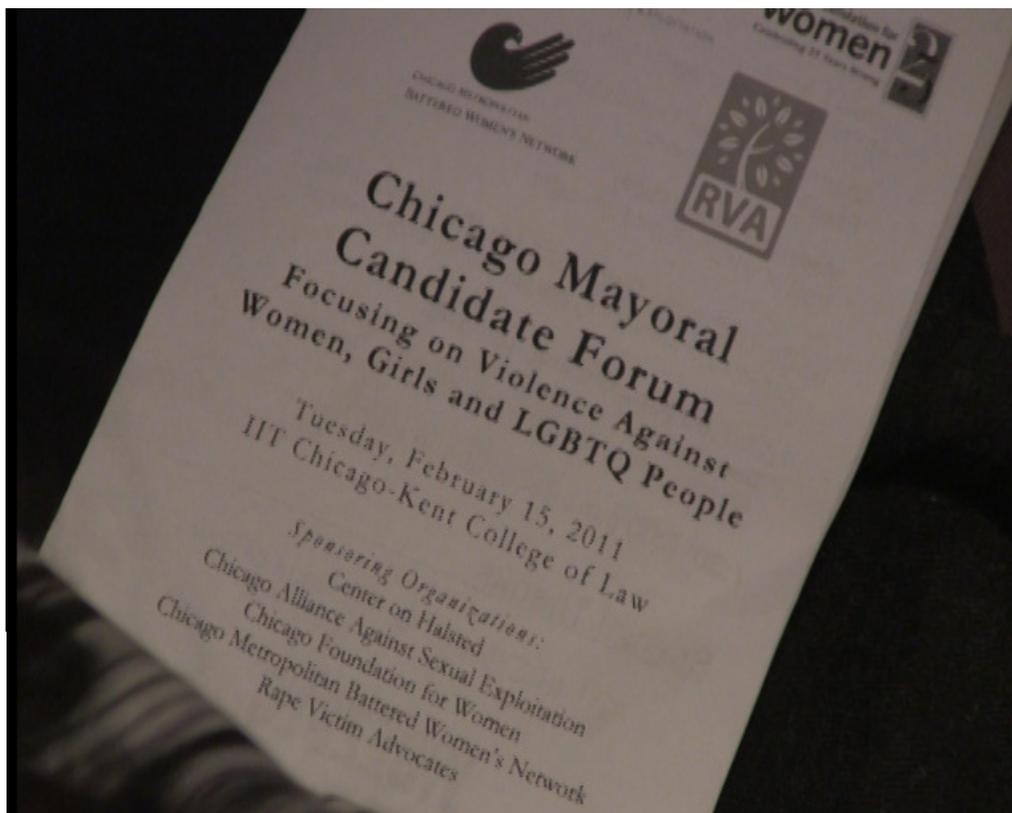


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Ronnie Reese/MEDILL

Mayoral candidates detail personal experience with abuse in talking to forum for women, LGBTQ

by [AMARITA BANSAL](#) and [RONNIE REESE](#)

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"I was once in an abusive relationship. I left with a broken arm but I got out. I could have lost my life," mayoral candidate Patricia Van Pelt-Watkins said Tuesday night.

One of the last forums held for the Chicago mayoral race got personal as candidates discussed issues to end violence against women, girls and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning community at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law.

According to the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, one of the organizations sponsoring the forum, domestic violence is five times more likely to affect women in Chicago than the most prevalent communicable disease.

Miguel Del Valle, who also said he was a victim of violence as he was bullied at school, said he's not pleased with the money allocated for rape crisis services in the city.

"\$275,000. That's nothing, absolutely nothing. You have to pressure the state and the county to do more but you can't do that if you're not contributing as a local government. There's no leadership. It hasn't been a priority, and with me it certainly will be."

According to the Chicago Justice Project, there has been a significant gap between the number of calls made to

services related to felony sex crimes and the number of reports generated by the Chicago Police Department.

In 2009, the public made 4,933 calls to police regarding felony sex crimes but only 1,737 reports were actually filed.

"It should be a part of our civics class. People should learn in civics how to respect the rights of others," mayoral candidate William "Dock" Walls III said. "Sexual violence prevention classes in schools should be mandatory."

The classes are optional under Chicago Public School policy.

"We will certainly have better citizens here in the city of Chicago and we will have less incidents because people will understand what the boundaries are," Walls said.

Carol Moseley Braun said respect and boundaries should also be addressed with police response to the LGBTQ community.

"With regard to LGBTQ youth [with police], there has to be a level of respect, there has to be a level of service and they ought to be called on the line if there is a complaint that they have not."

Van Pelt-Watkins said, "It's not just the LGBTQ problem, it's all of our problem because whenever anybody doesn't feel safe in the community it's all of our responsibility to stand up and do something about it."

A report coordinated by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs indicates 65 incidences of hate crimes toward the LGBTQ community occurred in Chicago in 2009.

All candidates participated at the forum except two, Rahm Emanuel and Gery Chico.

Shara Kaplin, vice president of external relations at the Chicago Foundation for Women, said, "For us it was really important to see candidates show up. We have four candidates here making it clear to our community that they wanted to share their opinions."



Amarita Bansal/MEDILL

Four mayoral candidates discuss ending violence against women and the LGBTQ community a week before Election Day.

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