CITYWIDE

Look For The Helpers: How Chicagoans Are Supporting Their Neighbors Amid ICE Raids

As President Donald Trump deploys federal agents in the city and suburbs, locals are finding ways big and small to help each other. Here's how you can help, too.

By Marium Asif, City Bureau, Jerrel Floyd, City Bureau, Sophia Kalakailo, City Bureau and Jorge Iván Soto, City Bureau
October 16, 2025

Lindsey Jordan, of Andersonville, shows volunteers how to fold pamphlets for the whistle kits on Monday, Oct. 13, 2025, at All Saints Episcopal Church in Ravenswood. Credit: Anastasia Busby for City Bureau

Credibility: Original Reporting On the Ground Sources Cited

This story was published in collaboration with City Bureau. Support City Bureau's work to reimagine local journalism and sign up for its free weekly Newswire newsletter.

CHICAGO — If there is one thing to draw hope from amid the descent of federal agents into Chicago over the past month, it's how Chicagoans far and wide are showing up in support of one another.

Across the city, neighbors are stepping up to help kids get to school safely, picking up groceries for families who fear leaving their homes and raising money to support street vendors and others whose livelihoods have been threatened by the swarm of Immigration and Customs Enforcement patrols.

While it remains unknown how long the increased ICE presence will last — Russell Hott, ICE's field director in Chicago, told Block Club last week that there was no planned end date — the effect of people showing up for one another will continue to reverberate for just as long, neighbors and organizers said.

Here are a few ways neighbors are supporting their communities — and how you can help, too.

Volunteers make whistle kits to help deter ICE agents on Monday, Oct. 13, 2025, at All Saints Episcopal Church in Ravenswood. The event was put on by Ravenswood Community Services. Credit: Anastasia Busby for City Bureau

Blowing The Whistle

Residents are equipping themselves with whistles by the thousands, readying neighbors to alert one another if they see ICE agents nearby.

The Little Village Community Council began handing out bright orange whistles during "know your rights" workshops in June, after getting the idea from Los Angeles residents who were reacting to their own city's immigration raids earlier this year.

"We had the idea of coming out with a whistle so people could hear that noise, and if they don't have legal status, go the other way — run as quickly as possible to safety and to make sure they don't open their doors," said Baltazar Enriquez, president of the Little Village Community Council.

Since then, the idea has spread to other neighborhoods as well; Ravenswood Community Services gathered volunteers Monday evening to assemble 600 whistle kits to pass out to parents and students. Pilsen Arts & Community House has a tutorial how to publish and distribute its one-page whistle zine, which is available along with other printable resources online, and has been handing out whistle kits to local businesses to distribute.

LISTEN

Meet The ICE Resistance — Cameras, Whistles And Neighborhood Rapid Response Teams

1x

Belmont Cragin United distributed 5,000 whistles at a recent event and is looking to hand out more than 12,000 by the end of October, said organizer Alonso Zaragoza. The organization recently launched Whistlemania, where volunteers assemble and distribute whistle kits across multiple Northwest Side neighborhoods. Each packet includes information on recognizing federal agents and advice from the ACLU, as well as a whistle to alert others in emergencies or during ICE encounters.

How you can help: While the first Whistlemania kit-packing events took place Tuesday evening in Austin, Belmont Cragin, Hermosa, Portage Park, Logan Square and Avondale; keep an eye out for future events on the Belmont Cragin United Instagram.

Customers and neighbors line up at Laura Murillo's stand in Back of the Yards, as seen on Sept. 26, 2025. Murillo was one of several people detained by federal agents Thursday amid operations Midway Blitz and At Large, organizers said. Credit: Francia Garcia Hernandez/Block Club Chicago

Street Vendor Support

The familiar jingle of bells from a paletas cart or a roadside offering of produce have become rarer as Chicago street vendors stay home to protect themselves from ICE.

Vendors around Chicago — from Laura Murillo of Laura's Tamales to a tamalera in Rogers Park — have been arrested by immigration agents over the past month. In late September, neighbors and organizers pledged they would keep Murillo's Back of the Yards stand going to support her daughters.

In a matter of weeks, the Street Vendors Association of Chicago has raised $184,000 of its $300,000 goal to provide emergency support to street vendors who are too fearful of ICE raids to go out and sell their wares.

Through her nonprofit organization The Mural Movement, Delilah Martinez launched Operation Buyout, where she and other organizers are "buying out" a vendor's supply — giving them $500 to $1,000 along with groceries and other necessities. Since July, Operation Buyout has supported Matello's Bakery in Pilsen, a neighborhood paleta seller, and a woman who sells chocolate in Pilsen.

How you can help: Donate to the Chicago Street Vendor Relief Fund (donations to the nonprofit organization are tax deductible); grab your bike and join CyclingxSolidarity for the Saturday's Street Vendor Bike Tour in Little Village; attend the Kafecito with Kathy fundraiser Sunday at Latina-owned Tasa Coffee Roasters, 4136 W. North Ave. in Humboldt Park; Donate to Operation Buyout on Venmo (@TheMuralMovement), CashApp ($VaultGallerie) or Zelle or QuickPay (delilah@themuralmovement.org).

Grocery Runs

Monica Gutierrez has called Pilsen home for the majority of her life, but she's never seen the streets of her neighborhood this empty. It's disheartening to see the fear, violence and disrespect her community is facing, said Gutierrez, who was raised in an immigrant household.

"ICE is everywhere and doesn't even allow us a second to breathe or to get where we need," she said.

When Gutierrez came across Sin Título's Neighbor to Neighbor program a few weeks ago, she jumped at the opportunity. As a volunteer, Gutierrez goes on grocery runs for community members who are afraid to leave their homes to get the basic necessities.

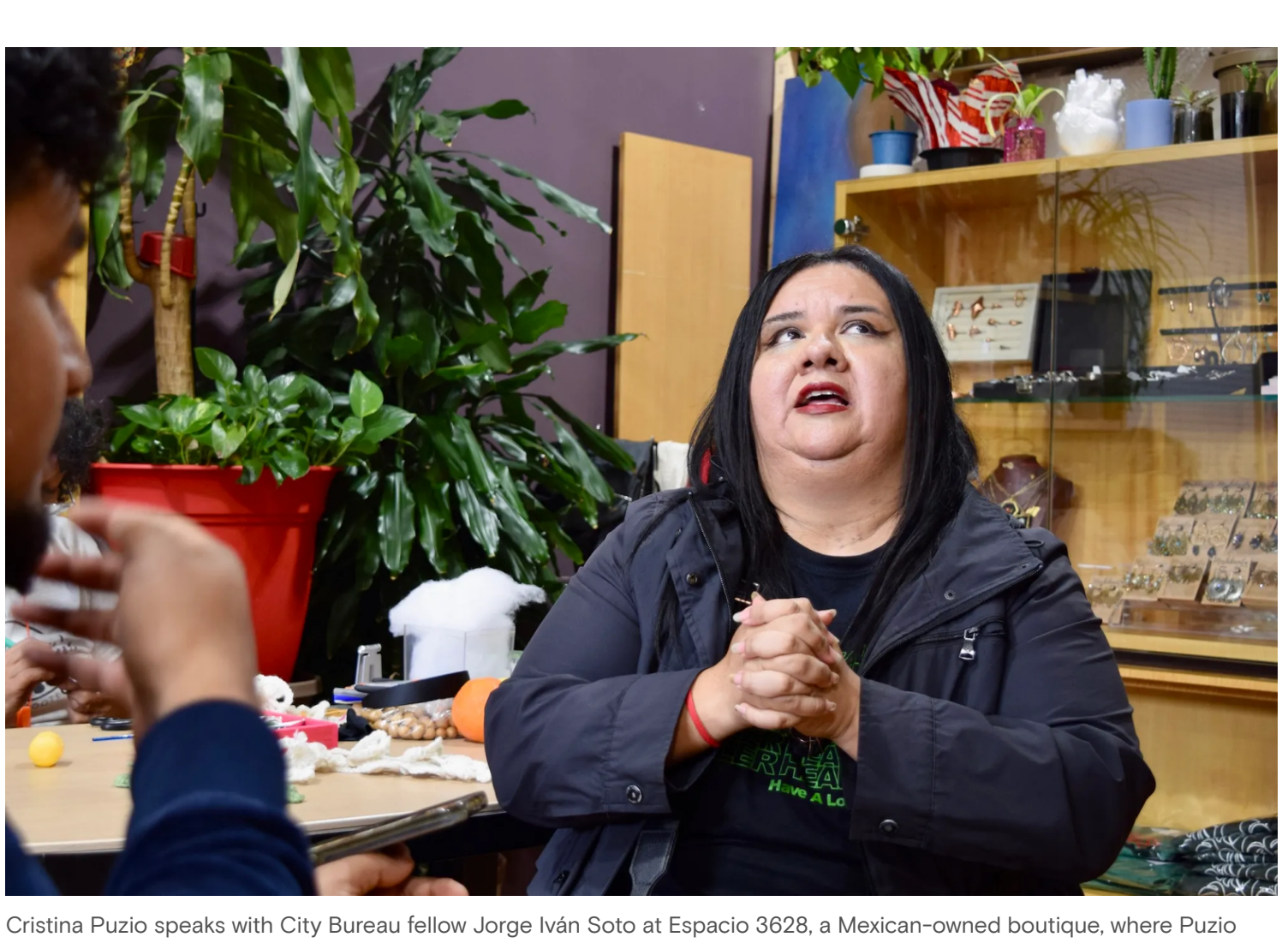
Sin Título co-founder Iraís Sosa started the program in hopes of creating "more moments of peace" amid the chaos.

But Sosa didn't anticipate that 100 people would sign up within the first couple hours of opening the volunteer application. Now almost 400 people have applied, Sosa said. It was a "good problem" to have and she quickly figured out a system. The program has been capped at 200 volunteers across the Chicago area to keep it manageable.

After seeing a raid at a bus stop, Sosa also started offering Lyft gift cards for those who don't feel safe commuting using public transportation.

Applications to receive help or nominate a loved one are still open and available in English and Spanish, Sosa said. Recipients are paired up with a volunteer and can get groceries on a recurring basis as long as funds are available. They have measures in place to ensure privacy, like confirming addresses verbally over the phone as opposed to text or email, she said.

How you can help: While Sin Título isn't taking more volunteers right now, it is still accepting donations. They've raised more than $11,000 since launching the program to cover the cost of groceries and Lyft gift cards.



Cristina Puzio speaks with City Bureau fellow Jorge Iván Soto at Espacio 3628, a Mexican-owned boutique, where Puzio offers community limpias, or spiritual cleansings, to community members impacted by ICE on Oct. 11, 2025. Credit: Maureen Dunne for City Bureau

Cleansing Charity

Cristina Puzio is a curandera — a folk healer — born and raised in Pilsen. After seeing news of Funston Elementary being tear-gassed by federal agents in Logan Square in early October, she felt a need to do something that would honor her community and her culture.

Inheriting practices that were passed down to her from ancestors and mentors, she reached out to Evelyn Medina, owner of the Logan Square gift shop Espacio 3628, to offer "limpias" to the community.

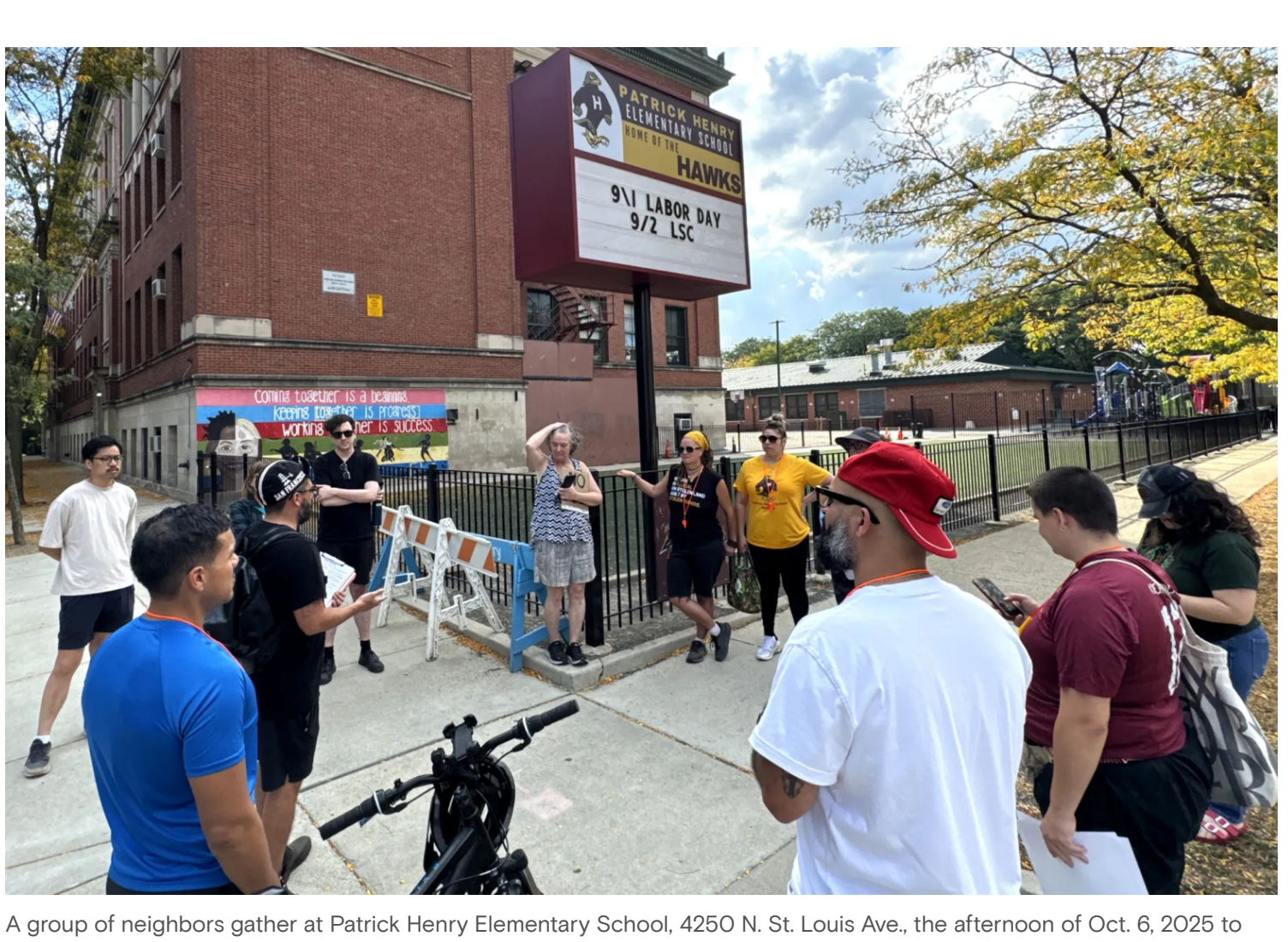
As Puzio puts it, a limpia is a way of cleansing a person's energy. By removing a person's negative energies, she hopes to help them let go of burdens they carry.

"Whatever we're carrying, whether it's an emotion, a fear, worry," she said. "If we don't know how to process it, it can linger, and it can start to affect us on a deeper level."

The specific limpia she offers is for those living with shock and fear — particularly resonant during the heightened ICE activity. Incorporating obsidian, epazote, basil, Copal, lemons and sacred waters, the ritual lasts for 10 minutes.

Cristina will continue to collaborate with Espacio 3628 and provide limpias to Logan Square residents and surrounding communities — the next event is set for Tuesday.

How you can help: Attend the next limpias fundraiser at the Logan Square shop, 3628 W. Armitage Ave., from 2:30-6 p.m. Tuesday. Espacio 3628 is also accepting donations to continue handing out whistles and Know Your Rights cards, and organizing watch patrols during neighborhood school drop-offs and pickups.



A group of neighbors gather at Patrick Henry Elementary School, 4250 N. St. Louis Ave., the afternoon of Oct. 6, 2025 to get trained on how to keep an eye out for federal immigration officials. Credit: Alex V. Hernandez/Block Club Chicago

School Safety

In Belmont Cragin, school attendance has dropped by as much as 10 percent as families worry that ICE agents will show up during drop-off and pickup, said Alonso Zaragoza, who serves on a Local School Council along with his work with Belmont Cragin United.

A new "walking school bus" program aims to provide a sense of security for families as they go to and from school, Zaragoza said. Seven or eight volunteers will position themselves along school routes, mirroring Safe Passage routes established by Chicago Public Schools. Similar corner watches have launched in Irving Park and Albany Park on the Northwest Side, as well.

"It's about having bodies out around the school, keeping an eye out and making sure everybody's safe," Zaragoza said. "So that the kids who haven't been going to school in the last couple weeks feel comfortable enough to come back and finish their education."

After early challenges, the community-led effort is gaining traction as educators and parents work together. "Now the pieces of organizing are starting to fall into place," Zaragoza said. "Everybody's clicking together."

To maintain a sense of community and safety, Belmont Cragin United is continuing with events like its seventh annual "Trunk or Treat," while also training neighbors through the Rapid Response Network to verify reports of ICE presence. He said the effort is about accuracy and care, as the group doesn't publish anything unverified and works to keep neighbors informed.

He emphasized that all of this work is entirely community-led. "There's no taxpayer money being involved in this. No elected official has offered to pay for this," he said. "People need to be informed."

How you can help: Volunteer with the Belmont Cragin United Rapid Response Network to help verify ICE activity and distribute know your rights materials; donate safety whistles, candy, or printing materials for the upcoming Trunk or Treat community event. Learn more about starting a walking school bus program here.

Shea Michals places a comical Know Your Rights infographic in Spanish on the door of the Chicago Art Locker at Roscoe Street and Kildare Avenue in Avondale on Sept. 22, 2025. Credit: Ariel Parrella-Aureli/Block Club Chicago

Turning Art Into Action

As reports of ICE raids began spreading through Chicago's Latino neighborhoods, photographer Mari Trancoso said she felt a growing urgency to help.

"I just keep feeling this burn in my chest," she said. "Like this angry cry wants to come out, and I just feel like I'm not doing what I need to do."

Trancoso lives about 1½ hours west of Chicago in Dixon, but she has been photographing weddings and families across Chicago for nearly a decade.

Using her photography business and online following, she created a fundraising campaign called Art as an Offering. Proceeds from mentoring sessions, photo editing customizations known as presets and educational PDFs were given to five Chicago organizations: Instituto del Progreso Latino, ICIRR, Pilsen Food Pantry, Street Vendors Association of Chicago, and Sin Título.

"I wanted to offer something reachable for other people, not just photographers," she said. Lower-priced resources, starting at $15, were designed to make donating accessible, and clients booking future photo sessions with Trancoso can also opt to have part of their payment directed toward the groups.

Though she has mostly used her platform for awareness in the past, this effort feels more personal — and more urgent — than before. "My family is from Mexico — my grandma is from Zacatecas, and I have cousins who are not white-passing, and are in fear," she said. "I felt like I had this privilege that I could do more things since I don't have that same fear as they do."

For others who want to help, Trancoso encourages using social media to share verified information or volunteering for organizations already embedded in neighborhoods. She cited Sin Titulo as an example, noting that "even simple things like running errands for Latino families who are too scared to go out in public are very valuable."

How you can help: Purchase digital photography presets, educational PDFs or mentorship sessions through photographer Mari Trancoso's Art as an Offering fundraiser on Instagram (@mari.trancoso); book a future photo session and direct part of your payment toward one of five Chicago-area organizations.

A poster outside of Rico Fresh Market on Armitage and Central Park avenues alerts people of a recent ICE smoke grenade incident that shocked area neighbors and business owners, seen Oct. 7, 2025. Credit: Ariel Parrella-Aureli/Block Club Chicago

Wallet Warriors

Pilsen streets have been emptier than usual, and Becky Lehmann took note during a recent visit to the neighborhood. At times, she was the only customer at some of the businesses she stepped in, she said.

Lehmann, who lives in Edgewater, wanted to help, so she posted an Instagram video calling on people to support the businesses in Hispanic neighborhoods still reeling from the increased ICE presence.

"When I boil it all down, it's just what I can do to be kind," she said.

In the video, Lehmann encourages people to pick a neighborhood that they know is being targeted and go and contribute to the local businesses that are hurting. If they see something happening, they can record and share.

She frames it as something anyone can do. "Resistance doesn't have to be big and noisy," she says in the video. "It can be walking into a shop and buying a cat figurine from a neighbor."

Others have also made the call for Chicagoans to support immigrant-owned businesses. The Hermosa Belmont Cragin Chamber of Commerce shared a list of neighborhood businesses to support. Lost Girls Vintage put out a call for commenters to share their favorite South and West side businesses. Zaragoza said Belmont Cragin has been slowly recovering from the pandemic, rebuilding its business community. But the ICE raids have caused renewed fear and kept many from dining out or even leaving their homes, he said.

"The dining scene in our neighborhoods has been decimated because of it," he said. The neighborhood will host a Taste of Belmont Cragin event Oct. 28, with a route through four restaurants and participating street vendors.

How you can help: Many neighborhoods have chambers of commerce listing local businesses to help you plan your visit. You can also sign up by Oct. 24 to participate in the Nov. 8 Abuelita Hot Chocolate 5K Walk/Run in Riis Park in Belmont Cragin on Nov. 8 — money raised will go toward neighborhood businesses.

Support City Bureau's work to reimagine local news.

Support Local News!

Subscribe to Block Club Chicago, an independent, 501(c)(3), journalist-run newsroom. Every dime we make funds reporting from Chicago's neighborhoods. Already subscribe? **Click here to gift a subscription**, or you can **support Block Club with a tax-deductible donation.**

Listen to the Block Club Chicago podcast:

Listen On Apple Podcasts　LISTEN ON Spotify

For Many South Siders, Icon Jesse Jackson Was Their Neighbor ‘Rev’

1x

00:00　15:17

- For Many South Siders, Icon Jesse Jackson Was Their Neighbor ‘Rev’
- The Long Lasting Impact Of Operation Midway Blitz On Our Neighborhoods
- Why Many Chicagoans Are Saying No To More Delivery Robots
- New Year, Same You. Why Most Resolutions Fail And What To Do Next
- Chicago Sees Longest Winter Freeze In 19 Years — But Relief Is Coming

LOAD MORE

TAGGED: How to Help, Operation Midway Blitz

Previous
Immigration Committee Chair Warns ‘Fascism Is Here,’ Sends Call To Investigate Feds To Council

Next
Criterion Collection’s Famed Movie Closet Coming To Chicago

Gold Transparency 2026 Candid.

Charity Navigator FOUR-STAR

EIN: 82-3844275

Block Club Chicago is a nonprofit news organization dedicated to delivering reliable, nonpartisan and essential coverage of Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods.

© 2026 Block Club Chicago　Powered by Newspack　Privacy Policy