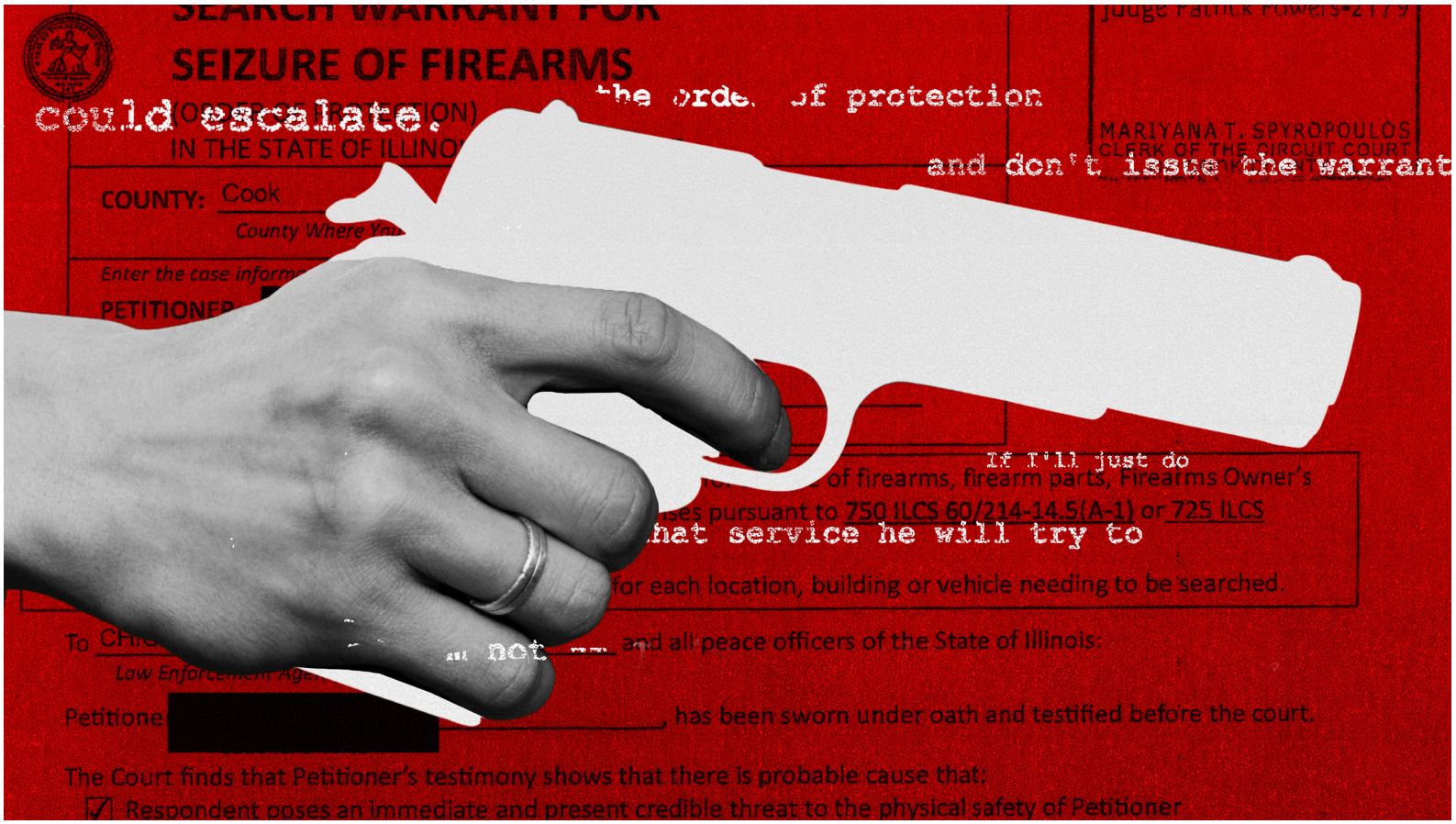

The Chicago police are rarely executing search warrants to collect guns owned by suspects in domestic violence cases despite a provision in a state law aimed at protecting survivors. | Illustration by Mendy Kong/WBEZ

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

THE WATCHDOGS NEWS CITY HALL

Chicago police aren't going after domestic abusers' guns despite state law

Under Karina's Law, domestic violence victims can get a search warrant for the police to go after their abusers' firearms. But the Chicago police have served just three of the 91 warrants issued since the law took effect last year, the Sun-Times found.

By Sophie Sherry | Nov 13, 2026, 5:30am CST

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When her abusive ex-boyfriend pointed a gun at her head this summer, Dominique says she knew she had to do something before it was too late.

So she went to court and requested a protective order to keep her ex away from her and a search warrant for the police to go get his gun. She was able to do so under Karina's Law, an Illinois law that took effect last year in an effort to protect survivors of domestic violence.

"I just don't want to die," the 26-year-old mother told a Cook County judge in September.

Her requests were granted. And the Chicago Police Department was sent a search warrant, which officers had 96 hours to execute.

But that didn't happen. Instead, a cop was back in court two days later to ask the judge to drop the warrant, according to a transcript of that hearing.

The officer argued that too much time had passed since Dominique last saw her ex-boyfriend's gun, saying that made it difficult for police to "conclusively say that that firearm remains in the location."

Dominique says she was shocked.

But to those tracking the implementation of Karina's Law, the move was hardly surprising.

Since the law took effect, Chicago police have gotten at least 91 Karina's Law search warrants, according to documents obtained by the Chicago Sun-Times. Only three have been served.

A police spokesperson says it's a safety issue for the police.

"Our focus is on recovering weapons from domestic violence offenders in the safest manner possible for all individuals involved," the spokesperson says, adding that some guns are still taken during arrests or when suspected abusers hand them over after a warrant is issued.

But advocates for domestic violence victims say the department is flouting the law and placing survivors at risk.

Dominique, who agreed to be interviewed on the condition she be identified by only her first name because she fears for her safety, questions when the police “will take it seriously.”

“What would it take?” she says. “Would it take [being] harmed or a fatal incident? God forbid those incidents occurring.”

Questions raised on the honor system

Karina’s Law was the culmination of a yearslong legislative battle over how to crack down on abusers who own guns. It took effect statewide on May 11, 2025 — Mother’s Day.

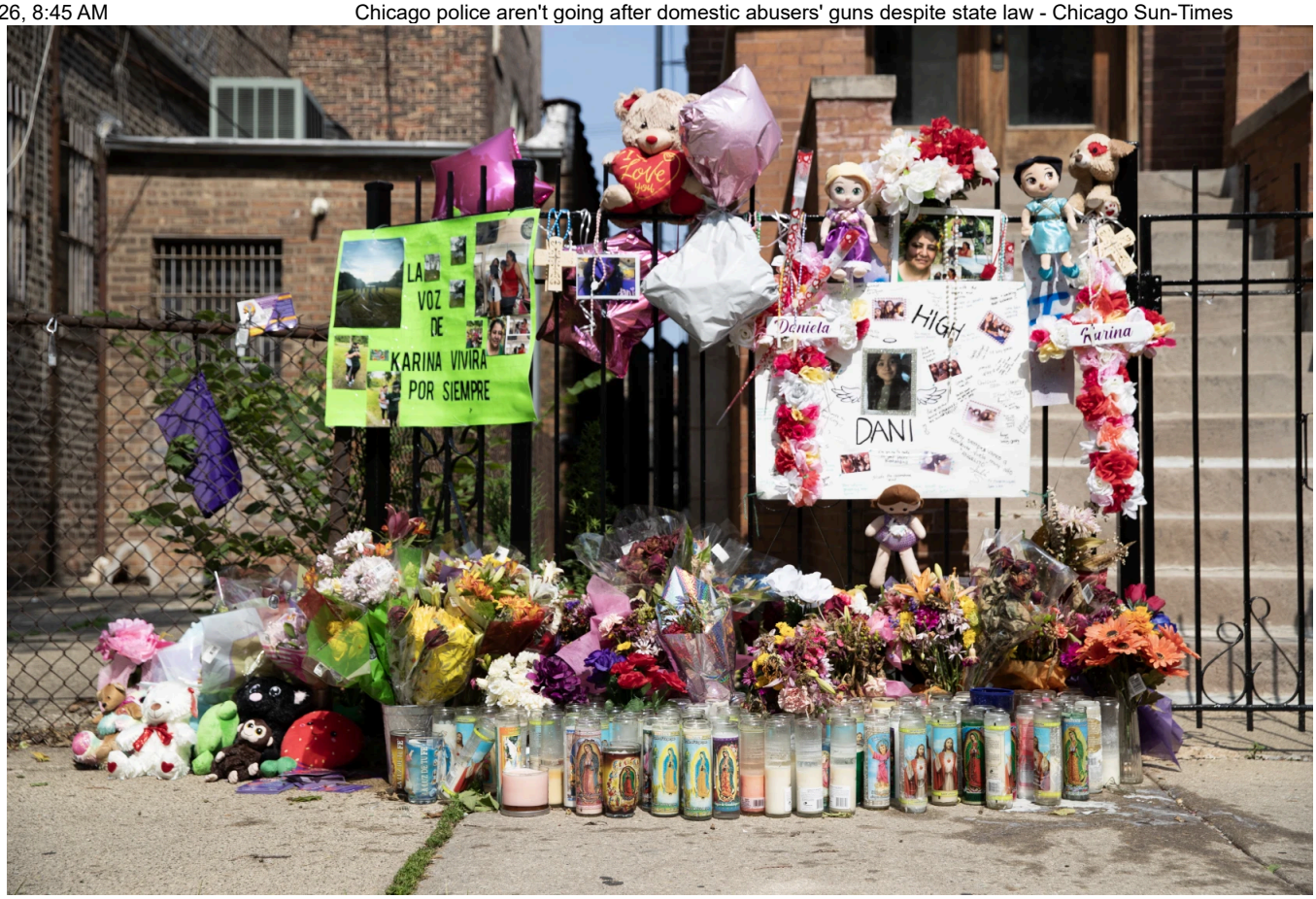
The law was named for Karina Gonzalez, who was shot to death in July 2023, weeks after she told police she had been threatened by her husband, Jose Alvarez. Her 15-year-old daughter, Daniela, also was killed.

Gonzalez had been granted a protective order that barred Alvarez from possessing a gun. But his weapon was never taken away.

At the time, domestic violence survivors had the ability to request firearm removal when they sought an order of protection. But advocates say that enforcement was inconsistent and often inadequate.

Karina’s Law was presented as a solution. Now, judges granting an order of protection also can issue a firearm search-and-seizure warrant to law enforcement.

If the survivor has recently made a police report, officers have 96 hours to execute the warrant. If not, the police have 48 hours to investigate and raise any issues with a judge.



A memorial for slain Little Village resident Karina Gonzalez and her 15-year-old daughter Daniela in July 2023. | Owen Ziliak/Sun-Times

Questions about how the law has been implemented arose after a Chicago police official appeared before the Cook County Board in late March.

Mike Milstein, deputy director of the police department's Office of Victim Services, acknowledged that the police had carried out just two of the 60 Karina's Law warrants that had been issued to that point. Milstein told commissioners that some people targeted in those gun-seizure warrants handed over their weapons voluntarily, so it was unnecessary to conduct the searches.

That raised "a giant red flag" for Benna Crawford, a managing attorney of Legal Aid Chicago, which provides free representation for people who can't afford a lawyer.

"Attempting to remove guns from respondents through the honor system and voluntary surrender is exactly the broken system that Karina's Law was passed to fix," Crawford says.



Benna Crawford, managing director of Legal Aid Chicago, at her office in the Loop late last month. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

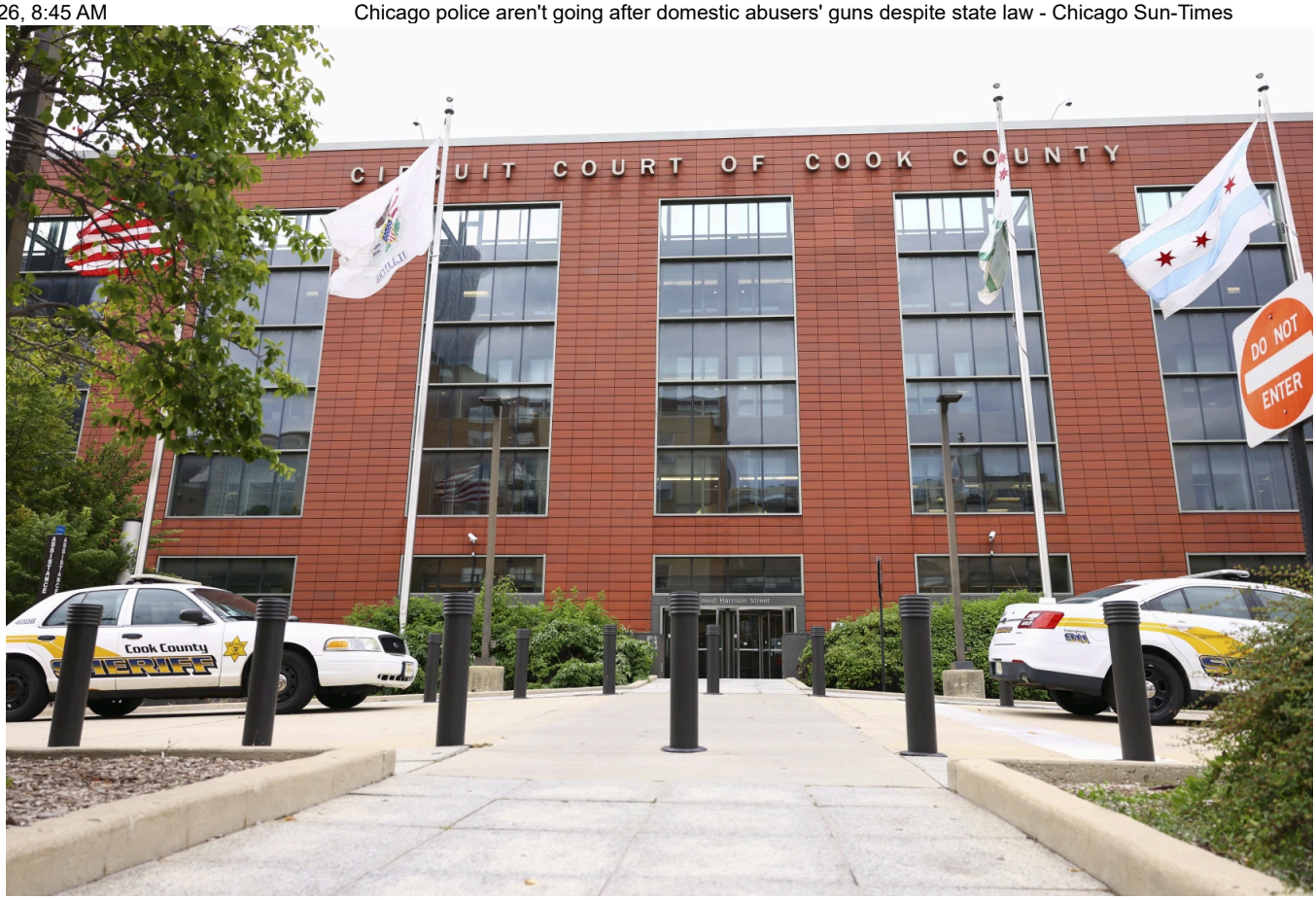
A lasting problem

Legal Aid Chicago lawyers set up a desk at Cook County's domestic violence courthouse in May and started taking every case tied to Karina's Law. Crawford and other attorneys noticed that judges were hesitant at first about issuing warrants to seize guns.

They say there also was another impediment to enforcing that part of the law — the Chicago police. Since May, a handful of Legal Aid Chicago clients have sought warrants that were directed to suburban law enforcement agencies. All of them have been served, Crawford says, "and guns have been recovered" during each search.

Over that same period, the Chicago police failed to execute any of the warrants issued in cases filed by more than 30 Legal Aid Chicago clients, Crawford says.

In almost every case, police officials returned to court and asked a judge to negate a warrant, Crawford says. Court records show officers sometimes would argue that a warrant was based on old information or lacked certainty.



Cook County's Domestic Violence Courthouse, 555 W. Harrison St. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

In Dominique's case, an officer told a judge that too much time had passed since she had seen her ex-boyfriend's gun, arguing that it could have been moved since then. That was four days after Dominique said the gun was held to her head and just two days after the warrant was issued.

As the officer moved to have the warrant quashed, he noted that Dominique's ex-boyfriend had a roommate who was on house arrest and facing gun charges.

Her lawyers pushed back.

"This petitioner did exactly what she needed to do and voiced why she needed this warrant," Legal Aid's Mallory Morgan told the judge. "The single incident between them included the gun being pointed at her head. And when you had asked why she felt she needed a warrant, her response was because: I do not want to die."

Despite the dire warnings, Cook County Circuit Judge Lester Finkle sided with the police department and nixed the warrant, echoing the concerns about the gun possibly have been moved and about others living with the ex-boyfriend.

One search, 26 guns

The Chicago police have recovered multiple guns in each of the three searches that have been conducted in response to Karina's Law warrants.

One of the warrants was executed in July 2025 in a case involving a protective order, and another was served in October 2025 in a divorce proceeding. Two guns were recovered in the first case and four in the other, records show.

The last warrant was served in July as part of a criminal case. While a man was in custody on domestic battery charges, the police searched his Bridgeport home and recovered 26 firearms.

At a city budget hearing this month, the police brass stood by their approach to Karina's Law while acknowledging the challenges they're facing under an "expedited" timeline to investigate and seize guns.

"Sometimes, it makes it very difficult for officers to … corroborate all the information, assess what the risks are when you're actually conducting the warrant, and focus on appropriate course of action," said Counterterrorism Chief Christopher Papaioannou, who was named a finalist Thursday to become the city's next police superintendent.



Christopher Papaioannou, now the Chicago Police Department's counterterrorism chief, speaks at a news conference after four teenagers were shot in Washington Park in January 2023. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

Papaioannou credited officers for "doing an exceptional job" executing the warrants but also noted that most guns "are being recovered through voluntary compliance."

The police spokesperson says the department "does not refuse to serve search warrants.

"As part of the significant reforms we have made to the search warrant policy in previous years, we have strengthened the process leading up to the service of a search warrant to ensure all information is verified and corroborated," the spokesperson says.

But state Sen. Celina Villanueva, D-Chicago, who was a chief sponsor of Karina's Law, says it's "a problem" that Chicago cops aren't serving most warrants to get guns from suspected abusers.

"This is something the department really needs to take a look at," Villanueva says.

She says lawmakers also need to "go to the drawing board" to help keep survivors safe.

Maralea Negron, executive vice president of policy and impact for The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence, spent years lobbying legislators in Springfield to pass Karina's Law.

"To see the fact that it's failing in places where a search warrant was granted — a very serious legal document and a directive by a judge — is very disheartening and completely undermines the intention of what we were trying to accomplish with passing Karina's law," Negron says.

The number of domestic violence homicides in Chicago has fallen over the past year. But nonfatal domestic shootings have been on the rise across Chicago. So far this year, 69 people in Chicago have been shot and wounded by a domestic partner — a 25% increase compared to the same period in 2025.

Negron says Chicago police officials haven't been clear about the issues officers face while preparing to serve Karina's Law warrants. She and Crawford have tried to meet with the police department but gotten no response.

"Law enforcement's responsibility is to enforce the law," Negron says. "So, if a judge is signing an order and making this determination, it is really important for law enforcement to realize, 'I could actually be putting people's lives at more risk and in way of harm by not executing the search warrant.'"

Maralea Negron, vice president of policy and impact at The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence, speaks at a news conference about immigration enforcement in April. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

Living in fear

Crawford says she has seen the shortcomings of the “honor system” that Chicago police officials are using to seize guns from suspected abusers, with cases in which someone has surrendered a gun, only for the police to discover other weapons hidden in their home. The Chicago police also haven’t told her clients whether guns have been turned over, leaving survivors afraid and “completely in the dark.

“When they walk into that courthouse … what they are saying to the judge is that if this person is allowed to keep the guns, he is going to use those guns to kill me,” Crawford says.

Dominique says she has been living with that fear for months. When she isn’t in school, she says, she spends most of her time inside with her young child.

“I have a duty to protect my son even though I’m afraid for myself,” she says. “It’s a very perplexing feeling. I have to put on a brave face. I have to keep my head high. Yet I can’t let my rain get my child wet.”

Dominique’s order of protection still hasn’t been served.

“Victims of domestic violence, whether you are a male or a female, I just want the system to recognize us and fight for us,” she says.

Manny Alvarez, the son of Karina Gonzalez, has been pushing for changes since his mother and sister were killed. He hoped Karina’s Law would protect other families from the same fate.

Manny Alvarez, Karina Gonzalez's son, speaks with a supporter of Karina's Bill after a news conference in October 2023. | Anthony Vazquez/Sun-Times

"It's just disappointing to hear that people are asking for help — taking advantage of the law that was passed to help them ensure that that doesn't happen again — and out of self-interest or CPD's own reasons, they're simply just rejecting [warrants] or choosing not to carry them out," Alvarez says.

"I don't want it to be the case that there has to be someone else who dies at the hands of an abuser, and that's the reason that people start taking it seriously again."

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