



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on February 14, 2024

## Chicago Dumps ShotSpotter Tech to Track Gunfire After Nearly 550 Shooting Deaths Last Year

Chicago will no longer use the high-tech ShotSpotter system that enables police to respond more quickly to gunfire in the city, whose residents live in constant fear of dying in a hail of bullets. Almost 550 people died in shootings last year.

The reason: The system isn't perfect. And it's "racially biased."

In a city where holiday weekends sound like the Battle of Fallujah, one would think those are minor concerns, but alas, it is Chicago, the city with a big chip on its shoulder.

The good news for Democrats is this: The system will stay in place until after the Democratic National Convention, which runs August 19-24. When the shooting starts that week, the cops will know right away, and the worthies who will renominate Joe Biden might return home in one piece.



Kelly Liu/iStock/Getty Images Plus

### **\$49 Million Contract**

The system will run until September 22, but the contract ends Friday, the [city's Sun-Times reported](#). Meanwhile, the Mayor Brandon Johnson announced, "Law enforcement and other community safety stakeholders will assess tools and programs that effectively increase both safety and trust, and issue recommendations to that effect."

Top cops weren't invited to the meeting where Johnson elaborated on his plan, which lets the \$49 million contract with SoundThinking, the tech company that makes and markets the technology, lapse on Friday.

### [Continued the Sun-Times:](#)

[Johnson] insisted the technology is "unreliable and overly susceptible to human error," adding that it "played a pivotal role" in the fatal police shooting of 13-year-old Adam Toledo in March 2021.

Many of those concerns were reiterated by critics of ShotSpotter, who frame it as a costly surveillance tool that has led to overpolicing in minority communities. Proponents argue it's a lifesaving resource that gives cops another much-needed tool to respond to gun violence.

Cook County prosecutors say the technology doesn't help bring shooters to court, the newspaper



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reported, and in 2021, a study from the Northwestern School of Law declared that the vast majority of police deployments triggered by SpotSpotter yielded no crime reports.

Yet a third “scathing report” from the city inspector general “concluded the technology rarely leads to investigatory stops or evidence of gun crimes.”

The city police chief, Larry Snelling, does not agree. And neither do 13 of the city’s 50 aldermen. Led by the 29th ward’s [Chris Taliaferro](#), they wrote to Snelling to say the technology is “critical to locating victims, giving first responders the opportunity to render swifter aid and locate evidence.”

And those officials would know, the [Sun-Times reported](#):

Those alderpersons represent wards in ShotSpotter’s coverage zone, which includes 12 of the city’s 22 police districts. They argued funding for ShotSpotter was included in the 2024 budget and urged Snelling to “take all steps necessary to ensure that there is no gap in vital services for the residents of Chicago.”

Taliaferro (29th), a former Chicago cop who chairs the City Council’s Police Committee, said the decision will ultimately “hurt the city,” predicting it will have a damning impact on officers’ response times.

“We have lost an opportunity to get aid to victims if there are shots or there is someone who has been shot,” he said. “We’re losing that opportunity to get them lifesaving treatment as quickly as possible.”

Taliaferro said the number of people calling 911 is “much lower than what this detection system is picking up,” skewing the statistics cited by ShotSpotter critics. He insisted the technology “is very instrumental in keeping our police responsive to the needs of the community, especially when there’s shots being fired in our neighborhoods.”

“Is this technology saving lives? Yes. Are our police officers able to respond to calls of shots fired a lot quicker than using the 911 system? Yes,” he said. “I’m disappointed that we’re getting rid of technology that is actually working as it is designed to do.”

The former chief of police in Los Angeles, Charlie Beck, who toiled as an ad hoc superintendent under [incompetent former Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot](#), also backs the system.

“[The Chicago Police Department] has integrated ShotSpotter into their strategic centers in the districts, and I think they’re going to be losing a tool that has strong value,” Beck told the *Sun-Times*. “Without something to replace it or without an alternate plan that will make up for its loss, I wouldn’t have done it.... It hurts their effectiveness.”

### **The Technology, Chicago Shootings**

[SoundThinking says](#) that 80 percent of gunfire is never reported, but in cities that use the technology, 90 percent is reported.

ShotSpotter not only enhances police reaction time, decreasing it from 4.5 minutes to 60 seconds, the company claims, but also the hospital transport time for gunshot victims from 10.3 minutes to 6.8 minutes.

As well, the technology gets police much closer to the scene of a shooting and vastly increases the number of shell casings that are found — 50 percent to 89 percent.



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SoundThinking says 150 cities use the technology, including Denver, Oakland, and New York. Smaller cities also use it.

If any city needs ShotSpotter, Chicago would seem to be the one. Holiday weekends occasion hurricanes of lead.

Fifteen shootings during this year's Martin Luther King holiday weekend [left six dead](#) and nine wounded.

During the New Year's holiday weekend, [two were shot to death](#) and 23 were wounded.

Shooters celebrated Christmas last year with [22 shootings that left](#) three dead and 19 wounded.

September's Labor Day [44 shootings left](#) 10 dead and 34 wounded, one of whom was a six-year-old boy.

[Gunfire likely drowned out](#) celebratory fireworks through the July 4 weekend: 73 were shot; 11 died.

Last year's Memorial Day weekend [was another big weekend](#) for shootings. By the time that was over, 12 went to the morgue and 48 went to the hospital.

Assuming those figures are complete, holidays weekends alone accounted for 250 shootings.

The [Sun-Times's homicide tracker reports](#) 39 so far in 2024 and 582 in 2023. Thirty-four of this year's victims were shot to death, and 542 were last year. Such is the mayhem that the newspaper publishes [Homicide Watch Chicago](#) to memorialize the never-ending stream of victims who land in the intensive care unit or six feet under.

The answer to all this "gun violence": Dump ShotSpotter.



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