



Ten years ago last Sunday, on October 20, 2014, Laquan McDonald was murdered by a CPD officer after being shot 16 times in Archer Heights on Chicago's Southwest side.

The offending officer, Jason Van Dyke, responding with 8 other CPD officers to a disturbance call, had been at the scene for less than 30 seconds before opening fire on the 17-year-old. 9 of the 16 shots hit McDonald's back while he lay injured on the ground. Police reports of the incident, which claimed McDonald was behaving "crazed" and lunged at officers after refusing to drop his knife, directly conflicted with videos of the murder CPD eventually released after being ordered to do so over a year later on November 24, 2015.

As chilling as the crimes committed by Van Dyke, was the large-scale, organized conspiracy at every level of CPD leadership and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office to conceal what had happened on October 20th. Three other officers were alleged to have engaged in the intentional dismantling of audio recording devices present at the scene before the murder took place and fraudulent destruction of evidence, such as CTV footage of the murder captured at a nearby Burger King. The Office of the Inspector General would later recommend that 8 officers be fired for false or misleading statements made about the incident.

Chicago's impatience for real police reform sparked by the murder of Laquan McDonald and Rekia Boyd before him, fueled a political realignment in Chicago: from the firing of Garry McCarthy as CPD Superintendent in 2015 and the election of Kim Foxx as Cook County State's Attorney in 2016, to the creation of the Chicago Police Accountability Task Force.

It was the Task Force's final 2016 report, which validated and vindicated the outrage of Chicago's Black and Brown residents in regards to racist violence and systemic misconduct perpetuated by Chicago's police force, that ultimately led to the first community listening sessions of the Grassroots Alliance for Police Accountability (GAPA).

The GAPA coalition, originally made up of 6 neighborhood-level community organizations, was driven by a desire to bring the proposals of those most impacted by the injustices of an unaccountable and corrupt police system to the halls of city government and advocate for their immediate adoption. In 2016 alone, the coalition brought together more than 1,650 residents in 19 "Community Conversations" across the city to allow a broad and diverse group of Chicagoans to express their concerns about the Chicago Police Department.

Integrating the stories, experiences, and recommendations of community members, GAPA developed an ordinance that proposed a two-tiered structure for shifting power to Chicago residents and holding CPD accountable: a city-wide Community Commission and District Councils in each of Chicago's 22 police districts.

Working in Partnership with the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, alongside other neighborhood safety and violence reduction organizations that share a vision for safe communities



where the people have a voice in how the police operate, the Empowering Communities for Public Safety (ECPS) ordinance was passed and signed into law in July 2021.

Chicago is now home to the most democratic, progressive system of civilian police oversight in the United States. It has led to the appointment of pro-accountability, transparency, and justice reform commissioners to the first political body in the country designed specifically to guide policy practices for the police. As part of the ECPS ordinance, in 2023, Chicagoans elected 66 police district councilors. These councilors now hold monthly meetings on local police misconduct concerns and facilitate creative discussions on alternative community safety solutions that work best at the most local level. In short, ECPS has transformed how we do public safety in Chicago. It creates levels of accountability and oversight on the district level and steers CPD policy on the city level.

But as our origin story suggests, the road from Laquan McDonald to ECPS is a long and winding one, and the ultimate quest for real community safety, health, and justice is far from over.

First, as Chicagoans continue to learn more about what ECPS is and how they can get involved, it falls on coalitions like GAPA to help educate and mobilize residents to attend monthly District Council meetings. More attendance means clearer community input on neighborhood safety concerns and solutions. It also builds local political power to call for change and accountability.

Individual voices directly impact policy and accountability because community participation isn't just beneficial—it's transformative. As always, if you'd like to be a part of that transformation, you can find your local police District Council meetings at: chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ccpsa.html

Second, we must support District Councilors as they determine the trajectory of their role in this new office and develop their monthly meeting agendas. Many District Councilors still struggle with low community attendance and insufficient support and recognition from the city. But even with all these obstacles, community action plans, lessons on the history of policing in Chicago, and seminars on alternatives to policing from subject matter experts are already part of District Council meeting agendas across Chicago. GAPA hopes to connect the resources, support, and development opportunities that are already working to every District Councilor so everyone can access the best community development tools.

Finally, we must encourage and fight for strong, pro-accountability District Councilors to run for office in every police district and advocate for the resources we believe are necessary from the city government to execute the expectations of the office successfully if and when they win.

The GAPA coalition is continuing to work on these priorities and many more. The systems and practices that led to Laquan McDonald's murder and cover-up are not going to be dismantled through one ordinance. They will take decades of anti-racist activism, policy making, and community organizing to painstakingly disassemble brick by brick.



As we reflect on this moment and the ongoing struggle for police accountability and community safety, we are proud of how far we've come but are resolved to press still further in the memory of the victims of institutionalized violence, known and unknown, by reinforcing the foundations of the progress that the ECPS ordinance promises to make in our city, and by imagining to what heights a city free of police violence could reach if we are committed enough to realize it together.

Signed,

The Grassroots Alliance for Police Accountability

Good Kids Mad City Englewood
Community Renewal Society
Impact for Equity
Southwest Organizing Project
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
O.N.E. Northside
TARGET Area Development Corporation
Policing Project