

2024 Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Annual Report

A report to the Illinois Governor and General Assembly

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
60 E. Van Buren St., Suite 650
Chicago, IL 60605
312-793-8550
www.icjia.illinois.gov

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Introduction

Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Act

The Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Act (the Act), aimed at addressing the growing concern of violence against women in Chicago, was signed into law on June 10, 2022. The legislation created a task force consisting of subject matter experts knowledgeable about crime victims' rights and related protections (20 ILCS 4119/10-b). State Representative Kambium Buckner introduced the House bill creating the task force in 2021 and State Senator Mattie Hunter served as its chief sponsor in the Illinois Senate. The legislators outlined several key reasons for establishing a task force focused on missing and murdered women in Chicago. They highlighted the urgent need to address violence against Chicago women and girls through more effective policy solutions, especially the disproportionate violence faced by Black women and girls. In addition, through the task force's work, State Representative Buckner and State Senator Hunter sought to examine law enforcement's response to reports of missing and murdered women and girls due to concerns Illinois residents expressed about missing persons investigations. Specifically, residents pointed to a lack of transparency in investigations, issues with case follow-ups and leads, including use of DNA testing, and unsupportive interactions with law enforcement. The Act went into effect on January 1, 2023 (20 ILCS 4119/1) and the task force was formed and first met on May 23, 2023.

Several data sources shed light on the prevalence of violence against women and girls and of missing persons in Chicago. According to the Chicago Police Department (2024), there were more reports of criminal sexual assault against females than males in Chicago in 2022 and 2023; and Black females in those same years, had disproportionately higher rates of criminal sexual assault. In 2022, 83.4% of all criminal sexual assault victims were females; and, in 2023, the figure increased to 84.5%. In 2022, 47.5% of female criminal sexual assault victims were Black, and this number rose to 52.0% in 2023. However, population estimates in the 2023 American Community Survey indicate only 29.9% of females in Chicago are Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023a), suggesting that Black females disproportionately experienced criminal sexual assault. In addition to sexual assault, Black females in Chicago also face a disproportionate risk of homicide. In 2023, while females in Chicago accounted for 14.1% of homicide victims, Black females comprised 10.1% of homicide victims, a total of 64 Black females (Chicago Police Department, 2024).

Data sources show a similar disproportionality for missing persons in Chicago. As of October 8, 2024, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), a national database containing information on missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons, had 135 missing persons cases with the individual's last known location listed as Chicago (NamUs, n.d.). Of those 135 cases, 26.7% (36) were Black females. Yet in recent population estimates, only 15.4% of Chicago residents are Black females (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023b). These data demonstrate that Black females make up a disproportionate number of missing Chicago residents.

Research points to likely structural and social factors contributing to violence against women and girls. These include high rates of poverty, unemployment, crime, cultural beliefs that reinforce gender inequality, and childhood experiences with victimization (Centers for Disease Control,

n.d.; Jansson, 2017). Fewer studies directly inform why the loved ones of missing and murdered women and girls report poor experiences with law enforcement conducting homicide and missing persons investigations. However, studies have found that women of color, specifically Black and Latino women, have had inconsistent experiences with law enforcement, and that, consequently, they are more likely to have negative perceptions of law enforcement officers and agencies. These negative perceptions are often due to past traumatizing interactions with law enforcement (Wilson et al., 2021), including a lack of response to victimization by officers (Brunson & Miller, 2006) and depictions of police brutality in the media (Wilson et al., 2021).

Attitudes towards violence against women and girls and media coverage of Black female homicide victims may help explain the negative interactions that victims and families report having with law enforcement. Flood and Pease (2009) found that individuals who held more conservative or traditional beliefs about gender roles were more likely to be accepting of violence against women and to engage in victim blaming. A systematic review of law enforcement attitudes towards intervening in intimate partner violence (IPV) incidents showed that when officers held traditional beliefs about gender roles, they were more tolerant of IPV and less willing to intervene (Serrano-Montilla et al., 2023). Based on her analysis of media coverage of female homicide victims, Neely (2017) found that Black female homicide victims received less media coverage than their White counterparts. According to the author, media coverage influenced law enforcement; therefore, less media coverage might have resulted in a less robust law enforcement response to homicide cases. This suggests that less media coverage of Black female homicide victims may indirectly lead to disparities in how law enforcement responds to and investigates these cases.

Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women

The Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Act requires the group to a) elect a chair and vice-chair from its members; b) convene at least quarterly; c) issue its first report on or before December 31, 2024; and d) issue a report every subsequent year on or before December 31st (20 ILCS 4119/10). 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 governmental 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; and
- 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 report must also include recommendations for policies and practices to reduce gender-based violence, increase safety, and support healing for victims and affected communities (20 ILCS 4119/10-g). This report serves as the Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women’s first annual report, which is due to the Illinois Governor and General Assembly by December 31, 2024.

Background

Membership

The task force consists of 18 members (*Table 1*), each knowledgeable about crime victims' rights and protections. Illinois State Senator Mattie Hunter served as task force chair and Illinois State Representative Kambium Buckner was 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 services 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 officer	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
Victim service organization	Amanda Pyron	The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence	Yes
Victims' representative	Mandy M. Sark	Chicago Missing Persons Guild	Yes
Gender-related violence survivor	Teresa Smith	Self	Yes

Field	Name	Organization	Required
Victims' representative	Scheherazade Tillet	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

Recent Activities

Although the Act mandates quarterly meetings, the task force has convened more frequently, holding 11 meetings since May 2023. Meetings were held virtually via WebEx and in a hybrid format, with some members being present in person and others joining virtually. Meetings were held on the following dates:

- Tuesday, May 23, 2023
- Wednesday, August 23, 2023
- Wednesday, November 15, 2023
- Friday, February 23, 2024
- Monday, March 25, 2024
- Monday, April 22, 2024
- Wednesday, May 29, 2024
- Monday, July 22, 2024
- Monday, September 23, 2024
- Tuesday, October 22, 2024
- Thursday, December 19, 2024

Task force meetings included presentations from subject matter experts about similar task forces and initiatives, the prevalence of missing and murdered women, and law enforcement's response to missing persons investigations. Specifically, the group learned about the work of similar initiatives, in Wisconsin, Montana, and Minnesota to help inform the organization and focus of the task force. Task force members also invited local news journalists who had conducted investigations of violence against Black women and of missing and murdered Black women to summarize their findings, including information on the prevalence of missing and murdered Black women in Chicago. Additionally, state and local enforcement agencies, including the Chicago Police Department, presented their approaches to conducting missing persons investigations. Following these presentations, task force members engaged in discussions on such topics as the intersection of missing and murdered women and girls and other forms of violence, including human trafficking and domestic violence.

ICJIA researchers presented task force members with a framework for this report during their September 2024 meeting. Members provided feedback on the framework and approved it. The framework was then used to guide the writing of this report.

Summary of Presentations

Presentations to the task force and from member discussions are organized into the five priority areas outlined in the Act. The summary of presentation materials reflects the views and opinions of the presenters and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the task force members.

Systemic Causes

Task force members and presenters identified several systemic causes contributing to the disproportionately high levels of women and girls experiencing violence and being reported missing. Some causes identified were structural, including racism, extreme poverty, and redlining. Redlining refers to the historic racial segregation of neighborhoods that has had lasting consequences, such as higher levels of poverty, lower levels of homeownership, and poor health outcomes (Swope et al., 2022). At a task force meeting, Trina Reynolds-Tyler, the Invisible Institute's Director of Data, and Sarah Conway, senior reporter at City Bureau, presented findings from their recent investigation of Chicago missing and murdered women and girls. They pointed to inadequate housing and a lack of safe spaces due to historical and structural redlining in Chicago. Additionally, Kate Weeks, Executive Director of Minnesota's Office of Justice Programs, noted that the Minnesota Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force had examined systemic cases of violence against African American women and girls. As detailed in the recent Minnesota task force report, the group similarly identified redlining as a cause and pointed to other structural factors, as well, including racism due to slavery, stereotypes of Black women, and wage discrimination (Squires, et al., 2022). In another presentation, ICJIA manager Amanda L. Vasquez, shared information gleaned from meetings with task forces in Wisconsin and Montana about missing and/or murdered populations. She reported their perspectives on systemic causes, highlighting that they cited extreme poverty as a structural factor.

Various presenters and members asserted that violence was linked to missing and murdered women and girls. They described gender-based violence as contributing causes, including human trafficking, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Furthermore, findings highlighted race disproportionality. The Invisible Institute and City Bureau speakers reported, for example, that a disproportionate number of sex trafficking victims are Black girls. In examining 2019 FBI crime data, they found that, nationally, Black girls made up more than half of all child prostitution arrests. The speakers from the Invisible Institute and City Bureau as well as presenters discussing the Wisconsin, Montana, and Minnesota missing and/or murdered task forces also pointed to other types of violence as likely causes. These causes include family violence, such as custodial abductions and child abuse, gun violence, and suicide.

In addition to these systemic causes, presenters stressed how law enforcement indifference may be further contributing to the disproportionate number of missing and murdered Black women and girls in Chicago. Specifically, the Invisible Institute and City Bureau journalists noted instances in which the families of missing persons had reported that law enforcement was dismissive of runaway cases, failed to investigate, lost evidence, stigmatized missing persons, or engaged in victim blaming. The Minnesota task force also found that racial bias against Black

women and victim blaming are among the root causes of violence against Black women and girls. This bias includes historical narratives and harmful stereotypes that persist today, including labelling Black women as corrupt and immoral (Squires et al., 2022). Furthermore, presenters and task force members indicated that sex work and mental health disorders, including substance use disorders, are connected to missingness and high levels of violence against women. In discussions with the loved ones of missing Chicago women and girls, the Invisible Institute and City Bureau speakers found that missing women and girls commonly have existing mental health problems and substance use disorders prior to going missing. Task force members also described that some women and girls engage in sex work to meet their economic needs and that this makes them vulnerable to violence.

Appropriate Methods of Tracking and Collecting Data

Task force members heard from several representatives of law enforcement agencies about how data on missing women and girls are collected and tracked. Major Abigail Keller, Illinois State Police (ISP)'s Northern Investigative Commander, explained how law enforcement enters missing persons data into the Law Enforcement Agencies Data System (LEADS). LEADS is a statewide system used by all Illinois law enforcement agencies to enter and share “hot files,” including missing person records, with other law enforcement agencies. She also stated that missing persons information in LEADS is automatically shared with the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), thereby making it accessible to law enforcement agencies across the country. NCIC is an information system used nationwide by criminal justice agencies. It contains various criminal justice records, including information on missing and unidentified persons, and is most commonly used by officers making traffic stops (FBI, n.d.).

Additionally, Major Keller informed task force members about the National Missing and Unidentified Person System (NamUs), which is a public-facing clearinghouse for missing person and unidentified human remains cases. According to Keller, NamUs is an important, yet under-utilized tool. Not only does NamUs assist investigators with matching unidentified remains to missing person records, it also provides a resource for friends and family members of the missing. While LEADS and NCIC records are used by law enforcement only, the public can search the NamUs database for their loved one, providing immediate verification that the search for their loved one remains active. Keller added that while law enforcement agencies are required by the Illinois Missing Persons Identification Act (50 ILCS 722) to immediately enter missing persons data into LEADS and NCIC, the statute should be amended to clarify NamUs reporting requirements and timelines. While law enforcement agencies may be able to share updated information via LEADS and NCIC, public facing sites, such as the ISP's missing persons webpage, appear to be outdated. Task force member Mandy M. Sark, Chicago Missing Persons Guild co-founder, noted that such sites need to be regularly updated with current missing persons information.

Information on the prevalence of missing and murdered persons was reported by the ISP and by the Invisible Institute and City Bureau journalists using current methods for tracking and collecting data on missing persons and homicide victims. In her presentation, Major Keller, reported that as of January 29, 2024, and based on data obtained through LEADS and NCIC, there were 1,202 records of missing women in Illinois. Of these missing Illinois women, 685 or

56.9% were Black. The disproportionate number of missing Black women is more pronounced in examining Chicago missing persons. Major Keller stated that 207, or 70%, of all missing women in Chicago were Black. In addition, from Cook County Death Data from 2017 to 2021, speakers from the Invisible Institute and City Bureau found that the number of Black female homicide victims in Chicago was three times higher than the combined total of that of White and Hispanic female victims.

Acknowledging limitations, presenters cited barriers to tracking and collecting data on missing and murdered women and girls. Invisible Institute and City Bureau presenters observed gaps and inconsistencies in Chicago Police Department (CPD) data on missing persons. For example, from 2017 to 2021, approximately 45% of all missing person cases did not include data on the time and date that law enforcement arrived to begin an investigation. The journalists also pointed to 11 missing persons cases that the CPD had categorized as closed and non-criminal in nature. Yet homicide investigations were later opened for those cases, suggesting that missing persons reports for these individuals should not have been categorized as non-criminal when closed. Lastly, Major Keller asserted that the collection of additional data upon case disposition may allow for a greater understanding of missingness and victimization. Not enough is known about the causes and risk factors of missing and murdered young women and girls. Criminal justice agencies and other partners should consider how to uniformly collect information from formerly missing persons and crime victims regarding victimology, relationships to offenders and other case circumstances such as the reason for their disappearance, e.g., runaway, abduction, trafficking, death, etc. This data could be used for future research, crime prevention strategies, or to identify needs for development or enhancement of victim services.

Policies and Institutions Impacting Investigation and Prosecution

Presenters from the Cook County Sheriff's Office and the ISP described missing persons legislation in Illinois, including some of its key requirements. Cook County comprises Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. ISP's Major Abigail Keller and Cook County Sheriff's Office's Commander Jason Moran both referenced Illinois' Missing Persons Identification Act, which requires law enforcement to accept reports of missing persons. The Act further outlines information to be gathered about missing persons, such as their name, gender, date of birth, and other identifying features, and specifies that officers must inform the reporting person of resources they can contact (50 ILCS 722/5-a, c, d). Specifically, it instructs law enforcement to provide a missing persons' loved ones with contact information for NamUs and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). NamUs provides investigative support services, such as cold case advisors and analytic teams, and forensic services, including, DNA analysis, forensic anthropology, fingerprints, and forensic odontology. However, not all NamUs provided services are accessible to the public. NCMEC also provides support to survivors and family members of missing or exploited children; these services include mental health support, a support network of trained volunteers with lived experience, and legal technical assistance.

Both presenters noted conflicting requirements within the Missing Persons Identification Act regarding the time frame for entering missing persons information into LEADS, NCIC, and NamUs. The Missing Persons Identification Act states both that data must be entered into these systems and databases immediately and that law enforcement has up to 30-45 days after receipt of a report to enter these data (50 ILCS 722/10-c). Furthermore, another section of the Missing

Persons Identification Act suggests that reporting to NamUs is optional, delineating that a report may be made 30 days after a missing persons report is made but not longer than 60 days after the report (50 ILCS 722/5-d-2). Senate Bill 3948 was filed by Senator Michael E. Hastings in May of 2024. ISP's Major Keller, ISP's Missing Persons Clearinghouse Manager Craig Burge, and Cook County Sheriff's Office Captain Moran conducted a bill review and provided recommendations to amend the language of the Missing Persons Identification Act. Their recommendations would address the aforementioned concerns brought to the attention of the task force.

Representatives from the Cook County Sheriff's Office and the CPD described their policies and procedures for investigating missing persons cases. Commander Moran informed task force members that the Cook County Sheriff's Office's Missing Persons Project had implemented a policy requiring their officers to submit missing persons reports to NamUs. The policy specifies that missing persons reports made to the Cook County Sheriff must be entered in NamUs within 30 to 60 days, ensuring timely data collection for tracking purposes. The Missing Persons Project is an initiative started in 2021, in which the Cook County Sheriff's Office created a team within its Special Victims Unit to investigate missing persons cases. The project focuses on women who have been missing for three or more years (Cook County Sheriff, 2021; Cook County Sheriff's Office, n.d.).

The CPD's Bureau of Detectives Chief Antoinette Ursitti, Sergeant Pete Medina, and Commander Jarrod Smith presented how their department addresses missing persons cases. When an individual contacts 911 to report a missing person in Chicago, patrol officers are dispatched to begin a preliminary investigation. This involves gathering information on the missing person from the reporting individual. The information is then forwarded to a CPD detective to begin a full investigation. At the time of their presentation (during the task force's March 2024 meeting), CPD stated that all missing persons reports were completed on paper. The department, however, was working to automate the reporting process. Notably, Chief Ursitti explained that a person does not need to be missing for more than 24 hours before a report can be made. This is consistent with the Missing Persons Identification Act, which states that a missing persons report cannot be refused for any reason, even if the person has been missing for a short time (50 ILCS 722/5-a). However, in their research, the Invisible Institute and City Bureau journalists found that loved ones reporting missing persons in Chicago had been told that they could not report someone missing until 24 hours had passed.

Law enforcement presenters noted that while the Missing Persons Identification Act delineates certain requirements for responding to reports of missing persons, it gives law enforcement agencies discretion on how to operationalize many of these requirements. Specifically, it states only that law enforcement is encouraged to establish written protocols for handling missing persons cases (50 ILCS 722/5-d-5). Presenters explained that law enforcement agency rules and regulations vary, including those pertaining to the handling of missing persons cases, because of differences in agency size and the availability of resources. However, a lack of standardized and/or written procedures for responding to missing persons reports, follow-up, and case closure was cited as a gap. For example, presenters from the Invisible Institute and City Bureau reported that delays have occurred in the CPD assigning detectives to reports of high-risk missing persons. A high-risk missing person is an individual whose location is unknown and whose

circumstances suggest they may be at risk of injury or death (50 ILCS 722/10-a). Also, the presenters stated that directives issued by the department do not contain information on procedures for closing missing persons cases. Task force member Mandy M. Sark asserted that it's imperative for all missing persons reports to be investigated using the same standards, regardless of their demographic characteristics and previous missing persons or runaway status.

Measures to Address and Reduce Violence

Presenters and task force members described several changes to current law enforcement policies and practices to help address and reduce violence against women and girls. Specifically, in their investigation, the Invisible Institute and City Bureau presenters found support for establishing a dedicated missing persons unit within the CPD. They interviewed a retired CPD commander who asserted that without a unit devoted to missing persons that these cases would be deprioritized. The commander explained that CPD's Special Victims Unit is responsible for investigating cases of domestic violence and incidents in which youth are the offender in addition to missing persons. As a result, they often have limited resources for missing persons investigations. Similarly, a key recommendation by the Minnesota task force was to establish an office to focus solely on missing and murdered African American women.

Two additional potential improvements to current law enforcement policies and practices were also discussed. ISP's Major Keller recommended that law enforcement agencies be mandated to establish written protocols for missing persons investigations. These protocols should clearly define response expectations, documentation procedures, case follow-up, and disposition updates. Several presenters and members stressed the need for additional law enforcement training to improve their response to missing persons reports, with an emphasis on anti-racist training and Mental Health First Aid. Members noted that law enforcement would likely benefit from training on the requirements for entering missing persons information into LEADS and NamUs, including the time frame for entering that information. Presenters and members recommended that officers undergo anti-racist trainings to help address unconscious bias and Mental Health First Aid training to better serve high-risk populations. Mental Health First Aid is a 12-hour training intended to educate the public on identifying signs of mental illness and substance use disorders and responding to individuals in crisis (NAMI Illinois, n.d.).

To help address and reduce violence, presenters and members pointed to the importance of collecting high quality missing persons data and conducting research on missing and murdered persons. Specifically, the Minnesota task force emphasized the importance of collecting high quality data to better understand differences between the incidence of missing persons reports for Black women and other demographic groups and to understand differences in law enforcement response, such as how long cases remained open and whether cases were solved. The Invisible Institute and City Bureau presenters underscored that data should provide insights into law enforcement response times to missing persons reports, adding that medical examiner data should be linked to missing persons data. Currently, both are notable gaps. They pointed out that CPD missing persons reports lack a field to record when the loved one first contacted law enforcement, leaving response times undocumented. The Cook County Medical Examiner does not consistently document whether an individual was missing prior to death, making it difficult to link cases to missing persons reports.

Several task force members echoed this call for high quality data as a means to better understand the prevalence of missing and murdered women and girls in Chicago. They asserted that additional research is needed to identify causes of missing and murdered women and girls, to learn more about how missing and murdered cases may intersect with gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence and human trafficking, and to assess the availability of resources. To help fill information gaps, Minnesota's Missing and Murdered Black Women Office conducts case reviews. They review cold cases involving missing and murdered Black women and girls and conduct death investigations for homicide cases and overdose deaths ruled as suspicious.

Measures to Support Healing

Task force members and invited speakers asserted that families and victims need resources and services to heal. From their focus groups with families of missing and murdered Chicago women and girls, Invisible Institute and City Bureau presenters learned that the experience of having a loved one go missing was impactful and isolating. They also asserted that among the support that families needed were support groups, healing circles, and opportunities to connect with other families with similar experiences. However, members cited the limited resources available to support the families of missing and murdered women and girls. Furthermore, the Invisible Institute and City Bureau suggested that the lack of resources provided to families of missing Black women and girls is likely compounded by potential bias, for example, viewing Black women and girls as undeserving of limited resources. Community advocates asserted that families of missing persons in Chicago are often denied necessary services due to the premature dismissal of cases. This led some families to organize their own searches, prompting calls for funding to support community- and family-led efforts to fill service gaps. Minnesota task force findings also pointed to the importance of having dedicated resources for Black women and girls. The Minnesota task force emphasized the need for service providers who care about and reflect the community, recommending proactive recruitment and retention of Black staff.

Also cited as crucial for healing were improved communication and coordination between law enforcement, service providers, and families. Invisible Institute and City Bureau findings indicated that families are seeking increased transparency from law enforcement. Specifically, they want timely, reliable updates on investigative steps, and the information gathered regarding their loved one's disappearance. To better serve families of missing and murdered women and girls and victims, the Minnesota task force recommended better coordination of services across agencies. By increasing coordination, this recommendation seeks to improve family member and victim access to services and law enforcement and service provider ability to respond to their needs. Similarly, in her presentation, ISP's Major Keller asserted that it was important to strengthen relationships between law enforcement and victim service agencies. Furthermore, she stated that a referral system should be established and that a method for monitoring these linkages should be implemented to help identify successes, lessons learned, and opportunities for improvement.

Recommendations

Members of the Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women provided the following eight recommendations for improving policies and practices aimed at reducing gender-based violence, increasing safety, and promoting healing for victims and communities affected by violence against Chicago women and girls.

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 review and case follow-up and notify missing persons' loved ones of 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.

Conclusion

Since its formation in May 2023, the Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women has gained a deeper understanding of the disproportionate rates of missing and murdered women and girls through expert presentations and discussions. Presenters identified systemic causes, including racism, violence, and law enforcement attitudes. The task force also examined current methods for tracking and collecting missing persons data, along with the laws, policies, and practices guiding law enforcement responses to these reports. Additionally, they identified actionable approaches to reduce the prevalence of missing and murdered women and girls, while supporting the healing process for families and victims. These included the development of written protocols for directing law enforcement response to missing persons, the establishment of a dedicated missing persons unit, and funding for additional resources to support families of missing persons and victims. Based on these findings, task force members made six key recommendations focused on increasing resources for missing persons investigations and supporting families and victims, while improving law enforcement responses. This report satisfies the task force's statutory obligation to submit an annual report to the Illinois Governor and General Assembly.

In 2025, the task force will continue to meet and further examine the five priority areas outlined in the Act. They will also develop additional recommendations aimed at increasing the safety of Chicago women and girls and supporting healing. Task force members emphasized the need to invite organizations from various disciplines to future meetings in order to fully understand the policies and practices guiding responses to missing and murdered women and girls. These organizations include INTERPOL, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and victim service agencies, including those serving human trafficking victims. Thus far, task force presentations and discussions have primarily centered around missing persons reports and investigations. It may be beneficial for members to next prioritize learning about how systems respond to homicides, whether their response to Black female homicide victims differs from other homicide victims, and the availability of resources for families of homicide victims. Additionally, the task force should allocate meeting time to discuss the next steps for implementing the recommendations in this report, identifying necessary resources, key stakeholders, and a timeline for action. By maintaining a focus on missing and murdered women and girls, the task force aims to raise awareness and drive systemic change that will benefit victims, their families, and the broader community.

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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.