

NEWS



FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN FRITCHEY

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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Lawmakers Call for National Guard Help to Combat Violence *Urge Quinn, Daley and Weis to Coordinate Resources, Efforts*

(Chicago) Prompted by rampant gun violence and mounting fatalities across the city, State Representatives John Fritchey (D-Chicago) and LaShawn Ford (D-Chicago) are calling on Governor Pat Quinn to work in conjunction with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Chicago Police Superintendent Jody Weis to deploy the Illinois National Guard in an effort to deal with the violence. The two legislators, who were joined by the father of a victim of gun violence, stated that the Guard should be sent into Chicago as soon as possible to help get guns and criminals off the streets.

While the National Guard has been deployed in other states to prevent violence related to specific events and protests, the Chicago legislators stated that they were unaware of guardsmen being deployed to assist with general urban unrest.

“As we speak, National Guard members are working side-by-side with our troops to fight a war halfway around the world,” said Rep. Fritchey. “The unfortunate reality is that we have another war that is just as deadly taking place right in our backyard. Is this a drastic call to action? Of course it is. But is it warranted when we are losing residents to gun violence at such an alarming rate? Without question.”

So far this year, 113 people have been killed across Chicago - precisely the same number as the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined during the same time period.

“Gang activity and its resulting violence has taken a toll on my community for far too long,” stated Rep. Ford. “The Military Code of Illinois specifically states that it is the duty of the Governor to deploy such force as he deems necessary in order to suppress individuals acting together and committing violence in violation of our laws. Enough is enough. We’ve already lost too many lives. We need action now.”

While the two legislators represent very different racial and socioeconomic districts, they said that they are coming together to highlight the fact that the concerns about gun violence should be a priority to all Chicagoans. They also note that 80% of city homicide victims are black.

“Candidly, I think that if these shootings were taking place on the north side, we’d be seeing more of an outcry from the community and a more heightened response,” said Rep. Fritchey. “But regardless of where you live, or where the shootings take place, we must never lose sight that every one of these children that gets shot is somebody’s son or somebody’s daughter.”

Both legislators said that while they believe that more should be done to deal with the violence, their call to action should not be taken as a criticism of local law enforcement efforts. Rather, the two lawmakers say that they are simply looking for a way to prevent more innocent lives from being lost to senseless violence.

“Nothing in our request should be taken in any way as a slight to the hard-working men and women of the Chicago Police Department,” stated Rep. Fritchey. “But the reality is that Department resources are stretched thin, and while state funding isn’t available to provide for the hiring of more officers, by calling up the National Guard, we can help the police do their job and save lives in the process. We have trained and ready National Guardsmen living right here in Chicago who could be immediately deployed to assist our police officers. Let’s get them out into the streets.”

Fritchey and Ford note that Superintendent Weis recently pointed out most violent crime in Chicago happens on just 9 percent of the city’s blocks. To target these ‘hot spots’, Weis said he was seeking 100 officers to volunteer for a summer-long ‘strategic response team’.

“Rather than ask our officers to take on even more responsibility on a volunteer basis, the Governor, Mayor and Superintendent should use the National Guard resources that we have available to focus on these problem areas,” said Rep. Ford. “If they can save even one life, one child, in my community, I would welcome the National Guard with open arms and I am confident that my constituents would as well.”

The lawmakers said that prompt action is needed because summer is right around the corner and that with the warm weather comes an increase in violence. The head of a prominent anti-violence group supports their position.

“When the weather gets warmer, people see the person they’re after on the street corner,” said Tio Hardiman, Director of CeaseFire Illinois. “Between the bad economy and upcoming warm weather, we have the all the ingredients for what could be a very violent summer.”

Willie Williams Sr., whose son Willie Williams III was shot and killed in 2006, joined Reps. Fritchey and Ford at the press conference. Mr. Williams has since created a youth foundation named after his late son in order to assist inner-city youths through job training and sports programs.

“While nothing can bring back my son, I strongly support any and every effort to keep us from losing any more of our children to senseless gun violence,” stated Williams. “But the police can’t do it by themselves. We not only have to work together as a community to provide opportunities for our youth but we have to help the police get the guns and the killers off the street.”

Rep. Fritchey noted that while National Guard can be a key tool in combating the violence, they should not be viewed as the answer to the causes of the violence.

“People need to understand that until we provide meaningful economic opportunities to our residents, we will not break the cycle of despair and violence,” said Rep. Fritchey. “We have to replace the culture of complacency with one of opportunity and optimism.”