



[Opinion: Keep ShotSpotter — or find something better](#)

By Robert Boik

February 16, 2024

Crain's Chicago Business

In June of last year, the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago announced its desire to partner with public, philanthropic and nonprofit stakeholders on a "one table" approach to reduce gun violence in Chicago. In making our announcement, we outlined a five-pillar framework that detailed the commitments that the business community was prepared to make to support the overall effort to make Chicago the safest big city in America.

Since that time, we joined Mayor Brandon Johnson for the announcement of his People's Plan for Community Safety, where we committed to mobilizing the business community to help create jobs and spur revitalization on the South and West sides. Two weeks ago, we joined Gov. J.B. Pritzker, Mayor Johnson, Chicago Police Superintendent Larry Snelling and a number of our nonprofit and philanthropic partners to launch a new collaborative effort. We announced the business and philanthropic communities had come together to raise \$66 million (and counting) to scale promising community violence intervention programs in the most violent neighborhoods in Chicago.

These efforts alone, however, will not get us to where we need to be in terms of gun violence reduction unless they are coupled with effective constitutional policing and a strong criminal justice system. That is why a key pillar of our strategic framework is dedicated to the critical role that effective constitutional policing must play in helping to reduce violent crime, and why our Public Safety Task Force has spent significant time engaging with the Chicago Police Department and other experts to identify ways in which the business community can help strengthen and support the effectiveness of the police department.

So, you can understand why we are seriously concerned about the recent announcement that the city is phasing out ShotSpotter, one of the few tools CPD has to identify and respond to shooting incidents in real time, and one that CPD has publicly supported on many occasions. This concern is heightened by news that ShotSpotter may not be open to a short-term contract renewal through the summer.

A tool that alerts officers to gun violence is essential in Chicago, as gun violence is the issue that destroys families and communities. It also drives people and businesses out of neighborhoods most in need of investment. There must be a replacement for ShotSpotter that equals or exceeds its contribution to detecting gun violence in real time.

Our claim that real-time gun violence detection technology is essential for CPD is not just a matter of opinion. Publicly available data shows that in the 11th District, the city's most violent police district on the West Side, 415 people were shot outdoors in 2022. Only 25% of those shootings prompted a 911 call, whereas 72% were linked to a ShotSpotter alert. In the 7th District on the South Side, 218 people were shot outdoors in 2022, but only 22% triggered a 911 call, while 69% were linked to a ShotSpotter alert. Similar trends exist in every other high-violence police district in the city.

Ask a police officer — which we have — what it is like to respond to a ShotSpotter alert, and they will often tell you that they arrive at the scene with more critical information than when responding to a 911 call. ShotSpotter not only provides an exact location, it also relays information about the number of shots fired, whether there were multiple shooters and whether an automatic weapon was fired. A police representative recently testified to the Community Commission on Public Safety & Accountability that ShotSpotter technology led officers to the precise location of a shooting incident where first responders rendered life-saving aid more than 400 times since 2020.

ShotSpotter also augments other technological investments that the city and the CPD have made. It is the backbone of the Strategic Decision Support Centers in police districts across the city, where cameras can zero in on the locations of alerts and that information can be relayed to responding officers. As former interim Superintendent Charlie Beck recently observed, take ShotSpotter away, and those cameras become less useful. Take ShotSpotter away, and Chicago will have to start from scratch. Given the level of gun violence in our city, the Chicago police cannot afford to lose a step when the ShotSpotter microphones are turned off.

We fully appreciate the pressures on the mayor and the City Council to confront challenging issues in public safety. As a business community, we will continue to partner with and support all of the critical stakeholders — public, philanthropic and nonprofit — to make Chicago the safest big city in America, but we will also continue to support investing in technology the CPD determines to be essential for responding to gun violence.

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