

Democrat & Chronicle

ROCHESTER

After 2 crowd shootings, Rochester searches for answers

As Rochester mourns Zah'nia Barr and Shakara Green, community leaders, violence prevention workers and residents wrestle with how to stop shootings that erupted in crowds.



Kayla Canne

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

Updated Aug. 7, 2026, 12:59 p.m. ET

Two balloons stood out from the rest as hundreds of light pink hearts floated above North Clinton Avenue on the evening of Aug. 6: The numbers 1 and 4 were stretched into gold foil pillows.

Fourteen. That's how old Zah'nia Barr was when someone fired into a [late-night crowd](#) gathered in the neighborhood Aug. 1, killing the teenager with a single bullet.

Just one week prior, Mayor Malik Evans had [declared a ban](#) on late night public gatherings, calling a trend of impromptu street parties this summer a recipe for violence.

"She was a sweet girl," Yvonne Laidley, a family friend, started to tell mourners at the intersection Aug. 6. Her voice cracked and she couldn't quite continue.

Someone else jumped in: "Innocent." "A baby," another added.

The city barely had time to process Barr's death — an outlier in a year of [record-low homicides](#) — before it had to confront another: 35-year-old Shakara Green was killed and five others were injured during a [drive-by shooting](#) into a crowd on

Clifford Avenue the following night. Police don't believe either was the intended target.

The back-to-back killings have left community members, city officials and violence prevention workers reeling, wondering: How did this happen?

Weekend crowd violence puts focus on gathering ban

Wanda Ridgeway quickly called an emergency meeting. She said people have a duty to share what they know with police.

"We can't just sit back and be quiet," she said. "We've done got to the point where people are immune to all this violence. ... It's disappointing to see the spike. I'm hating to see the shooting into the crowds like it's OK, and nobody's saying a word."

Ridgeway, a longtime violence prevention advocate, now works with Jerome Ward at Chisel Collective. Several organizations are mobilizing this week to ramp up existing resources and community education, they said.

One question is top of mind: How can they show community members the risk of these late-night parties, while respecting their right to have a good time?

"I understand the logic," Ward said of the mayor's gathering ban. "He's right."

But Ward said Rochester lacks other controlled environments where people can gather freely. Some initially saw the ban as heavy-handed and worried it would lead to the over-policing of some Rochester neighborhoods.

"Standing in front of barbershops or standing in front of corner stores is kind of an urban tradition," Ward said. "That's just been exacerbated over the course of time, as we don't have other options where people can congregate and fellowship amongst each other."

Others have questioned whether RPD, which has complained of an officer shortage, has the resources to enforce a ban. The emergency order prohibits groups of 10 or

more from gathering in city parks, vacant lots or on sidewalks between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

So far, no one has been arrested for violating the policy — though police have used skirmish lines and pepper balls to **break up gatherings**. Officers were already on North Clinton Avenue, in fact, when the shots that killed Barr rang out just one block away.

"The goal is not to go out and arrest folks. The goal is to get them to leave," Rochester Police Chief David Smith said after. "To prevent the fights that ultimately happen during these gatherings."

Pink balloons for Zah'nia

A memorial for Barr this week drew a crowd of hundreds, including several of her young classmates. The air was thick and hot. Bees swarmed the parking lot. It is still summer — a season of joy — but this tragedy now looms over a new generation.

"You can't make sense out of nonsense," said John Rouse. He found himself thinking of his three children, two younger than Barr. "What kind of world am I trying to help create, shape for them?"

In the center of the crowd, Barr's mother sat barefoot in a lawn chair — inconsolable. She wailed loudly at times; quietly folded into herself at others. The girl's father trembled as he spoke to reporters. Balloons bounced in the sky, waiting, before they were set free.

Laidley, who grew up with Barr's mother and has known the girl her entire life, reminded the crowd that Barr's heart and spirit remains even in a world where her body does not. But after, she said Barr's death — and then Green's so soon after — left her wondering how a city marred by such violence can protect her and her loved ones.

"I can't want more for the city than the city wants for me," she said. "Zah'nia wasn't the first, and sadly she won't be the last."

— *Kayla Canne* covers community safety for the Democrat and Chronicle with a focus on immigration, police accountability, government surveillance and how people are impacted by violence. Follow her on Instagram [@bykaylacanne](#). Get in touch at kcanne@gannett.com.