

ROSELAND PUBLIC SAFETY

First-of-its-kind community law office opens in Roseland, offering families legal defense and support

The Freedom Defense Center of Roseland will use American Rescue Plan Act funds to provide more informed courtroom advocacy to families in the South Side neighborhood.

By Michael Puente | WBEZ | May 14, 2025, 9:42am CDT



Public Defender Sharone Mitchell Jr. speaks during a news conference to celebrate the opening of the new Freedom Center of Roseland at 11437 S. Michigan Ave. | Gary Middendorf/For the Sun-Times.

Cook County officials met in Chicago's Roseland neighborhood Tuesday to celebrate the opening of the Freedom Defense Center of Roseland, a first-of-its-kind community law office that aims to take traditional criminal legal defense out of the courtroom and into the community.

At the center, 11437 S. Michigan Ave., a local public defense team will work with families and organizations to provide more informed courtroom advocacy, including legal defense representation starting at arrest, legal education, mental health support and case management. It will also link art, defense and restorative justice in its practice.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said the center is a critical step toward addressing judicial inequities.

"We're opening a door, a door to fairness, to community-driven justice, and to a future where every resident has access to support and advocacy that they deserve," she said. "The Freedom Defense Center of Roseland represents what happens when government works in partnership with the community."

The center, **announced in 2023**, will use American Rescue Plan Act funds allocated during the Biden administration following the pandemic. Preckwinkle said the funds will help provide lasting change.

"Incarceration alone does not create safety. Legal systems should not simply process people," she said. "They should protect rights, address harm and expand opportunity."

Cook County Public Defender Sharone Mitchell Jr. said the center "is not just a building," and that legal defense belongs in neighborhoods like Roseland.

"For far too long, justice has been something that our clients have had to navigate alone, often far from home, surrounded by systems that felt cold and distant. This [changes] that," he said.

Mitchell Jr., who grew up on Chicago's South Side, recalled marching down Michigan Avenue to the Little League Field near Gately Stadium with fellow players — some of whom later ran afoul of the criminal justice system.

Standing inside a storefront along that same stretch of Michigan Avenue near the center, he said, "This means a lot to me."

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