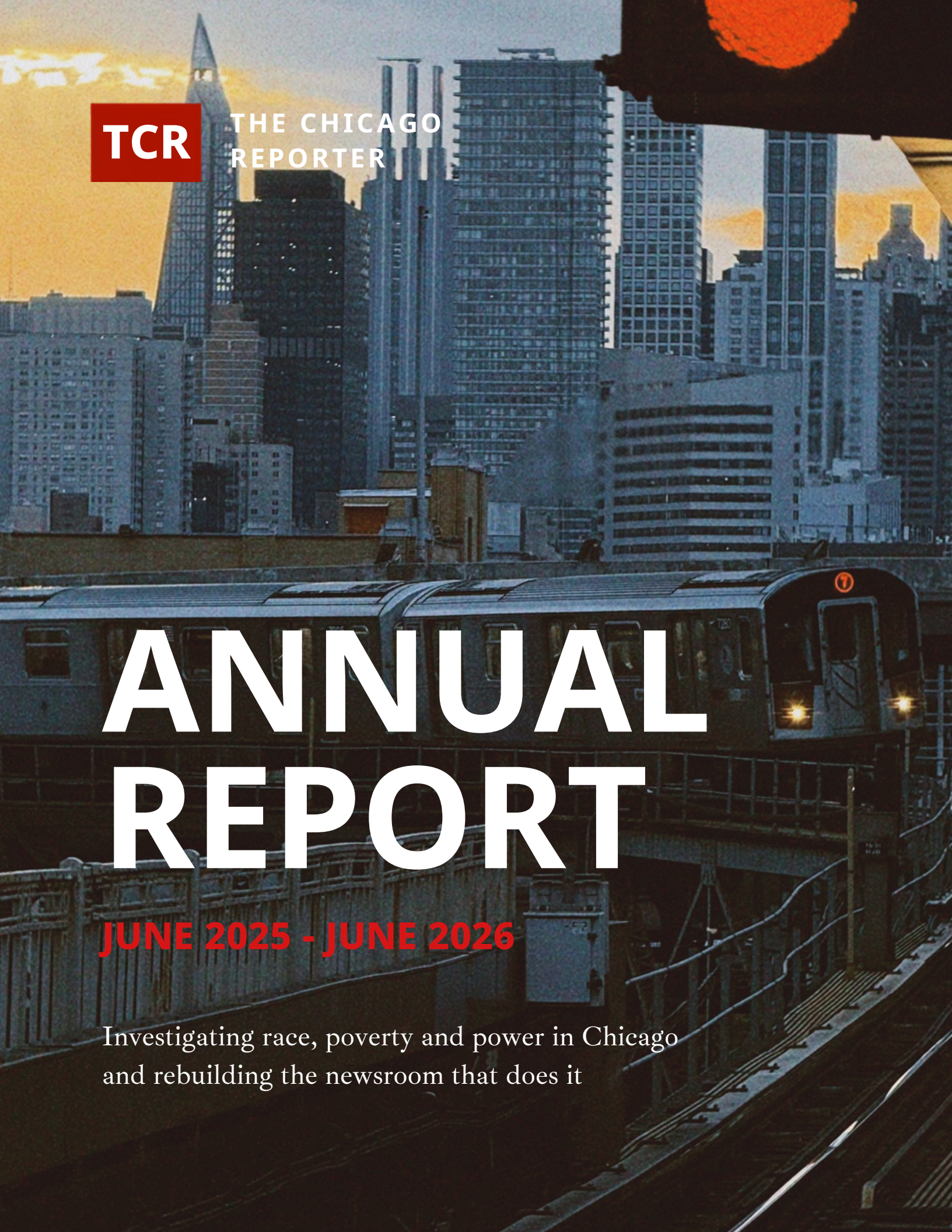


The background of the entire page is a photograph of the Chicago skyline at sunset. The sun is a large, bright orange orb in the upper right corner. The skyline features several prominent skyscrapers, including the Willis Tower. In the foreground, a blue and silver Chicago 'L' train is traveling on an elevated track, moving from left to right. The train's headlights are on, and a red circle with the number '1' is visible on its front. The overall color palette is dominated by the warm tones of the sunset and the cool blues of the city and train.

TCR

THE CHICAGO
REPORTER

ANNUAL REPORT

JUNE 2025 - JUNE 2026

Investigating race, poverty and power in Chicago
and rebuilding the newsroom that does it

A LETTER FROM OUR PUBLISHER

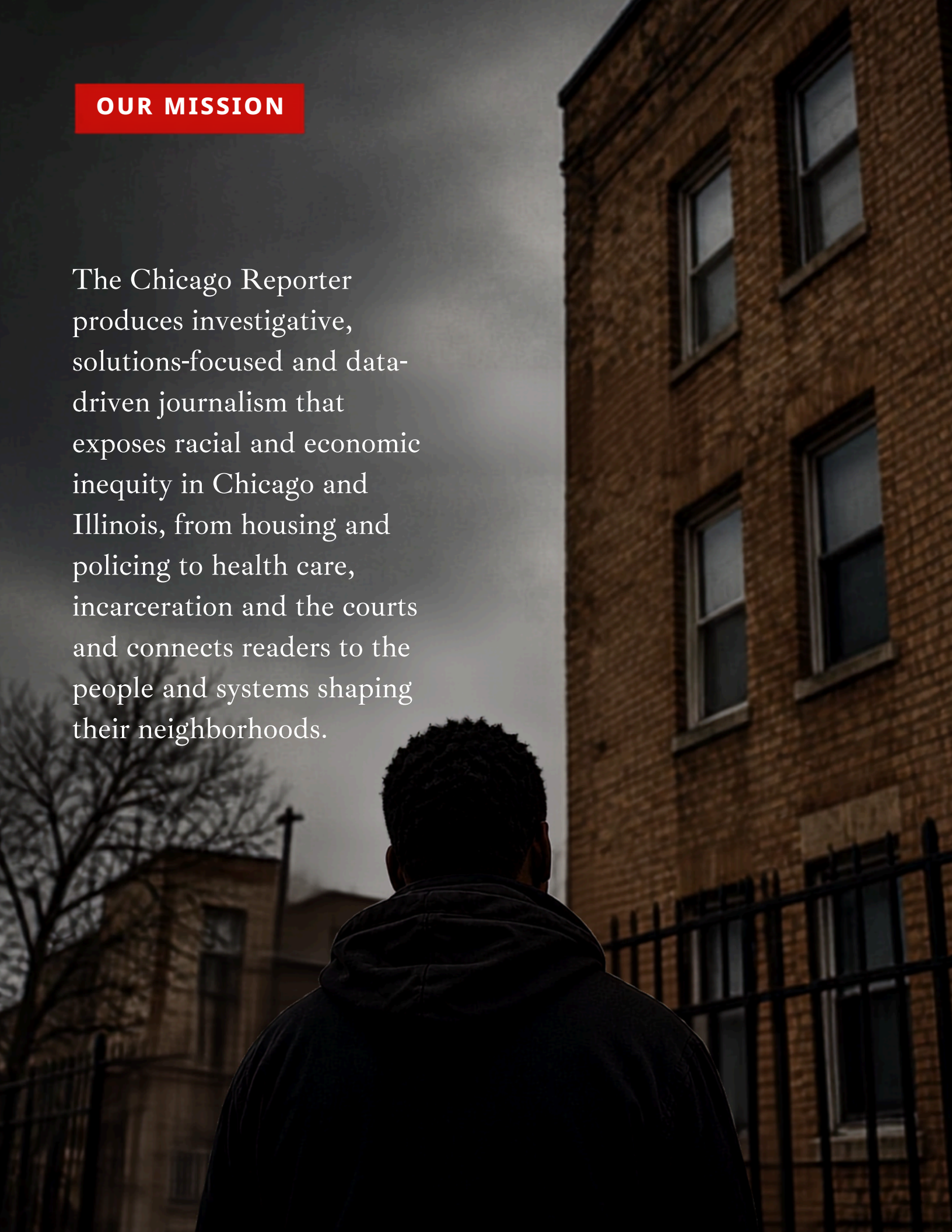
Twelve months ago, The Chicago Reporter was a newsroom fighting to keep its lights on. Today, it is a newsroom that has rebuilt its foundation — staff by staff, story by story, dollar by dollar — while never losing sight of why we exist: to hold power accountable for the racial and economic inequity that shapes life in Chicago.

This report covers June 2025 – June 2026, a period in which we grew from a two-person operation into a five-person newsroom bolstered by freelancers, fellows, interns and student reporters; nearly doubled our unique visitors; increased our email open rate seventeen-fold; hired our first permanent investigative reporter in years; and launched our first earned-revenue event. We also had setbacks: local grant applications were denied and we said goodbye to a valued colleague. We share the wins and the setbacks alike in the pages that follow, because that is the kind of transparency we ask of the institutions we cover.

None of this progress would have been possible without our freelancers, student reporters, fellows, university partners, and most of all, our readers and donors, whose trust and support carried us through a genuine turnaround year.

Thank you for believing in accountability journalism for Chicago's neighborhoods. We are just getting started.

Dr. Ebony D. Only
Publisher, *The Chicago Reporter*

A person with short dark hair, wearing a dark hoodie, is seen from behind, looking towards a multi-story brick building. The building has several windows and a black metal fence in front of it. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

OUR MISSION

The Chicago Reporter produces investigative, solutions-focused and data-driven journalism that exposes racial and economic inequity in Chicago and Illinois, from housing and policing to health care, incarceration and the courts and connects readers to the people and systems shaping their neighborhoods.



YEAR IN REVIEW

BY THE NUMBERS

34,000+

Unique website visitors
(+70% in a single quarter)

6,510+

Newsletter
subscribers

17.4%

Email open rate
(vs. 1.0% a year prior)

5+

New media partnerships
(goal was 1)

2x/week

Publishing cadence,
doubled in Q2 2026

\$16,555

2026 revenue raised YTD
(vs. \$735 in all of 2024)

5

Full/part time staff
(up from 2)

63

Guests at our first
signature fundraising event

27,000+

Combined social media
followers

Figures reflect the most recent full quarter reported to the Board of Directors (Q4 2025 for digital metrics; Q2 2026 for revenue and staffing) and year-to-date totals through the end of the reporting period.



THE CHICAGO REPORTER

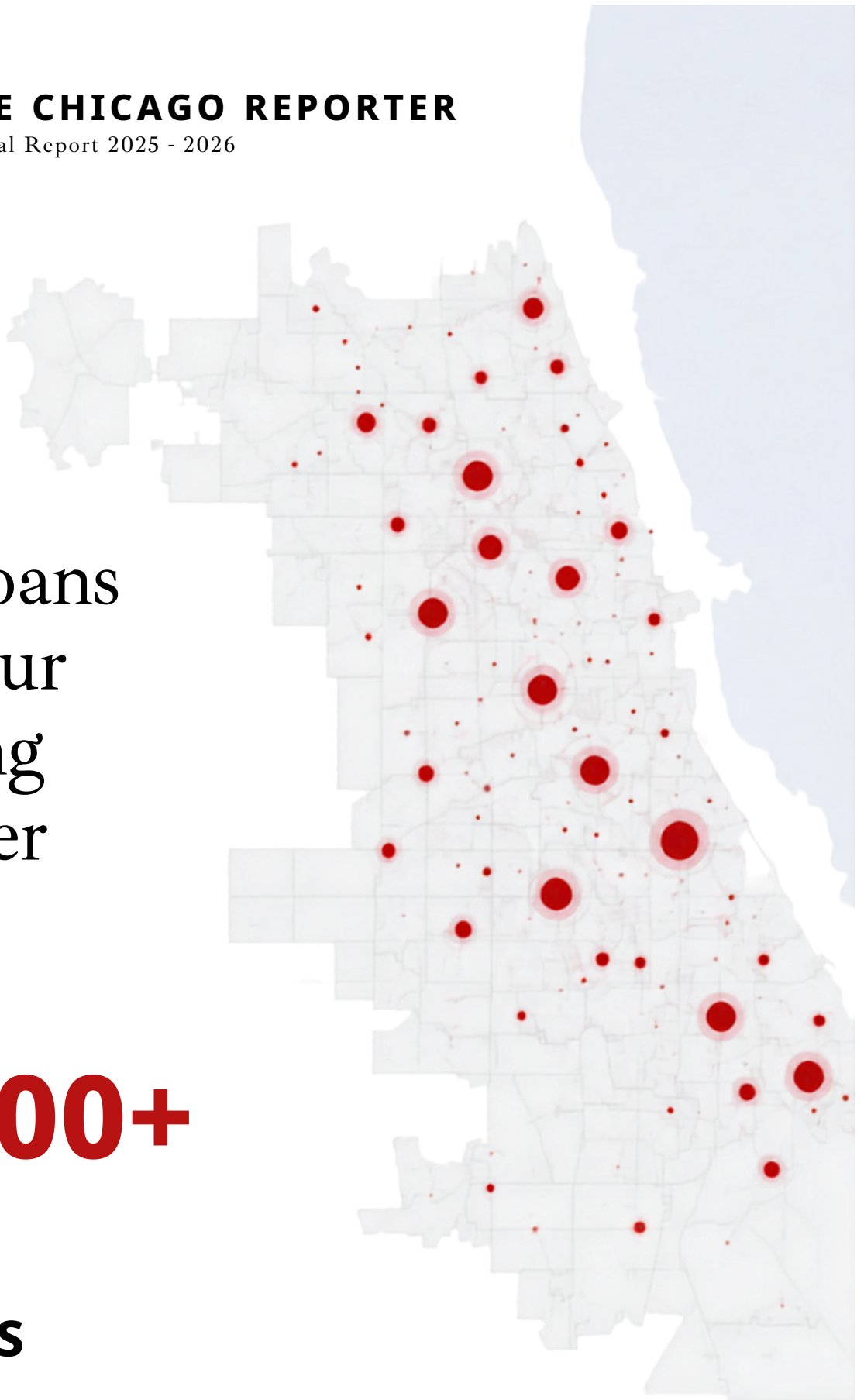
Annual Report 2025 - 2026

More
Chicagoans
found our
reporting
than ever
before.

34,000+

**UNIQUE
VISITORS**

Readers from every
corner of our city.





THE CHICAGO REPORTER

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The stories
that reached
the most
readers in
2025.

Each thumbnail is
one story we
published.

The red outlines
highlight our top
performers.

**TOP STORIES
IN FY 2025**



February

**It's Time to Talk About Environmental
Justice in Cook County**

Sara Cooper | "Student Voices" category

March

**Reinvest to Repair: Grassroots Movements
in Chicago's Path to Reparations**

Dr. Only | "Letters from our Publisher" category

April

**Chicago's new approach to
preventing drug overdoses**

Bella Laufenberg | "Student Voices" category

May

**New uniforms, same abuses: Accounts of a
tactical team shakedown in an Illinois prison**

Katie Schulder-Battis | "Staff Writers" category)

June

**Minors named in eviction notices, and the
new Ill. law that could protect them**

Katie Schulder-Battis | TCR Guides series



THE CHICAGO REPORTER

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The red outlines
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TOP STORIES
IN FY 2025

July

IDOC's controversial health care provider is out. Will people in IDOC finally receive the care they need?

Sara Cooper | "Practicum Writers" category

August

What we know about the future of property taxes in Cook County

Carolina Ruiz Baldin | (TCR Guides series)

September

26 Died Waiting: Families Call for Reform of Illinois' Medical Release Program

Hope Moses | "Student Voices" category

October

Six Years, 23 Percent: Chicago's Failed Promise of Police Reform

Dr. Only | "Words from our Publisher" category

November

"Second Amendment?"

Not for Black Chicago Drivers

Sara Cooper | "Staff writers" category

December

Are CPS staff layoffs promoting equity in schools?

Carolina Ruiz Baldin | TCR Guides series

A person with short dark hair, wearing a dark hooded jacket, is seen from behind, looking towards a multi-story brick building. The building has several windows and a black metal fence in front of it. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is somber and investigative.

INVESTIGATIVE IMPACT

With the hire of our first permanent investigative reporter in years, The Chicago Reporter moved from occasional freelance-driven coverage to a sustained investigative pipeline.

Here is where our reporting dug in this year:



Second Amendment? Not for Black Chicago Drivers

Investigative reporter Sara Cooper's first major investigation for TCR became the newsroom's most-viewed story of the year, drawing 3,497 views and validating the Board's investment in a permanent investigative hire.

IDOC's Health Care Crisis

Our ongoing investigation into health and disability care inside the Illinois Department of Corrections — including the story “26 Died Waiting” — was expanded into coverage of the IDOC's “Truth-in-Sentencing” policies.

Chicago's 250-Year History of Segregation

A deep historical look at how segregation was built into Chicago's neighborhoods over two and a half centuries remained one of our most-read and most-shared stories throughout the year.



Property Taxes in Cook County

A guide-and-investigation series explaining the future of Cook County property taxes consistently ranked among our top search-driven stories, reflecting strong reader demand for practical, accountability-minded explainers.

Cannabis Equity Investigation

Published during CBD Awareness Month, this investigation examined the \$500,000–\$700,000 liquid-asset barriers to Illinois' legal cannabis industry and the continued incarceration of Illinoisans for possession-related charges even as legal cannabis has expanded.

Peacekeepers

Our violence-intervention investigation, Peacekeepers, published May 21, 2026, marked a milestone in our Year 2 goal of producing two major investigative projects, alongside an active wrongful-conviction investigation into the Robbins Police Department and Markham courts, and IDOC lockdowns investigation supported by FOIA strategy with civil rights attorneys Loevy & Loevy.



PARTNERSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS

We can't do this work alone, and this year, strategic partnerships multiplied our reporting capacity without multiplying our payroll.



Medill School of Journalism / Northwestern University

Our deepest partnership: the Investigative Journalism Hub contributed multiple student reporters; a Media Law and Government Transparency practicum placed a student through April; a Health and Science practicum placed a full-time student for the summer; and a documentary video collaboration paired TCR with Medill's Documenting Justice course. A Medill data journalism intern joined in June 2026.

Harry S. Truman College — Uptown Exchange

A formalized cross-publishing partnership brought student journalism into TCR's pages under editorial oversight, with a shared partnership-criteria framework.

Chicago Reader

Co-publishing partner on our IDOC health care investigation.

Till Institute

Launched our first-ever fellowship program on April 8, 2026, welcoming an investigative journalism fellow from Ireland.

Injustice Watch & Prison Writers Project

New co-publishing discussions are underway with Injustice Watch on Department of Corrections investigations, and with the Prison Writers Project to showcase the work of currently and formerly incarcerated writers.

Fox 32 & Local News Accelerator

Fox 32 served as emcee and promotional partner for our signature fundraising event, and TCR was accepted into the national Local News Accelerator cohort, a recognition that connects our newsroom to peers, funders and best practices across the local news field.

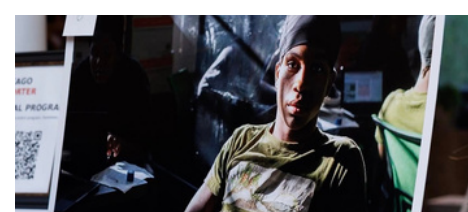
Public Narrative & Online News Association

Individual staff development partnerships this year included a Health and Science Reporting Fellowship (Public Narrative) and a scholarship covering ONA conference membership and attendance, both awarded to Investigative Editor Katie Schulder-Battis.

JUSTICE IN FOCUS

May 14, 2026 | Parkway Social
PHOTOJOURNALISM SHOWCASE

Photo: Terence Grayson / TCR



THE FIRST CHAPTER

Our inaugural Justice in Focus contest and showcase was a meaningful first chapter, defined by genuine community connection, professional-caliber presentation and the power of recognizing the people doing this work. Seven photographers entered across four experience levels. One winner was moved to tears, a reminder that this event matters to the people it recognizes.

BY THE NUMBERS

63 guests

76 RSVPs

7 entries

3 winners

4 contest categories

3 media outlets

\$6K in sponsorships

\$300 from silent auction

3 photographers committed for 2027

1 keynote: Tonika Johnson

WHAT MADE IT WORK

COMMUNITY

Honorees activated their own networks and brought new and returning audiences into TCR.

PROGRAM

Tonika Johnson invited participation, while one winner's emotional response showed the power of recognition.

PRESENTATION

Large-format prints and a welcoming Bronzeville setting created a professional gallery experience.

REACH

NBC, WVON, and Omni Channel carried the event beyond the room.

"Tonight is a celebration of truth, courage, creativity and community."

NATE RODGERS, EVENT HOST

LOOKING AHEAD

For 2027, earlier outreach, a more accessible entry fee and stronger marketing with direct calls to action will help scale participation, attendance and revenue. Three photographers have already committed to entering next year.



None of this
progress
would have
been possible
without **you.**

DR. EBONY D. ONLY
PUBLISHER



OUR TEAM

The Chicago Reporter grew from a three-person operation to a five-person core team over the course of this reporting period, supplemented by a growing bench of fellows, interns, and student reporters.

Core Staff

- Dr. Ebony D. Only - Publisher
- Katie Schulder-Battis - Investigative Editor
- Kenya Joyce Hatch - Development Associate
- NaBeela Washington- Audience Development Associate
- Sara Cooper - Investigative Reporter (Former Fellow)

Fellows, Interns & Students 2025-2026

- Tom O'Connor - Till Institute Fellow
- George Sun - Data Journalism Intern
- Jack Austin - Practicum Fellow
- Mary Ellen Ritter - FOIA Practicum Fellow
- Multiple Medill student reporters and cross-published students from Harry S. Truman College's Uptown Exchange



THE CHICAGO REPORTER

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Reader's Voices

“I've been following The Chicago Reporter's coverage under your leadership, especially how the newsroom connects health equity to broader questions of race and poverty in Chicago. That accountability lens is exactly why I thought of you for a reentry story focused on trauma-informed care.”

— **Diana Martinez, reader**

“The story looks awesome! Great timing — the Chicago Tribune published a story on police misconduct settlements today, and you beat them to it. Kudos!”

— **Kari Lydersen, Professor and head of the Medill Investigative Lab, Northwestern University**

“Your thoughtful analysis and in-depth commentary set you apart from the crowd. Keep up the excellent work!”

— **Vernie Bechtaler, reader**