

2025 Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Annual Report

A report to the Illinois Governor and General Assembly

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Introduction

The Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women was created on June 10, 2022. This Task Force's creation was a result of the Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Act, which sought to address the rising rates of violence against women in Chicago and went into effect on January 1st, 2023. This act requires the Task Force to conduct the following duties:

- Elect a chair and vice-chair from its members
- Convene at least quarterly
- Issue its first report on or before December 31, 2024
- Issue a report every subsequent year on or before December 31st (20 ILCS 4119/10)

As stated in the Act, each Annual Report will address one or more of the following five focus areas:

- Systemic causes behind violence that Chicago women and girls experience, including patterns and underlying factors that explain why disproportionately high levels of violence occur against Chicago women and girls, including underlying historical, social, economic, institutional, and cultural factors that may contribute to the violence.
- Appropriate methods for tracking and collecting data on violence against Chicago women and girls, including data on missing and murdered Chicago women and girls.
- Policies and institutions such as policing, child welfare, medical examiner practices, and other government practices that impact violence against Chicago women and girls, and the investigation and prosecution of crimes of gender-related violence against Chicago residents.
- Measures necessary to address and reduce violence against Chicago women and girls.
- Measures to help victims, victims' families, and victims' communities prevent and heal from violence that occurs against Chicago women and girls. (20 ILCS 4119/10-f)

The Task Force first assembled on May 23, 2023 and published their first report for 2023-2024 in January of 2025. This report established why the Task Force was created, along with the need for addressing the concerning rates of violence against women in Chicago. The report also highlighted presentations on each of the focus areas listed above. Based on these presentations, the Task Force put forward the following recommendations:

1. Increase legislative support and funding for missing persons investigations.

2. Establish a dedicated missing persons unit within the Chicago Police Department.
3. For law enforcement agencies currently using paper forms for missing persons reports, transition to an electronic or digital format.
4. Enforce existing reporting requirements to ensure missing persons data is entered into required systems within the mandated timeframes.
5. Amend the Missing Persons Identification Act to clarify reporting requirements, including making National Missing and Unidentified Persons System and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reporting both mandatory and timely.
6. Develop standardized written procedures and protocols for missing persons case reviews and case follow-ups and notify missing persons' loved one these procedures and protocols.
7. Establish statewide use of screening tools to identify cases of human trafficking.
8. Allocate funding for gender-based violence services, particularly those focused on human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault to protect women and girls at risk of becoming homicide or missing persons victims and to support their healing from violence.

For this report, the Task Force decided to focus on the current state of initiatives from government agencies, organizations, and ad hoc committees that focus on women and girls impacted by violence and to understand the lived experiences of community members.¹

¹ Note on language and scope: The Task Force's work centers on violence affecting women and girls in Chicago, as defined in the authorizing legislation. Consistent with ICJIA's Person-First Language Policy, this report uses inclusive language to recognize that gender-based violence also impacts transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive people. References to "women and girls" reflect the terminology used in state statute, while demographic data are presented according to the categories collected and reported by participating agencies.

Background

Membership

The Task Force consists of 18 members (Table 1), representing a variety of disciplines and perspectives. Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter served as Task Force Chair, and Chicago Missing Persons Guild co-founder, Mandy Sark, served as Vice-Chair.

Table 1

Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Membership List

Field	Name	Organization	Required
Victim Service Organization	Verda Bhatti	Between Friends	Yes
House of Representative Member	Representative Kambium Buckner	Illinois State House	Yes
Legal Service Organization	Margaret Duval	Ascend Justice	Yes
Legal Services Organization	Jennifer Greene	Life Span	Yes
House of Representatives Member	Representative Jackie Haas	Illinois State House	Yes
Healthcare	Adebola Hassan	Maternal & Child Health, Office of Women's Health and Family Services, Illinois Department of Public Health	Yes
Senate Member	Senator Mattie Hunter	Illinois State Senate	Yes
Illinois State Police Office	Major Abigail Keller	Illinois State Police	Yes
Illinois Chiefs of Police Association	Thomas Lemmer	Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police	Yes
Senate Member	Senator Seth Lewis	Illinois State Senate	Yes
Cook County Medical Examiner	Rebeca Perrone	Cook County Medical Examiner	Yes

Field	Name	Organization	Required
Victims' Representative	Mandy M. Sark	Chicago Missing Persons Guild	Yes
Victims' Representative	Scheherazade Tilley	A Long Walk Home	Yes
Women's Health Organization	Cristina Villarreal	Planned Parenthood of Illinois	Yes
Circuit Court	Diane Walsh	Office of the Chief Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County	Yes
Statewide Sexual Assault Organization	Carrie Ward	Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault	Yes

Monthly discussion-based meetings were held, often including invited speakers. The Task Force met on the second Monday of every month (except March), as follows:

- January 13th, 2025
- February 10th, 2025
- April 14th, 2025
- May 12th, 2025
- June 9th, 2025
- July 14th, 2025
- August 11th, 2025
- September 15th, 2025
- October 13th, 2025
- November 10th, 2025
- December 8th, 2025

Findings

The Task Force invited presenters from government agencies, statewide committees, and community-based organizations to describe the current state of services for women and girls affected by violence in Chicago.

Data Collection from Government Agency and Ad Hoc Committee

Dr. Ponni Arunkumar and Rebeca Perrone from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office presented information on data collection within female homicide cases. Specifically, they reviewed characteristics of female homicide victims from a 2024 study that systematically analyzed their Office's digital data between January 2017 and January 2022. According to the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, 72.95% of homicide victims whose sex was recorded as female were Black; the data did not include information on gender identity. Additionally, 80% of homicides were due to gunshot wounds, and the reasons for most of the homicides were unknown. However, the depth of the analysis was limited due to data tracking and funding issues. As Arunkumar and Perrone noted, some additional data could strengthen the analysis, such as results of DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy. But this would require additional funding for more services, which would support family contributions as well as data collection. Additionally, the demographic of gender was limited to only male and female. Task Force members noted that current data measures did not include inclusive gender categories for nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and transgender people. Members also highlighted that the data did not capture pregnancy or maternal status. Arunkumar and Perrone noted that the Medical Examiner's Office did have data on pregnancy status, but it was not included in this analysis. These omissions of demographic data limited the ability to report on the intersectional identities of female homicide victims. Similarly, cross-tabulation of demographics was not performed, compounding limitations on reporting about intersectional identities. Finally, Arunkumar and Perrone rounded out their presentation by highlighting awareness efforts conducted by the Medical Examiner's Office, like Missing Persons Day. This is an event hosted by the Medical Examiner's Office that connects community members to resources like counseling and provides assistance in entering information into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUS).

Next, Sara Block and Andrea Wilson presented on the Domestic Violence Ad Hoc Committee (DVFRC), which is an ad hoc committee of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority Board. Largely, the committee serves as a statewide resource for addressing domestic violence-related fatalities, near-fatalities, and other forms of abuse connected to domestic violence. The Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Act (750 ILCS 62/1) created the two-tiered structure of committee, consisting of a regional review teams and a statewide committee. The regional review teams, formulated from the boundaries of the Illinois circuit courts, examine local domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities. Their analyses of these reviewed cases are then brought to the statewide

committee. These analyses inform recommendations from the statewide committee to improve coordination, systemic response, and prevention initiatives across the state.

Like the Medical Examiner's Office, inconsistent data storage and data measures restrict the regional review teams and the statewide committee's abilities, due to limiting the ability to understand the extent of domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities. Due to this, the task force emphasized the importance of consistently collected data so that the DVFRC could better understand the circumstances of fatalities and near-fatalities.

Community Based Services

One community initiative, Life Span, specializes in linking missing and murdered women and girls and human trafficking. Jennifer Greene from Life Span presented on the legal definitions of human trafficking, sex trafficking, coercion, and highlighted how some trafficked women and girls may be a part of missing and murdered cases. However, the prevalence of this connection is unknown due to cases often going unreported or unrecognized. Greene advocated for more research to better understand the role that coercion and human trafficking play in missing and murdered cases in Chicago.

Shifting the focus to fatal domestic violence cases in Chicago, Shelby Hoffman Binder from The Network similarly defined key terms, now those related to domestic violence and intimate partner-related violence. She highlighted national data on fatal domestic violence and intimate partner violence, stating that firearm usage makes up about 66% of intimate partner homicides. Hoffman Binder shared the city of Chicago's violence reduction dashboard, which highlights violent crime data trends in Chicago, and the Illinois Department of Public Health's Illinois Violent Death Dashboard, which includes an intimate partner problem-related section. As with other agencies discussed here, Hoffman Binder highlighted that barriers to reporting domestic violence make it difficult to understand the prevalence of domestic violence within Illinois. Specifically, a lack of uniform demographic data collection on fatal domestic violence cases has resulted in limited knowledge of the prevalence of LGBTQIA+ domestic violence in Illinois.

AJ Banks, from the Chicago Women's Health Center, reported on the organization's diverse services, including gynecological and reproductive health, counseling, health services for transgender clients, and health education programs, all on a sliding scale. The Center operates from a client-centered model of care, with Banks emphasizing the importance of affirming their clients' lived experiences and identities while taking a person-centered approach to care and treatment. The Chicago Women's Health Center also prioritizes inclusion of transgender women and gender expansive clients, given that LGBTQIA+ people experience high rates of fatal and non-fatal violent crime when compared to cisgender people.

Another community-based organization offering services to people in Chicago experiencing violence or human trafficking is the Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan

Family Services. Loren Gutierrez and Alex Johnson highlighted its range of services. For clients currently experiencing domestic violence, it offers civil orders of protection, housing, and immigration support. To support community members, it provides visa support, civil litigation, and case management services. The Legal Aid Society partners with programs like Communities Partnering 4 Peace, which focuses on community violence intervention to achieve a reduction in gun violence, to provide services to program participants at anti-violence organizations to reduce community-level violence. Gutierrez and Johnson emphasized the importance of survivor-centered services and advocated for survivor-centered laws, policies, and interventions. They also highlighted that ineffective violence reporting and access to resources are significant barriers to community members obtaining the necessary services and resources. To overcome these barriers, Gutierrez and Johnson suggested timely and accurate collection of violence data.

Lastly, the task force invited Brenda Myers Powell, who is the founder of the Dreamcatcher Foundation and the Ernestine's Daughter organization, to offer her expertise as a survivor of sex trafficking. Myers Powell emphasized the importance of understanding survivors' needs and experiences and meeting their safety and security needs by offering nonjudgmental spaces to eat, rest, and seek support. She pointed to a concerning post-COVID-19 trend, in which she had observed an increase in the number of suburban women being trafficked and an increase in gang-related trafficking. Myers Powell also reported that the participants in her programs often describe experiencing street harassment, attempted abductions, or online recruitment for trafficking. Overall, Myers Powell highlighted the importance of programming that empowers participants by allowing them to be active participants in their care.

Recommendations

Based on the critical information gathered from the presentations, the Task Force makes the following five recommendations.

Recommendation #1: The Cook County Medical Examiner's Office should expand data analysis by including pregnancy status, sex assigned at birth, and gender identity variables, when available, and by examining sub-populations with intersecting identities.

Analyses from the Medical Examiner's Office should include the following information when possible:

- Pregnancy status
- Sex assigned at birth, specifically labeled as such
- Gender, inclusive of all gender identities, including transgender and gender non-conforming people

The Task Force recommends that analyses conducted by the Medical Examiner's Office should be updated to include additional demographic information for a deeper understanding of missing and murdered women and girls' cases. All demographic information should be cross-tabulated with outcome measures so that differences within intersectional identities can be best captured and analyzed. Finally, the Task Force recommends that all data should be entered as efficiently as possible to ensure up-to-date records. These additional fields and updated analyses will ensure that the full depth of homicides in Cook County is understood. This update would allow government officials to have access to accurate homicide data that offers a comprehensive understanding of the demographics that make up missing and murdered women and girls' cases.

Recommendation #2: Conduct research on the intersection between gender-based violence and missing and murdered women and girls

Additional research is needed to understand the disparities and disproportionality of violence experienced among the populations of women and girls in Chicago.

Specifically, research should focus on, but not be limited to:

- The link between human trafficking and missing and murdered women
- Women who experience human trafficking, domestic violence, and/or sexual assault and who also go missing and/or are murdered
- Cases of coercion for human trafficking that led to missing and/or murdered cases

This proposed recommendation can help by better identifying effective strategies to prevent and respond to missing and murdered women and girls' cases in those communities.

Recommendation #3: Increase public awareness of rights and resources for families of missing and murdered individuals

Throughout the presentations, the task force learned about various resources available to members of the public, like Missing Persons Day hosted by the Medical Examiner's Office. Given that many community members are not aware of the resources that exist in Chicago, government officials should increase public awareness efforts. These increased efforts should help families of missing and murdered individuals better understand their rights and the services and resources are available to them.

Awareness efforts should also apprise families of the reporting systems they can use to submit missing persons information and resources for reporting grievances about or misconduct from government agencies, if present.

Recommendation #4: Community-based organizations should review and update policies, as necessary and appropriate, to reflect a commitment to gender-inclusive and survivor-centered service

Community-based organizations serving victims, survivors, and families of missing individuals need to update policies, procedures, and services to be gender-inclusive and survivor-centered, when appropriate for the services offered. This update would reflect the vast number of people experiencing violence and human trafficking, along with allow clients to be active members in their care.

Research has shown that people who are transgender and gender nonconforming experience high rates of domestic violence (Peitzmeier et al., 2020). Specifically, when compared to their cisgender peers, transgender people are 1.7 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence (either physical or sexual), 2.2 times more likely to experience physical intimate partner violence, and 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual intimate partner violence (Peitzmeier, et al., 2020). Also, 54% of transgender and non-binary people have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes (James et al., 2016). This is compounded by many transgender people reporting discrimination in medical settings (Kattari et al., 2020) which further compounds the harm they experience by worsening their mental and physical health (Smith & Norris, 2025).

Presentations by community-based organizations demonstrated that it is of the utmost importance that people receiving services have the option to direct their care. This helps to ensure survivors and their loved ones have access to necessary resources and support.

Recommendation #5: Allocate additional funding to government agencies and community-based organizations to address risk factors that lead to missing and murdered cases

Additional government funding needs to be allocated toward understanding the extent to which risk factors like poverty or human trafficking contribute to women going missing and getting murdered and directed toward services for addressing these factors,

research needs to be funded as do government agencies or community-based organizations that can provide meaningful and relevant prevention, intervention, and response services. Additionally, recipients of funding should be empowered to collect and have access to accurate, timely, and up-to-date data to inform their efforts.

Conclusion

The task force focused on a government initiative, ad hoc committee, and community-based organizations as a part of their legislative duties to understand appropriate methods for tracking and collecting data on violence and institutions that impact violence against Chicago women and girls. Due to this, the Task Force recommends improving data collection and analyses for the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, conducting additional research on gender-based violence, increasing public awareness of rights and resources, updating community services policies and practices to be gender-inclusive and survivor-centered, and allocating additional funding to government and community services. These recommendations aim to address existing challenges, prevent future harm, and expand upon existing knowledge. By implementing these recommendations, Chicago and Illinois can take meaningful steps to address high rates of gender-based violence and incidences of missing and murdered women and girls.

In 2026, the Task Force will continue to meet and examine the five priority areas outlined in the legislation. Additionally, Task Force members highlighted that future meetings should focus on exploring topics discussed during public comment, like implementation of water safety measures (like cell phone charging stations near bodies of water, life vests and safety rings near water, and potential use of canine units in missing persons investigations near bodies of water), Amber and Ashanti Alert usage, action plans for months with high violence rates, and primary prevention programming. Task force members also discussed that future meetings should expand upon of previous recommendations, like understanding current Chicago Police Department policies and procedures for missing and murdered persons cases and the creation of a missing persons unit within the Chicago Police Department.

References

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- Peitzmeier, S. M., Malik, M., Kattari, S. K., Marrow, E., Stephenson, R., Agénor, M., & Reisner, S. L. (2020). Intimate partner violence in transgender populations: Systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence and correlates. *American Journal of Public Health, 110*(9). <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305774>
- Smith, C., & Norris, H. (2025). *The LGBTQI+ community reported high rates of discrimination in 2024*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-lgbtqi-community-reported-high-rates-of-discrimination-in-2024/>

Appendix A

Task Force Member Provided Resources

National	National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)	Website: https://namus.nij.ojp.gov/
	Black & Missing Foundation	Website: https://www.blackandmissinginc.com/report/ Phone: 877-97-BAMFI (877-972-2634)
	*National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)	Website: https://www.missingkids.org/home 24-Hour Hotline: 800-843-5678
	*Polly Klaas Foundation	Website: https://www.pollyklaas.org/ Phone: 800-587-HELP (800-587-4357)
Illinois	Missing Persons Awareness Network NFP	Website: https://www.missinginillinois.org/missing-in-illinois Phone: 312-620-0788
Chicago	Chicago Missing Persons Guild	Website: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1679834239192879/ Contact: Mandy M. Sark Email: chicagompg@gmail.com
Resources for Young People	National Runaway Safeline	Website: https://www.1800runaway.org/ 24/7 Crisis Line: 800-RUNAWAY (800-786-2929)
	The Night Ministry	Website: https://www.thenightministry.org/ Phone: 877-286-2523
	The Broadway Youth Center	Website: https://howardbrown.org/clinic_location/broadway-youth-center/ Phone: 773-388-1600 Address: 1023 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL
Other Resources	National Domestic Violence Hotline	Website: https://www.thehotline.org/ Phone: 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233)
	Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline	Phone: 877-863-6338
	National Human Trafficking Hotline	Website: https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en 24-Hour Hotline: 888-373-7888 Text: 233733
	STOP-IT Initiative Against Human Trafficking	Website: https://centralusa.salvationarmy.org/stopit/ 24-Hour Hotline: 877-606-3158
	Local LGBTQ Resource Helpline	Website: https://www.centeronhalsted.org/ Phone: 773-871-2273
	National LGBTQ Crisis Hotline	Website: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/ Phone: 866-488-7386 Text: 'START' to 678-678

*Note: These resources are for those responsible for individuals under the age of 21.