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Gun violence disproportionately impacts African American communities like mine – yet we are often left out of conversations on solutions. The truth is, African American residents and communities across Illinois will be safer when Illinois stops illegal gun ownership and fixes the broken FOIA card system.

I'm fully cognizant of the historic nature of law enforcement as it relates to minorities in general and specifically black people. As such I'm advocating for responsible, racially conscious policing and adjudicatory enforcement as we fight to keep guns out of the hands of known criminals to make our communities safer. The stakes are too high for black communities who so often bear the burden of gun violence and over-criminalization within Illinois.

Legislators should focus on who is supplying guns to our neighborhoods instead of placing the blame solely on black youth. Background checks are one way to reduce illegal firearm trafficking and keep guns out of our communities.

As a community outreach worker and active member of my clergy, I have witnessed the trauma that lingers after one of these life changing events. We need stronger mental health supports in communities affected by gun violence, to get residents the help that they need.

I call on our legislators to support The BIO (Block Illegal Gun Ownership) Bill, which will fund community-based mental health services aimed at reducing gun violence and will ensure that all residents – regardless of race or ethnicity – are compliant with the law.