

# Youth activists hold press conference on gun violence in Chicago

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

Youth activists from Good Kids Mad City (GKMC), No Cop Academy Campaign, March4OurLives Chicago, The VOYCE Project and Assata's Daughters held a press conference to address the recent police shooting of Maurice Granton Jr. as well as the gun violence that occurs across Chicago June 11 near Mayor Rahm Emanuel's office at City Hall.

Joanna Barnado (Maurice's sister); his two young children's mother; Latayhia Shaw; and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, Florida) activists Alex Wind and Sofie Whitney were also in attendance.

Ahead of the press conference, youth activists held up signs of Black people killed by police officers in Chicago in recent years; the signs included their birth and death dates. They also chanted "No Cop Academy, 95 million for the community," spoke about the power of the people to make positive change and called on Chicagoans to vote Emanuel out of office in 2019.

GKMC's Alycia Moatoa, Damayanti Wallace, Madison Miller, Jonathan Williams and Taylor Norwood read poems addressing police violence, No Cop Academy and Emanuel as well as the need to

invest in underserved communities on Chicago's South and West sides.

March4OurLives Chicago member Juan Reyes (who also translated his remarks into Spanish) said Emanuel and the city council do not represent the youth, especially those on the South and West sides. He explained that the proposed \$95 million cop academy is an example of decades of systemic oppression that is happening to the youth in marginalized neighborhoods across the city. Reyes noted that positive change is only going to happen when the way the city is run changes to help every Chicago citizen live and thrive anywhere they reside.

March4OurLives Chicago member Jeremy Liskar explained that their organization is working in coordination with GKMC and No Cop Academy Campaign to address these issues. Natalie Daskal from March4OurLives Chicago was also in attendance.

VOYCE and GKMC leader Amina Henderson-Redwan said the people in her community have experienced the school-to-prison pipeline and violence first-hand. She explained that when she was nine years old she watched her father die—and that was not the only time she lost love ones



**Youth activists from Good Kids Mad City (GKMC), No Cop Academy Campaign, March4OurLives Chicago, The VOYCE Project and Assata's Daughters.**

Photo by Carrie Maxwell

due to gun violence.

Henderson-Redwan noted that when mass shootings happen at schools those individuals get media attention but not young people across the country, including Chicago, who experience gun violence as they go about their daily lives—she said that has to change. She said safety means "getting to the root causes" of this violent behavior, not pouring money into school security guards and/or police, metal detectors, arming teachers and building new cop academies.

Wallace asked why Emanuel does not care when people in neighborhoods like hers, Woodlawn, get shot. She said the people in City Hall do not care, and that extends to certain parts of Chicago that do not experience gun violence every day. Wallace noted that the \$95 million could be spent on mental-health centers and school improvements.

Moatoa explained that this proposed cop academy will be located in an area where four Chicago public elementary schools have been shut down, resulting in a situation in which there are now 30 students per teacher at the remaining schools. She said it is not safe for any young person, especially Black and Brown youth, in the schools with armed police officers. Moatoa noted the solidarity from March4OurLives Chicago and Parkland activists who were in attendance.

Assata's Daughters and No Cop Academy Campaign member Nita Tennyson said the cop academy will have resources the schools do not have such as art classes. She said more police officers will not help the city address gun violence.

North Lawndale resident and Live Free Chicago activist Willie Round spoke about the need for

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## 'OUT of the Office' benefits Affinity, Chicago House

BY VERN HESTER

On June 6, the 17th iteration of the Pride networking party "OUT of the Office" took place in the rooftop lounge of The I/O Godfrey Hotel.

The event, through its long history, has remained true to its focus of creating an atmosphere for LGBTQ individuals in the business and corporate sector to network and meet while benefiting a worthy cause. This year's beneficiaries were Chicago House and Affinity Chicago. (Previous beneficiaries have included Gay Games Chicago, Legacy Chicago, Transworks, The AIDS Walk and Run, The LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce and Open Hand Food Pantry.)

Event creator Andrew Hayes of Fifth Third Bank said in a previous press release, "As you know, 17 years ago was a different time for us and the event has been credited with connecting many people together who have gone on to enjoy business."

For all the joy and socializing that took place, the event's focus was squarely on the LGBTQ community, with many well-known community activists and leaders, media personalities, corporate business individuals, small-business owners, and supporters and allies in attendance.

Dreamtown Realty sponsored the event, while Hayes, Mika Stambaugh of TMI, and Brad Edwards of CBS 2 Chicago chaired. Sandi Robinson of The Godfrey Hotel, and Sam Powell and Christina Pinson of Dreamtown Realty planned "OUT of the Office."

Anthony Gutierrez, the senior program director of Chicago House, and Imani Rupert-Gordon of Affinity Community Services each spoke briefly about the work their respective organizations do for the community. Among the many raffle prizes offered were two tickets to The House of Blues Gospel Sunday Brunch, two nights at The I/O Godfrey, tickets to a White Sox game, a wine-and-vodka selection and a mystery prize titled "Luck be A Lady."



Photos by Vern Hester



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community and school resources and investments to help West and South side residents thrive instead of what he said was the "unnecessary" \$95 million cop academy.

Wind said what happened at his school Feb. 14 happens every day in Chicago, adding that Chicago youth need to be heard. Wind noted that Black students get suspended at a rate three times higher than white students and that needs to be fixed—and that will not happen with a new police academy.

Whitney noted that Chicago youth want to feel safe and that is something everyone can agree on. She said their voices are not being heard and that is not fair. Whitney said the only way these problems are going to be fixed is by providing schools and students with the resources they need so they can have a safe childhood and good life.

Community activist and GKMC mentor Kofi Ademola was at the press conference with Maurice Granton's family. He said there is a "crisis in our community" and police do not make people safer.

Ademola explained that police shot and killed Granton last week and when a vigil was held the next day another person was shot in his community. He said listening to young people is the best way to achieve positive change for every community in Chicago.

Barnado, fighting back tears, spoke about wanting justice for her brother and said the family had just left the funeral home where they were picking out his casket. She said he was a good person and she never thought she would be in this position where she is demanding answers as to why her brother was killed by the police.

"He was murdered in cold blood," Barnado alleged.

Shaw said Granton was a great father and did everything for his kids.

During the Q&A session, a reporter asked Wind and Whitney to weigh in about being allies of the No Cop Academy movement. This prompted a response from a number of the Chicago activist speakers who criticized that question, saying reporters should be asking about what happened to Granton and others affected by gun violence in Chicago.

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