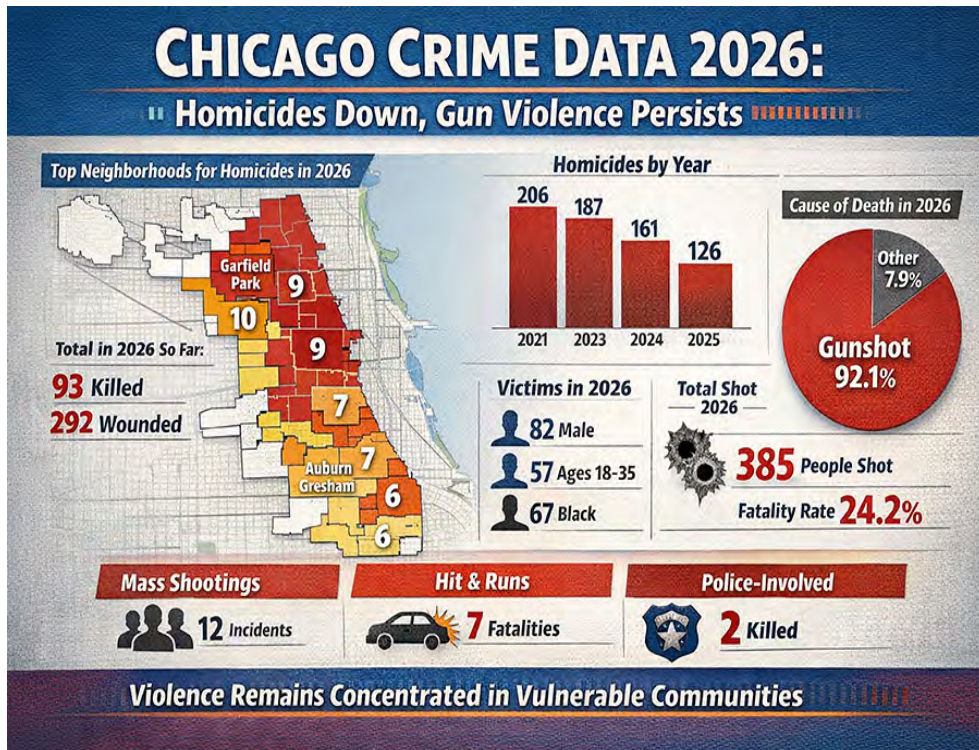
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Week of April 15, 2026

Chicago Sees Continued Decline in Homicides, But Gun Violence Remains Persistent



New data from early 2026 shows a continued decline in homicides across Chicago compared to previous years, offering a mixed picture of progress and ongoing challenges as gun violence remains a major concern in many neighborhoods.

As of mid-April 2026, several communities continue to bear the brunt of violence. Garfield Park leads the city with 10 homicides, followed closely by Austin with 9. Other neighborhoods experiencing elevated levels of violence include Auburn Gresham (7), South Shore (7), and Roseland (6). Meanwhile, areas such as North Lawndale and Grand Crossing have each recorded 4 homicides so far this year.

Citywide, 2026 is showing a downward trend in homicides compared to recent years.

Through the current reporting period, Chicago has recorded 126 homicides in 2025, down from 161 in 2024 and significantly lower than the 206 reported in 2021. The decline suggests progress in violence reduction efforts, though the numbers remain high compared to pre-2020 levels.

Gun violence continues to dominate as the primary cause of death. Of the 93 homicides recorded in 2026 so far, more than 92% were caused by gunshots. Other causes, including stabbings, trauma, arson, and strangulation, account for a small fraction of cases.

Data also reveals disparities in who is most affected. Men represent the overwhelming majority of victims, accounting for 82 of those killed and 247 wounded. Young

See Violence page 6

Graphic of recent Chicago Crime Data on gun violence so far, for 2026

Chicago's Cannabis (Marijuana) Laws: What Residents and Visitors Need to Know in 2026

By Isaac Lewis



Marijuana growing plant

Chicago's Cannabis Laws: What Residents and Visitors Need to Know in 2026

Since the legalization of recreational cannabis under the Cannabis Regulation and

Tax Act, adults age 21 and older in Chicago have been allowed to legally purchase and possess marijuana. The law, which took effect on

January 1, 2020, marked a major shift in Illinois policy—moving from decriminalization toward a regulated legal market.

Legal Possession Limits Illinois residents can legally possess:

- Up to 30 grams of cannabis flower
- 5 grams of cannabis concentrate
- 500 milligrams of THC in edibles

For visitors from out of state, the limits are cut in half:

- 15 grams of flower
- 2.5 grams of concentrate
- 250 milligrams of THC

Possession beyond these limits can still result in criminal charges, ranging from misdemeanors to felonies depending on the amount.

Where Cannabis Use Is Allowed—and Where It's Not

While legalization allows for personal use, restrictions remain strict on where See Marijuana page 5

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Visit us on our website at www.nlcn.org for more articles, photos, information and more.

Death of Barbara Deer, wife of the late Cook County Commissioner Dennis Deer, and their son Kaleb, sends shockwaves through Chicago as leaders call for prayer, awareness, and action

By Isaac Lewis



Barbara Deer, a respected Chicago Public Schools speech-language pathologist and community advocate, is remembered by residents and leaders across Chicago as the community mourns an unimaginable loss, and calls for healing.

Chicago — A heartbreaking act of violence has shaken communities across Chicago following confirmed reports that the wife of the late Cook County Commissioner Dennis Deer was fatally shot—allegedly by her own son.

According to multiple Chicago news outlets, the victim, Barbara Deer, was killed in an incident that has left both investigators and residents searching for answers. Authorities report that her son, identified in early coverage as Kaleb Deer, is accused in the fatal shooting. Details surrounding the circumstances, including motive and events leading up to the tragedy, remain under active investigation.

Barbara Deer was widely respected for her work as a Chicago Public Schools speech-language pathologist, Executive Director of Juneteenth Illinois, and her commitment to uplifting youth and families. Beyond her profession, she was known as a community builder and advocate for Black history, healing, and empowerment.

In a statement shared by community members and supporters, the depth of the loss was clear:

“We mourn the heart-breaking loss of Barbara Deer and her son, Kaleb. Barbara was a dedicated CPS speech-language pathologist, a community builder, and a champion for Black history and healing. Her impact lives



Kaleb Deer

on in the students, families, and communities she served. We hold the Deer family and all who loved her in our hearts.”

Community Leaders Respond

Local elected officials expressed deep sorrow while also calling for reflection and action.

Chris Taliaferro shared the emotional toll of the tragedy: “It’s just a tragic loss. We were already grieving the loss of our dear friend and colleague, Commissioner Deer. Now, hearing of the loss of his wife and son—it really breaks my heart. I will continue to pray for the family, for his daughter and his other son, and lift them up in my prayers every single day.”

Emma Mitts emphasized both grief and the need for deeper community awareness: “Oh my God, this is still heart aching and heartbreaking. It takes me back to prayer. My prayers are with the family—but we also have to put action behind our words.”

Mitts noted that West Side leaders are planning to come together in response: “I’ll be meeting with West Side elected officials to talk about what we can do. We’re hurting—but we also have to ask, how can we help?”

She also pointed to the broader lesson for families and communities: “Let’s pay a little more attention to our loved ones and what they’re going through. You just don’t know what someone is dealing with. We can’t move too fast and miss what’s happening right in front of us.”

Calls for Healing and Support

Community voices extended beyond elected officials. Nikki

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Harvey offered condolences on behalf of congressional staff:

“It is with heartfelt love and admiration that I extend my deepest condolences to the Deer family during this time of bereavement. Please know that I am praying with you as I also keep you lifted in prayer while standing with you during this difficult time.”

A Community Searching for Answers

As news spread, residents across Austin, North Lawndale, and surrounding neighborhoods expressed grief and disbelief. Many described the tragedy as a painful reminder of the hidden struggles families may face—and the urgent need for stronger mental health support and violence prevention.

The case continues to raise difficult questions about grief, trauma, and the importance of paying closer attention to warning signs within families and communities.

Law enforcement officials have not yet released full details as the investigation remains ongoing.

As Chicago mourns, the legacy of Barbara Deer stands in sharp contrast to the tragedy of her death—a life rooted in service, compassion, and community impact.

The Austin Voice Newspaper will continue to follow this developing story.

Kaleb Deer is at the center of a tragedy that has left a community grieving and searching for understanding. Those who knew of his journey describe a young man who did many things right—succeeding in school, attending college,

and working toward a future—yet still carried unseen burdens.

Leaders like Illinois State Lakesia Collins (5th District) say the moment underscores a deeper reality: where many young Black men silently bear emotional weight while continuing to push forward. The tragedy, they say, is a call to action—to normalize mental health support, encourage open conversations, and ensure that seeking help is seen not as weakness, but as an essential part of well-being and healing.

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The Board of Directors, staff, and extended stakeholders of Strategic Human Services and North Lawndale Community News extend our deepest and most heartfelt condolences to the family, friends, and loved ones of Barbara and Kaleb Deer during this time of profound loss.

We are deeply saddened by this tragedy, which has left a lasting impact not only on those who knew and loved them personally, but on the broader community they were a part of and served. Moments like these remind us of the fragility of life and the importance of coming together in compassion, reflection, and unity.

Barbara Deer and Kaleb Deer's lives mattered, and their presence will be remembered. We stand in solidarity with their family as they navigate this unimaginable grief, and we join the community in honoring their memory.

When we thought of them in life, it was always with a bright future. We knew as they worked on their personal lives, a major part of them worked on improving the community. It is part of the legacy of the Deer family, including former Cook County Board Commissioner (2nd District), Dr. Dennis Deer, the husband of Barbara and the father of Kaleb. Dr. Deer was a boardmember of Strategic Human Services and the North Lawndale Community News until his passing in June of 2024. Dr. Deer and his mother, Shirley Deer each having their own honorary streets renamed after them. This represented the work they put into the community. They instilled hope, peace, and good thoughts.

In times of sorrow, we must also reaffirm our commitment to supporting one another, strengthening our communities, and working towards a future where such tragedies are far too rare.

May their legacy live on, and may their loved ones find comfort, strength, and peace in the coming days ahead.

With deepest sympathy,

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Violence from front page

adults between the ages of 18 and 35 are the most impacted age group, with 57 fatalities and 164 injuries. Teens have also been significantly affected, with 6 killed and 27 wounded.

Racial disparities persist as well. Black residents account for the majority of victims, with 67 killed and 197 wounded, followed by Hispanic residents with 28 killed and 63 wounded.

Despite the drop in homicides,

the overall number of people shot remains high. As of March 31, 2026, a total of 385 people have been shot, including 93 fatalities. This is slightly higher than the same period in 2025, which saw 373 total shooting victims.

The city's fatality rate — the percentage of shooting victims who die — stands at 24.2% in 2026, a slight increase from 24.4% in 2025 and notably higher than rates seen earlier in the decade.

Other forms of violence and public safety concerns continue to impact residents. Hit-and-run incidents have

resulted in 7 fatalities and 57 serious injuries so far this year, while police-involved shootings remain relatively low, with 2 fatalities and 1 injury reported.

Mass shootings — defined by police as incidents involving three or more victims — have also occurred in 2026, including one incident where four people were shot and at least a dozen additional multi-victim shootings.

While officials point to declining homicide totals as a sign of progress, community

advocates stress that the persistence of shootings and concentrated violence in specific neighborhoods highlights the need for sustained investment in prevention, intervention, and economic development.

As Chicago moves further into 2026, the data underscores a complex reality: fewer lives are being lost compared to previous years, but the underlying conditions driving violence remain deeply entrenched in many communities.



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The North Lawndale Community News

The North Lawndale Community News is published weekly by Strategic Human Services. Our purpose is to help inform the communities we serve on resources, events, and issues relevant to them. Our community includes those who live, work, worship in, and/or care about North Lawndale and its neighboring communities. Our focus is on positive, productive solutions, that will improve the lifestyle of community members.

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West Side Postal Workers Mourn Loss of Beloved Letter Carrier Brandy Fleming

by Photojournalist Chevette M. Conley



Postal worker letter carriers of the The Otis Grant Collins Station located at 23rd and Pulaski gathered together to mourn the loss of one of their own Brandy Fleming who was shot and killed in an alley, March 13 of this year.



Brandy Fleming

The United States Postal Service employs more than 800,000 letter carriers nationwide—workers who often go unnoticed despite the essential role they play in communities every day. For those who carry the mail, the job becomes more than a routine—it becomes a relationship. Letter carriers build bonds with the residents they serve, exchanging daily greetings, checking in on familiar faces, and becoming a trusted presence on their routes. In many neighborhoods, their absence is deeply felt.

But behind that service is a job filled with challenges. Carriers brave harsh weather, insects, aggressive dogs, and at times, dangerous or unpredictable human encounters. Despite these risks, they continue to show up, committed to their communities. On March 13, 2026, that commitment was tragically cut short.

The Otis Grant Collins Station, located on Chicago's West Side, lost one of its own.

Twenty-nine-year-old Brandy Margaret Fleming, a dedicated letter carrier, was murdered—shot and left in an alley. While the tragedy made headlines, her role as a postal worker was not widely reported due to the ongoing investigation. For her co-workers, the loss was devastating.

In response, the carriers at the Otis Grant Collins Station came together to honor Brandy's life with a heartfelt balloon release ceremony. The gathering brought together colleagues, family, and loved ones in a moment of remembrance and unity. The ceremony opened with a prayer led by Chevette Conley. As balloons filled the sky, there was both sorrow and celebration—a reflection of a life that touched many. Brandy's aunt, sister, father, and her 5-year-old son were in attendance.

In a moment that brought both laughter and tears, her aunt shared, "Brandy is probably watching over us saying, 'Y'all doing too much.'" The crowd smiled, remembering her quiet yet warm spirit. Those who worked alongside Brandy described her as a sweet, reserved young woman and a dedicated employee. Though many may not have known the full extent of what she carried personally, they knew her as a hard-working and dependable colleague.

Many of her fellow carriers attended her funeral services, where words of comfort and faith were shared. Station manager Diane Freeman offered encouragement to the family, delivering a message rooted in scripture. Representatives from the National Association of Letter Carriers also extended support and formal resolutions in her honor.

Family and friends wore yellow and

white—colors that reflected Brandy's bright personality and love for life. The service included music, heartfelt reflections, and tributes from those closest to her. Born on February 10, 1997, in Chicago at St. Anthony Hospital, Brandy built her life around hard work and ambition. She previously worked at Menards before joining the Postal Service, where she faithfully served her community for three years.

Brandy had dreams beyond her route. She aspired to continue her education in criminal justice and hoped to one day become a crime scene investigator. She leaves behind her son, Davion Temple; her mother, Lavon Whitley of Chicago; her father, Robert Fleming of Minneapolis, Minnesota; siblings, extended family, and a large network of friends and fellow postal workers who considered her family.

In a final tribute, her fellow carriers organized a "last ride" procession. Postal vehicles lined the streets, forming a caravan that circled the church as horns sounded in unison. As an all-female group of pallbearers carried Brandy's casket, the sun shone brightly—fitting for someone who loved the color yellow.

Brandy Fleming's life was one of quiet strength, dedication, and promise. Her loss is deeply felt—not only by her family, but by the community she served each day. She will not be forgotten. May she rest in peace.

And as we remember Brandy, let us also remember the men and women who continue to serve as letter carriers—often underappreciated, yet vital to the fabric of our communities. Keep them in your prayers.

Marijuana from front page

cannabis can be consumed.

Consumption is permitted:

- Inside a private residence
- On private property (with owner permission)
- At licensed cannabis consumption lounges

However, it is illegal to use cannabis in public spaces, including:

- Streets, sidewalks, and parks
- Areas near dispensaries
- Public transit such as buses and trains operated by the Chicago Transit Authority
- High-traffic public destinations like Millennium Park

Violations for public consumption can result in fines and other legal penalties.

Rules for Vehicles and Transportation

Cannabis use in vehicles—whether moving or parked—is strictly prohibited. When transporting cannabis, it must be stored in a sealed, odor-proof, and child-resistant container.

Additionally, transporting cannabis across state lines remains illegal under federal law, even if traveling between states where marijuana is legal.

Purchasing Regulations

Cannabis can only be purchased legally from state-licensed dispensaries. In Chicago, these businesses typically operate between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., offering regulated products that meet safety and labeling requirements.

Property Rights Still Apply

Even though cannabis is legal, landlords and property owners retain the right to ban its use on their premises. Renters are encouraged to review lease agreements to avoid potential violations.

Ongoing Impact

The legalization of recreational marijuana has brought both economic opportunities and regulatory challenges to Chicago. While the city has embraced a growing cannabis industry, officials continue to stress responsible use and adherence to the law.

As cannabis becomes more normalized, understanding the rules remains critical for both residents and visitors navigating Chicago's evolving legal landscape.

Black Holocaust Remembrance Day 2026

By Professor Zaki Amir, our Washington DC based Journalist



International attendees of the Commemoration of Black Holocaust Remembrance Day 2026 held Saturday April 11th at Joe's Emporium 3309 Bunker Hill Rd. Mt. Rainer, Maryland

Joe's Emporium 3309 Bunker Hill Rd. Mt. Rainer, Maryland was again the place to be for the Commemoration of Black Holocaust Remembrance Day 2026 held Saturday April 11th. "Which Path Will You Choose" is an especially poignant question which must be answered by the man depicted in the flyer?

First up in the program was Attorney Marylin Pierre who is of Haitian descent. She expanded on her presentation of 2025 by highlighting even more, the unmitigated gall France imposed on Haiti following their defeat at the hands of the enslaved population who threw off colonialism.

She outlined how it took Haiti 122 years to pay her enslavers the 150 million francs she demanded at gunpoint for the loss of her empire. Enlisting the use of a powerful video with the link below, she showed to the audience, she substantiated her disdain, contempt and outright abhorrence with the entire way her country was made to suffer at the hands of their colonial master because they became free and independent of her.

Two outstanding themes were revealed which should be reiterated to those who speak of Haiti. First, it is not the Poorest Country in the Western Hemisphere but is "The First Black Republic"! And it is this pride of the overthrow of the French which caused her to recite a poem exposing the stereotypes of how a Haitian person is seen and heard.

Second, she transitioned into the current fight for "Reparations" Haiti is involved with France for recovery of the "Blood Money" received for their domination and control of the land along with the destruction of her people.

Captain Mecca Shabazz again performed as an "Ancestor" who was totally victimized by her captors as a slave. Her depth of how she was treated allowed everyone to feel the hopelessness which slavery was meant to instill in our fore parents but did not take root; for we here today addressing the damages done to them. Charlotte as the character is named did not succumb to the absolute control over her life one would expect for a woman who was beaten raped and treated with contempt. She showed admirable dignity and poise and above all resistance as she carried her wash out and talked to the audience about her life on the slave plantation.

Minister Najee Muhammad was next on the program and introduced by Min. Ishmael Al-Islam the "Master of Ceremonies" told the audience they were going to hear information in "The Crossroads of Humanity" which he hoped would be shared with their families and other Afrodescendants.

The lecture chosen for the 2026 Black Holocaust Remembrance Day Commemoration was inspired by a letter written by Messenger Elijah Muhammad (peace be upon him) to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. which he shared using a projected image of it for the audience to follow along.

Taking the letter and proving the goal of our independence as a people was the same thing in the minds of both our beloved Messenger and Dr. King was his beginning.

He followed by taking us to the time of slavery noting the mother of Fredrick Douglass had to walk 12 miles in the hot sun after doing field work to see him and 12 miles in the darkness of night back to her plantation just to comfort him because he lived on another plantation.

The Dred Scott decision was shared with the audience which shows the contempt of the American government which in no uncertain terms let the world know the "Negroes" who were slaves were not on the same level as the whites who were citizens.

He revealed the depth of depravity of slavery and spoke on how the slave master would sell his own children born from forced mixed breeding and rape. In addition, he talked about the slave auction, the book 100 years of lynching and how our fore parents were burned at the stake while whites would eat popcorn like it was entertainment.

John Brown was mentioned as a white man who gave his life and of his family's life for the freedom of us and Ms. Ida Hakim who is following in the great Abolitionist Tradition by continuing to fight for "Reparations."

Most exciting was his explanation of how Master Fard Muhammad had a "Vision" of a government for us and Messenger Elijah Muhammad was teaching us of it but had to cover it as a religion. He also told of how the "Good News" is of the government which was in the mind and upon the shoulders of Master Fard Muhammad as written in Isaiah 9:6.

Minister Naajee urged us to understand now and not be like the Afrodescendant Man caught in an indecisive moment with his hands on his hips not knowing which path to choose. He spoke about how the Honorable Silis Muhammad is on the "Right Path" and we must choose God or the devil, was his final take before turning the rostrum over to the "Conductor" of the reparation's movement Attorney Malik Z. Shabazz.

With words of reassurance, Attorney Shabazz talked about how he was committed to working with the Honorable Silis Muhammad and how we are not far from realizing the goal of which our ancestors dreamed, which is full and complete reparations and a land we can call our own away from America.

How the U. S. and France Made Haiti Poor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2kbliq8AUc&t=202s>

<https://repaircampaign.org/reparations-today/the-haitian-national-committee-on-restitutions-and-reparations-proposal-to-the-permanent-forum-of-people-of-african-descent>

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<https://ww.change.org/p/restitution-%C3%AO-ha%C3%AFTi-de-la-ran%A7on-pay%C3%9e-%C3%AO-la-france-pour-la-reconnaissance-del-ind%C3%A9pendance>

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