

Chicago police officers investigated for abusing migrant youth forced to sleep in police stations

Kristina Betinis
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Last Thursday, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) announced it had received a complaint and initiated an investigation into four Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers alleged to have made sexual contact with migrants living in the 10th District station in the Lawndale neighborhood. A migrant youth is reportedly pregnant by a CPD officer. Later reports indicate an investigation continues involving only two officers. No names or details of the complaint have been released.

Forty asylum seekers who had been forced to sleep in the lobby of that police station were moved last Friday into city shelters “for their own safety,” according to local outlet ABC7.

Since last August, about 11,000 asylum seekers have arrived in Chicago, having been bused in from Texas in a cruel political maneuver by Governor Greg Abbott. According to Axios, more than 730 migrants are now being housed across 22 police stations, living and sleeping on the floors. Some 5,000 more asylum seekers are in city facilities in makeshift or temporary shelters, according to the Chicago Tribune. Some have moved into temporary housing on short term leases.

A migrant from Nicaragua, Karla Urbina, told the *Tribune*, “Many have no respect for us, they see us as objects. Some officers treat not only women, but all migrants badly, calling them names, giving looks and violating the little privacy that they may have,” noting that fear of reprisal means asylum seekers do not report abuse.

Many “welcoming cities,” including Chicago, did not have funding or housing facilities set aside to assist tens of thousands of arriving families, though city leaders claimed there was safe haven for immigrants. In Chicago, the shelters, churches, Cook County medical system, and nonprofit agencies were quickly overwhelmed and thus families have been forced to sleep on the floors of police stations, in shuttered public schools and park district field

houses without adequate food or bathroom facilities, or social support.

On Wednesday, asylum seekers took complaints about mistreatment, unacceptable conditions, lack of food and social support to City Hall, demanding housing and jobs. One woman told a local news reporter that migrant mothers are being threatened with expulsion from shelter if they complain. Protesters with the Little Village Community Council are demanding that the investigation into the officers accused be transparent.

Abuse of vulnerable immigrant families and their children by the notoriously violent and corrupt CPD is a charge that could easily ignite the tinderbox of social anger and disgust at decades of inequality, exploitation and abuse at the hands of the police and the capitalist social and political order they serve.

City officials are therefore demanding the investigation be swiftly concluded. Public Safety Committee Chair Ald. Brian Hopkins said, “We have to resolve this; we have to. We can’t let this linger. You know, it would be damaging to everyone if this takes months and months, and we still don’t have answers. We need to solve this within weeks.”

The dangers facing migrants at the hands of the state cannot be underestimated. In May, Chicago Alderman Ray Lopez tweeted the false and inflammatory assertion that asylum seekers were spreading tuberculosis to police in the stations. News media outlet Block Club contacted Andrew Buchanan, spokesman for the Chicago Department of Public Health, who said, “There hasn’t been a single confirmed case of tuberculosis among migrants staying at police stations nor any cases among Chicago police officers.”

The ruling party in Illinois and Chicago, the Democrats, leveled a further attack on immigrants last month when billionaire Governor J.B. Pritzker announced the state would claw back the limited healthcare benefits for low-income undocumented immigrants aged 42 and older. Healthcare for

low-income undocumented children up to age 18 under the All Kids program and seniors over age 62 under the Health Benefits for Immigrant Seniors Program would continue, but the governor rejected calls from immigrant rights groups and healthcare activists to provide coverage for low-income undocumented adults aged 19 to 41.

Pritzker claimed in a statement referring to those living in the city's 22 police stations, "[T]hey've been taking good care of those migrants." On the investigation into sexual abuse, Pritzker offered only the formality: "It's a terrible thing and I hope there's a full investigation as fast as possible, and if there is wrongdoing they ought to be held accountable immediately."

Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson, the former Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) lobbyist whose campaign was backed by Senator Bernie Sanders and city council members in the Democratic Socialists of America, issued a similarly perfunctory statement last week: "The Johnson administration remains intensely focused on the deeply troubling allegations of sexual misconduct by a Chicago Police Department officer against a minor new arrival, and other allegations of sexual misconduct in the Chicago Police Department's 10th District."

In every meaningful respect the Democratic Party has been the partner in the Republican Party's fascistic targeting and abuse of immigrants, which is today, as in times past, used as a political and ideological wedge aimed at dividing and intimidating the working class as a whole. The Democrats participate in this above all by relentlessly promoting identity politics, and especially racial politics.

During the 2023 mayoral election, Johnson's opponent Paul Vallas, also a Democrat, who was backed by big business and campaigned on repressive law and order policies, was actively promoted by "Moms for Liberty" and several Trumpite media figures, as his official social media account "liked" and followed racist and bigoted postings. But Johnson's campaign did not raise the alarm or make a class appeal to all workers to unite in opposition to Vallas' campaign. Instead, Johnson increasingly promoted the concepts and language of identity politics, including black nationalism.

Johnson credited black nationalism for the progressive policies of the mid-20th century. In a bizarre distortion of the history of the civil rights movement that erased the working class, including white workers, from his telling, Johnson claimed all the Great Society legislation passed under the administration of US President Lyndon Johnson was, "because you had a black radical left agenda that

brought Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. All of that came out of the black consciousness movement."

During a March vote in city council on accepting state funding to assist immigrants being bused in, DSA Ald. Jeanette Taylor expressed her opposition to immigrants being placed in the predominantly black Woodlawn neighborhood, part of the 20th ward, claiming it would anger residents who themselves need assistance. Former Mayor Lori Lightfoot placed immigrants in a shelter in Woodlawn's shuttered Wadsworth Elementary, which was closed in 2013 as part of the largest school closure in US history.

Claiming the city had thrown "a grenade into our community," Taylor aired her views on immigrants: "I made it clear to this administration in October, I had a part of the ward that I felt could accommodate [the migrants], because they're Latinx-speaking folks, and part of my ward is Latinx. But I wasn't listened to. It felt like nobody heard me and it went on deaf ears. So when do we have the conversation about where it's safe, where people should actually be, where they can get the support that they need in the community?"

The Democratic Party is unable and unwilling to make any class-based appeal, fearing a mass mobilization against inequality and austerity, police violence, and endless war far more than they fear the fascistic Republicans or the collaboration of their own candidates with fascist organizations, like Vallas for electoral aims.

The working class must take the necessary steps to defend itself against attacks on all of its sections, uniting across nationalities, races, genders and orientations by forming rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighborhood to coordinate the struggle for jobs, housing, healthcare, schools, and infrastructure, building its own socialist political movement, independent of the capitalist two-party system and in opposition to the divide-and-conquer politics of both parties.



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