

# **LVEJO Statement on Violence, Policing, and Immigration**

The Little Village Environmental Justice Organization releases this statement as a frontline community to shine a light on the direct link between environmental injustice, systems of violence, policing, and criminalization of migration. These systems deeply impact our neighborhood alongside other communities of color across Chicago, the United States, and the world.

The numbers in the sub-headings do not indicate a specific level of importance or chronological order.

## **1. Environmental injustice is fundamentally intertwined with policing, immigration detention and deportation as violence.**

- Environmental harms from racism and injustice manifest as immediate and slow violence where communities of color are devalued, extracted from, poisoned through exposure, and systematically deprived of access to resources and health needed for surviving and thriving.
- Gentrification and displacement are also forms of violent environmental harms and serve to sever community ties to land, to each other, and to cultural rootedness necessary for thriving.
- Environmental racism and policing share root causes, and the oppressive systems we are trying to change also uphold and reinforce policing.
- Environmental justice work is direct work to intervene within and interrupt cycles of violence.
- Environmental justice work moves toward a world free of violence and oppressive systems.

## **2. Currently the systems of violence, policing, and the criminalization of immigration in Little Village and beyond are harmful and deadly.**

- Little Village is over-policed, with most of the police violence falling on youth, people who live and work on the street, and community members living in poverty.

Example: Within 2 years (2009-2010), Chicago Police Department (CPD) arrested 2,697 youth under the age of 17 in the 10th district and 4,619 arrests in the 11th district (Little Village and North Lawndale).<sup>1</sup>

Example: Cook County Jail is overcrowded with detainees who don't have the monetary means to pay their bond, therefore staying in jail to await their trial for months, even years on end from nonviolent crimes to more severe cases.

- The U.S. Justice Department reported in August that of the 438,000 individuals incarcerated in local jails nationwide in 2011, about 60 percent were pretrial detainees, and most of them were accused of nonviolent offenses.<sup>2</sup>
- Current outside narratives claim that the source of violence stems from inside the community. Contrary to this, we believe the main source lies within systems of violence such as policing and criminalization of migration, which serve to harm community members instead of centering their needs.
- When the systems of policing and criminalization of migration work together, it increases the overall policing of community members and leads to higher levels of incarceration that many times also lead to deportation.
  - Example: Scott and Saucedo's article discusses the historical, educational, and prison policies that contribute to the mass incarceration and detention centers in Illinois.<sup>3</sup>
  - "Local gang databases not only drive disproportionate local policing but also feed into national databases that are routinely used by DHS and immigration enforcement to select their deportation targets."<sup>4</sup>
  - The various agencies that work together as a part of these activities include Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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<sup>1</sup> Kaba, M. (2011). *2009-2010 North Lawndale Juvenile Justice Snapshot*. Chicago: Project NIA.

Retrieved from: [http://www.issuelab.org/resource/2009\\_2010\\_north\\_lawndale\\_juvenile\\_justice\\_snapshot](http://www.issuelab.org/resource/2009_2010_north_lawndale_juvenile_justice_snapshot)

<sup>2</sup> Injustice Watch Staff "Unequal Treatment- A Series, Bent On Bail, *Injustice Watch*. Retrieved from <https://injusticewatch.org/interactives/bent-on-bail/>

<sup>3</sup> Scott, R. and Saucedo, M. (2013). "Mass Incarceration, the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and the Struggle Over "Secure Communities" in Illinois," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 7: No. 1, Article 7.

Retrieved from: <http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol7/iss1/7/>

<sup>4</sup> Unzueta, T.A. (2017). Expanding Sanctuary: What Makes A City A Sanctuary Now?. Mijente. Retrieved from: <https://mijente.net/2017/01/27/sanctuary-report/>

(ICE); Customs and Border Protection (CBP); Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); and Chicago Police Department (CPD).<sup>5</sup>

- When it comes to young people in the neighborhood, the youth-to-prison pipeline in schools, parks, and open spaces, feeds further into criminalization. The use of local institutions, (police presence in schools, Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), Middle School Cadet Corps (MSCC), etc.) funnel youth into the policing system which results in a culture where the criminalization of young people is reinforced by other peers, and/or community members.
- Over-policing in schools is paired with early adoption of ROTC and military recruitment programs — a local Little Village middle school went from having an after school Cadet Corps program to a full day military academy.<sup>6 7 8</sup> Pauline Lipman, an educational policy professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, also explains that Black and Latino males are sorted and regulated via zero tolerance discipline policies and/or ROTC militarization programs in Chicago Public High Schools throughout the city, which leads some youth to military and prison.<sup>9</sup> As a result, community institutions earn money on the recruitment of youth and facilitate the normalization of policing, military tactics, and systems of violence in the community. The US Defense Department spends as much as \$2.6 billion each year on recruiting.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Organized Communities Against Deportations. (2017). *Is it a raid? How to report immigration activity and avoid creating panic and confusion.*; Desis Rising Up and Moving. (2017). *A Brief Guide for Sharing Reports of Raids on Social Media* (Version 1.0 – 2/13/2017). Retrieved from:

<http://www.drumnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ABriefGuideforReportingRaidsonSocialMedia.docx.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Schaeffer-Duffy, C. Feeding the Military Machine. *National Catholic Reporter*. (2003). Retrieved from: [http://natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2003a/032803/032803a.htm](http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2003a/032803/032803a.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Wedekind, J. (2005). The Childrens Crusade: Military programs move into middle schools to fish for future soldiers. *In These Times*. Retrieved from <http://inthesetimes.com/article/2136>

<sup>8</sup> Goodman, D. (2002). Recruiting the Class of 2005: Military programs have expanded into thousands of public high schools, signing up nearly half a million students. Is Junior ROTC building character — or lining up soldiers? *MotherJones*. Retrieved from: <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2002/01/recruiting-class-2005/>

<sup>9</sup> Lipman, P. (2010). Chicago School Policy: regulating Black and Latino youth in the global city. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 6 (4), pp. 331-355.

<sup>10</sup> Meiners, E. (2007). Military in CPS. *Area Chicago*. Retrieved from: <http://www.areachicago.org/military-in-cps/>

### **3. Money that is spent on policing and police misconduct in Chicago and locally in Little Village greatly exceeds the spending on needed resources for environmental and community issues.**

- The City of Chicago has a budget of over \$9 billion annually. In 2016, the proposed budget for Chicago Public Schools was \$5.7 billion, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) budget was \$3.1 billion, and the budget for Chicago Park District was \$458 million. Since 2004, the Chicago Police Department paid out \$662 million in settlements - about \$50 million annually for police misconduct, including judgements, settlements, and outside legal fees.<sup>11</sup> In 2017, 39.6% of general fund expenditures went to policing. In 2011, 22nd Ward Alderman Ricardo Muñoz Muñoz, spent \$740,000 on 37 Police Observation Devices (PODs) which was 56% of the ward's overall annual budget.<sup>12</sup>
- The Chicago #NoCopAcademy campaign<sup>13</sup> highlights the city's constant misuse of funds to increase criminalization in Black and brown communities while actively disinvesting in educational, health, and job creation programs. Since Spring 2017, Mayor Rahm Emanuel has been pushing for the allocation of \$95 million towards the construction of a "Public Safety Training Academy" in the West Garfield Park Neighborhood. This predominantly African American neighborhood underwent the closure of multiple public schools in 2013.<sup>14</sup> The #NoCopAcademy campaign is being led by young Black activists from predominantly SouthWest side of Chicago demanding the 95 Million dollars be allocated to community programs instead. The majority of Chicago City Council's Latino Caucus has voted in support of the facility, including Alderman Cardenas of the 12th ward, and subsequently denounced and ejected the sole member who has consistently supported the youth-led campaign.<sup>15</sup> The campaign is endorsed by over 70 organizations supporting the call for accountability for the city's spending on police and violence toward Black and Brown communities.

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<sup>11</sup> Tresser, T., et al. (2016). Chicago Is Not Broke: Funding the City We Deserve. The Chicago Is Not Broke Book Project. More information here: <http://wearenotbroke.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Office of Alderman Ricardo Muñoz, 22nd Ward. (2014). *Participatory Action Budgeting Town Hall Meeting at La Villita Community Church. Presentation Slide: How was the ward money spent in the past?*

<sup>13</sup> No Cop Academy campaign website: <https://nocopacademy.com>

<sup>14</sup> Epton, A., Richards, A., & Courtney, C. (2013). School Board Votes To Close 49 Schools. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from [http://graphics.chicagotribune.com/school\\_utilization/](http://graphics.chicagotribune.com/school_utilization/)

<sup>15</sup> Serrato, J. (2018). Alderman opposing new CPD academy is ostracized by Latino Caucus <http://www.chicagotribune.com/voice/ct-alderman-opposing-new-cpd-academy-is-ostracized-by-latino-caucus-20180524-story.html>

- Zapata Elementary School badly needed to install a new air filtration system to protect students from increased diesel exhaust with minimal estimated costs for repair.<sup>16</sup> Local residents have also been clamoring for a new Community Center at La Villita Park that would provide use of the park during the cold winter months. A new Community Center at the park is estimated to cost \$16 million. Despite these reasonable amounts to address community needs, Chicago continues to spend in increasing policing resources instead.

#### **4. Chicago has a long and current history of environmental violence in the same communities that experience over policing.**

##### **Crawford and Fisk Coal Power Plants**

The coal-fired power plants in Little Village and Pilsen were one of the largest polluters in the country, with Crawford coal plant was known as the dirtiest coal plant in the US. The Crawford plant was responsible for 75% of the particulate matter. The Harvard School of Public Health study found that the Crawford Plant's pollution led to more than 40 premature deaths, 550 emergency room visits, and 2800 severe asthma attacks per year in Little Village alone.<sup>17</sup>

##### **Celotex Site**

The superfund site located at 2800 S. Sacramento was formerly used for making, storing and selling asphalt roofing products sealed with coal tar. The former asphalt company contaminated the soil and the backyard gardens of nearby residents' homes, including the Collateral Channel just south of it.<sup>18</sup> Coal tar contains Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons, which include compounds that have been proven to be carcinogenic. Studies showed that individuals with lifelong exposure to coal-tar sealcoat-treated pavements and playgrounds have 38 times higher risk of cancer.<sup>19</sup> LVEJO organized to get the site cleaned up after community residents suffered from numerous body rashes. In 2014, the polluted site was ultimately converted into a public park. The new community-won La Villita Park is located right behind the Cook County Jail and is accessible to the 5,000 children under the age of five that live within a quarter mile from the park. However, the park is only accessible during the warm weather months. Unfortunately, Chicago has six months of cold weather per year. La Villita Park needs a field house. Without

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<sup>16</sup> Air Filtration Post-Installation Report For Avalon Continuation School; Prepared for TraPac By IQAir North America Inc. (2013)

<sup>17</sup> Levy, J. I., Spengler, J. D., Hlinka, D., Sullivan, D., & Moon, D. (2002). Using CALPUFF to evaluate the impacts of power plant emissions in Illinois: model sensitivity and implications. *Atmospheric Environment*, 36(6), 1063-1075.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2015). La Villita Park Opens at Former Celotex Site. Retrieved from: <https://www3.epa.gov/region5/cleanup/celotex/pdfs/celotex-fs-201501.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Parks, T. (2016). Public health concerns prompt physician policy. *AMA Wire*. Retrieved from: <https://wire.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health-concerns-prompt-physician-policy>

one, Little Village have limited recreational space during the cold winter months. A new fieldhouse would cost about \$16 million.<sup>20</sup> This pales in comparison to the cost of Chicago Police Department's \$9 billion dollar annual budget and to the \$662 million paid out for police misconduct.<sup>21</sup>

### Diesel Pollution

Diesel pollution in Little Village, leads to over 20,000 asthma attacks, 680 heart attacks and about 570 premature deaths in Illinois each year.<sup>22</sup> In 2016, LVEJO partnered with a local high school to conduct truck counting. Students collected 5 hours and 42 minutes of video footage of trucks passing by the intersection of 31st St. and Kostner Ave. The local high school survey found that on average 1.3 trucks pass through that intersection per minute. Through the continuation of truck counting on 31st and Kostner Ave., in 2018 students at the same local high school collected 6.87 hours of video footage and counted a total of 604 trucks. This new data averaged a total of 1.47 truck passing by the 31st St. and Kostner Ave intersection.<sup>23</sup>

### Collateral Channel

The Collateral Channel, the south branch of the Chicago River, lies directly south of many residential homes. The canal is toxic and releases strong odors produced by methane. The Channel also contains extremely high levels of Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), which exceed threshold standards by a factor of 14 to 56 times posing severe health risks.<sup>24 25</sup> Several PAHs also exceed human health and ecological toxicity standards, as well as carry

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<sup>20</sup> Serrato, J. (2015). Little Village residents fight for fieldhouse. *WBEZ News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/little-village-residents-fight-for-fieldhouse/ef8a7a71-837a-4ecb-8683-5b21cf7e57a7>

<sup>21</sup> Tresser, T. et al. (2016). Chicago Is Not Broke: Funding the City We Deserve. The Chicago Is Not Broke Book Project. More information here: <http://wearenotbroke.org/>

<sup>22</sup> Respiratory Health Association. Diesel Pollution: A threat to your health. Retrieved from: <http://www.lungchicago.org/air-quality-diesel-pollution/>

<sup>23</sup> AP Statistic Class 2017-2018 (2018). Final AP Statistic Student Truck Count Report. Retrieved from: <https://lavillitarespira.com/resources/>

<sup>24</sup> Sarah T.R. (2013). Something smells in Little Village. Retrieved from: <http://chicago.suntimes.com/politics/something-smells-in-little-village/>

<sup>25</sup> Yin, K., Viana, P., Zhao, X., & Rockne, K. (2010). Characterization, performance modeling, and design of an active capping remediation project in a heavily polluted urban channel. *Science of the total environment*, 408(16), 3454-3463. Retrieved from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969710003566>



carcinogenic risks.<sup>26</sup> The sediments are predicted to release up to 4.5 methane, nitrous oxide and hydrogen sulfide mixture of sediment on an annual basis.<sup>27</sup>

### East Chicago West Calumet Complex

The public housing complex was constructed directly on top of a lead smelter and metal processing plant that were never cleaned up, as well as just north of a USS Lead refinery and amongst several other industrial facilities. Of the 30,000 residents living in East Chicago, the majority of them are Black or Latinx with many of them living below the poverty line. Residents have been living on contaminated land for over a decade. EPA officials knew about the environmental hazards since the 1990s and early 2000s but chose to ignore the issue. Lead ingestion carries significant lifetime health impacts that cannot be reversed, including negatively impacting brain function, ability to learn, and ability to focus. East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland asked residents of the West Calumet Complex to evacuate their homes in 60 days, which carried additional risks, including moving to new communities with very little resources to do so, severing community support and putting “residents in a situation that may have led to more contamination because they were moving in a rush to other homes that are contaminated with lead or arsenic,” said Debbie Chizewer, an attorney at Northwestern University’s Environmental Advocacy Clinic representing residents in proceedings with U.S. EPA.<sup>28</sup>

### Petcoke Piles in Southeast Chicago

Ambient petroleum coke, “petcoke,” presents similar serious health risks to PM 10 where particles can affect the heart and lungs and cause serious health effects.<sup>29</sup> Residents in southeast Chicago reported the “petcoke” dust from the 30-foot-tall piles blowing through the community. The dust coated neighborhood homes and lawns and prevented residents from being outside and causing respiratory issues. Once inhaled are hazardous to people’s health. While the piles have now been removed due to extensive community campaigns, residents are still burdened by ambient air pollution due to manganese, carrying additional and even more

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<sup>26</sup> Telemundo Chicago. (2017). En desespero residentes por mal olor en La Villita: La comunidad realizará un foro con las autoridades pertinentes para exigirles que de una vez y por todas arreglen un canal de aguas estancadas y contaminadas. Retrieved from: <http://www.telemundochicago.com/noticias/destacados/En-desespero-residentes-por-mal-olor-en-La-Villita-Chicago-433844413.html>

<sup>27</sup> Zhao, X., Viana, P., Yin, K., Rockne, K., Hey, D., Schuh, J., & Lanyon, R. (2007). Combined active capping/wetland demonstration in the Chicago River. In *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Remediation of Contaminated Sediments*.

<sup>28</sup> Varjacques, L. (2017). The Compounded Pain of Contamination and Dislocation. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/living-on-lead/531534/>

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2017). Health Effects of Petroleum Coke. Retrieved from: <https://www.epa.gov/petroleum-coke-chicago/health-effects-petroleum-coke#healthrisks>

dangerous neurological health risks.<sup>30</sup> This is supported by enforcement actions by the Illinois Attorney General.<sup>31 32</sup>

## **5. In addition to violence perpetrated on incarcerated people, carceral systems are inherently violent misuses of land**

- The carceral state is built on land already stolen from indigenous communities.
- Jails, prisons, and immigration detention centers are another form of environmental violence on immigrant and communities of color, as they are often built on brownfields/polluted formerly industrial land.<sup>33 34</sup>
- Little Village is the site of Cook County Jail, the largest jail in the United States, which covers 96 acres of land - more than twice the amount of total green space in all of Little Village.<sup>35</sup> Much more land and resources are dedicated to policing and incarceration than to green space in Little Village, a demonstration of how environmental injustice and violence intersect.
- During the fight to build a park on the Celotex Site, Cook County Jail tried to compete for the land; the jail wanted to expand its employee parking lot to the site while the community demanded a park. In addition, the proximity to the Celotex site posed environmental health issues for the people in the jail. U.S. EPA conducted its investigation of the site from 1993 to 2004 and completed the required cleanup in 2009

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<sup>30</sup> Ruppenthal, A. (2017). After Petcoke, Community Confronts More Dangerous Pollutant: Manganese. Retrieved from: <http://chicagotonight.wttw.com/2017/02/08/after-petcoke-community-confronts-more-dangerous-pollutant-manganese>

<sup>31</sup> Office of Attorney General of the State of Illinois. (2014). Madigan Files New Lawsuit Against KCBX for Pet Coke Pollution Violations: Water Pollution and Open Dumping Alleged in Latest Enforcement Action. Retrieved from: [http://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/pressroom/2014\\_03/20140304b.html](http://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/pressroom/2014_03/20140304b.html)

<sup>32</sup> Cox, T. (2013). Petcoke Would Be Snuffed Out By New City Ordinance. DNAInfo. Retrieved from: <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/2013/11/20/south-deering/petcoke-would-be-snuffed-out-by-new-city-ordinance>

<sup>33</sup> Bernd, C. (2017). Climate Refugees in Toxic Immigrant Jails Are Victims of Environmental Racism. *Truthout*. Retrieved from: <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/41406-climate-refugees-in-toxic-immigrant-jails-are-victims-of-environmental-racism>

<sup>34</sup> Bernd, C., Loftus-Farren, Z., Nandini Mitra, M. (2017). America's Toxic Prisons: The Environmental Injustices of Mass Incarceration. *Alternet*. Retrieved from: <http://www.alternet.org/environment/americas-toxic-prisons-environmental-injustices-mass-incarceration>

<sup>35</sup> Lopez, A. (2017). Why Environmental Justice is needed to address Chicago violence. Social Justice News Nexus. Retrieved from: <http://sjnnchicago.medill.northwestern.edu/blog/2017/01/09/environmental-justice-needed-address-chicago-violence/>



under the Superfund program adding the site to the national Superfund list for 11 years as one of the most contaminated sites in the nation.<sup>36</sup>

## **6. Natural disasters, large infrastructure projects with harmful impacts on people and resources; failure of environmental protections, and other scenarios can become a vehicle to a police state and further denial of human rights.**

Some examples include:

### **Hurricane Katrina Disaster**

Communities were disinvested from and denied access to basic resources and survival was criminalized, with the needs of corporations capitalizing on the disaster prioritized over needs of many community members.<sup>37</sup>

### **Flint Lead-in-Water Crisis**

With the Flint community exposed to high concentrations of lead in water and permanent health impacts, documentation such as a State ID becomes a requirement in some areas for obtaining clean water, leaving undocumented, and refugee community members with no recourse.<sup>38</sup>

## **7. When environmental injustice occurs and communities rise up in response to this violence, deployment of police and/or military forces is a key tactic used to suppress resistance.**

Some examples include:

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<sup>36</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency. (2015). *La Villita Park Opens at Former Celotex Site*. Retrieved from: <https://semspub.epa.gov/work/05/920210.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Kaufman, S. (2006). The Criminalization of New Orleanians in Katrina's Wake. Retrieved from: <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Kaufman/>

<sup>38</sup> Yu Hsi Lee, E. (2016). How The Flint Water Crisis Is Impacting Undocumented Immigrants. *ThinkProgress*. Retrieved from: <https://thinkprogress.org/how-the-flint-water-crisis-is-impacting-undocumented-immigrants-70b25a1a4abe/>

### Dakota Access Pipeline #NoDAPL Struggle

The Dakota Access Pipeline project, also known as Bakken Oil Pipeline, would extend 1,168 miles across North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois, crossing through communities, farms, tribal land, sensitive natural areas and wildlife habitat. The pipeline would carry crude oil from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota to Illinois where it will link with another pipeline that will transport the oil to terminals and refineries along the Gulf of Mexico. Native resistance to stop the pipeline from being built and protect water sources on Native land was met with brutality and violent suppression.<sup>39</sup>

### Assassination of Human Rights and Environmental Justice Leaders

The deaths of Berta Caceres, Emilsen Manyoma, and other movement leaders in other countries is connected to militarization and policing internationally and the role of the United States via American imperialism.

## 8. Self-determination is key to any meaningful change away from violence and policing.

- LVEJO holds that the Little Village community and its members need a voice in decision-making about violence and policing in the neighborhood.
- Critical to this voice is that community members are supported in achieving self-determination and are not met with gatekeeping when attempting to change what happens in Little Village.
- Current programs that encourage surveillance and produce community vigilantism **do not** provide self-determination. Instead, they increase existing power differences in the community and continue to criminalize youth, poverty and participants in street-based economies.

## 9. Solutions to violence in Little Village must lead toward the goal of liberation from violence and create access to justice.

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<sup>39</sup> Levin, S. (2017). Dakota Access pipeline activists say police have used “excessive” force. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/18/dakota-access-pipeline-protesters-police-used-excessive-force>

- **The solutions to violence must center the most affected community members as experts on what the community needs**, not the institutions, systems, or authorities charged with implementing policing and immigration detention and deportation.
- **The solutions to violence must be asset-based and not deficit-based**, with solutions derived from existing strengths within our community, as opposed to from perceived weaknesses.
- **The solutions to violence must be grounded in policies and practices that address multiple and all undocumented communities.**
- **The solutions to violence must include intersectional and expanded sanctuary policies that protect immigrant communities, explicitly close existing loopholes and include the impacts of policing on the Black community.** Expansion of Chicago's Welcoming City Ordinance should specifically remove the following exceptions, which still allow for police and ICE collaborations on detention of people with:
  - A criminal warrant
  - A prior felony conviction
  - A pending felony prosecution
  - Who are in a gang database
- **The solutions to violence must acknowledge Black leadership in anti-police brutality and liberation from a policing system.**
- **The solutions to violence do not include calling for more police in numbers or more resourcing of police.**

## EXAMPLE ALTERNATIVE

### Mi Parque

The Mi Parque Leadership Project is a community-led program that allows Little Village residents to help maintain La Villita Park as a safe and open green space for recreational activities. Mi Parque Leadership team and La Villita Park Advisory Council work in a framework where they honor every community member as essential to the creation and growth of the park. Participating youth are seasonal part-time paid-interns that are trained in community stewardship, de-escalating conflicts, and restorative justice and practices as alternatives to surveillance and policing in public spaces, such as La Villita Park. Participants

exercise self-determination and show how alternatives work on the ground. Notably, in 2016, no homicides were reported in or around La Villita Park.<sup>40</sup>

Since the summer of 2015, the Park Advisory Council at *La Villita* Park encountered important issues that affect the wellbeing of community members. The goal of the Park Advisory Council was to recruit volunteers from the neighborhood in an effort to make residents feel included in the park's current initiatives, programs, and future direction. Many residents were concerned that some patrons used the park for other leisure purposes, such as smoking, drinking, or loitering at the park. Another issue was safety, such as trespassing and/or graffiti that occurs on the neighboring building that surround the park. Moreover, residents constantly criticized the lack of communication between the community and Chicago Park District at *La Villita* Park. As a result, the Park Advisory Council (PAC) was created and a new pilot project was implemented in order to alleviate some of the park's safety and maintenance issues. First, LVEJO and La Villita Park Advisory Council established the *Mi Parque Leadership* pilot project (MPL). In doing so, the MPL youth team maintained the park's stewardship throughout the summers of 2015 and 2017. Secondly, the PAC and MPL developed the top ten safety tips for park patrons and created key partnerships with numerous community organizations and institutions. Overall, LVEJO, PAC, and MPL documented several recommendations over a span of three years and also developed a strategic plan to further improve La Villita Park by 2020.

The *Mi Parque Leadership* pilot project was established in 2015. Initially, MPL started with two supervisors, four (paid) youth park ambassadors, and five volunteers. At the conclusion of the 2015 program, the unpaid-volunteers increased from five to over twenty-two residents that ranged from 5 year-old children to elderly residents who were over 69 years of age. In the summer of 2017, the *Mi Parque Leadership* (MPL) Program was officially established as an alternative method to keep the La Villita Park safe and clean. The MPL program increased its capacity in three major ways, such as hired one consultant, two lead-supervisors, six paid youth ambassadors, and recruited over thirty volunteers. In addition, the PAC and MPL hosted numerous Park Advisory Council monthly meetings, organized cultural events, and community services opportunities.

Environmental justice communities live at the cross-section of a multitude of issues, and thus have historically organized through intersectional strategies. To end the environmental violence in our communities means to end the police and state violence, as well. It is an ongoing process of Little Village Environmental Justice Organization to firmly root in restorative and transformative practices. By following the Principles of Environmental Justice and the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing, we center community members instead of upholding

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<sup>40</sup> Ali, T. (2016). Crime In Chicago: What Happened In Your Neighborhood In 2016. *DNAinfo*. Retrieved from <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20161222/albany-park/chicago-crime-by-beat-map-by-neighborhood-murder-car-theft-burglaries>

policing and detention/deportation strategies that only serve to criminalize Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities.

**Read More:**

- [\*Why Environmental Justice is Needed to Address Chicago Violence\*](#) by Antonio Lopez
- [\*What To Do Instead of Calling the Police: A Guide, A Syllabus, A Conversation, A Process\*](#)
- [\*Expanding Sanctuary: What makes a sanctuary city now?\*](#) by Tania Unzueta at Mijente
- [\*Principles of Environmental Justice and Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing\*](#)