

Press Release



Council on Library and
Information Resources

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

October 28, 2026

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Diana Martinez (312) 597-1830
diana.martinez@cityofchicago.org

Clerk Valencia, U.S. Rep García and Ald. Fuentes reflect on Chicago's Latine history and the leaders who paved the way

Sold-out archival discussion revisits pivotal City Council moments, highlighting immigration, representation and the enduring legacy of Mayor Harold Washington

CHICAGO — Chicago City Clerk Anna Valencia joined Congressman Jesús “Chuy” García and 26th Ward Alderperson Jessie Fuentes on Wednesday for *“From the Seats of Power: Exploring Latine History Through Chicago’s City Council.”* The discussion revisited pivotal moments, political struggles and trailblazing leadership that helped shape Latine representation in Chicago government.

Hosted by the Office of the City Clerk at Latinos Progresando, 2724 W. Cermak Rd., the sold-out event brought together residents, community leaders and public officials for a reflection on Chicago's history and the generations of leaders who fought to ensure Latine communities had a voice in City Hall.

Moderated by Dario Durham, co-host of the *77 Flavors of Chicago* podcast, the conversation drew upon historical audio recordings preserved in the City Council archives, allowing attendees to hear firsthand the debates, challenges and defining moments that shaped Chicago's political landscape.

“Our history is more than a record of what happened inside City Council chambers. It's a reminder of who fought to be heard, the barriers they overcame and the responsibility we have to keep those doors open,” **Valencia said.** “This archive tells the story of progress that was never guaranteed. By preserving and sharing these voices, we're connecting generations and reminding Chicagoans that representation matters, history matters and the work of building a more inclusive city continues.”

The discussion opened with a 2008 City Council recording of former 1st Ward Alderman Manuel Flores advocating for a moratorium on immigration raids, deportations and family separation. His remarks drew parallels between immigration enforcement at the time and the forced repatriation of Mexicans during the 1930s, prompting a conversation about recurring challenges facing immigrant communities and the importance of learning from history.

Panelists also revisited Chicago's turbulent Council Wars era through a 1986 exchange involving then-Alderman Luis Gutiérrez and Alderman Bernard Stone. The recording illustrated the political tensions surrounding Mayor Harold Washington's administration and the changing dynamics of a City Council grappling with shifting power and expanding representation.

For Congressman García, whose decades of public service span Chicago City Council, the Illinois Senate, the Cook County Board and the U.S. House of Representatives, the archival recordings offered an opportunity to reflect on the movement that helped open doors for a new generation of leaders.

“When we entered City Hall, we were fighting for something bigger than ourselves. We were fighting for communities that had been overlooked for far too long,” **García said**. “Mayor Harold Washington understood that democracy only works when everyone has a seat at the table. The progress we've made was built through struggle, coalition-building and people who refused to accept that their voices didn't matter. That legacy belongs to the people of Chicago, and it's one we must continue to protect.”

One of the discussion's central moments featured a December 1, 1987, recording of García, speaking on the City Council floor, following Mayor Washington's sudden passing. His remarks honored Washington's commitment to opening City Hall to historically underrepresented communities and advancing opportunities in housing, education, employment and public service.

The recording underscored the lasting impact of Washington's leadership and the role of Latine elected officials in reshaping Chicago's governmental institutions. Alderperson Fuentes reflected on the responsibility of today's leaders to build upon that history while addressing the challenges facing the next generation.

“I stand on the shoulders of leaders who challenged systems that were never designed with our communities in mind,” **Fuentes said**. “Their courage created opportunities for people like me to serve, but representation alone is not enough. We have a responsibility to use our voices, challenge injustice and make sure the next generation inherits a city where their opportunities are not limited by their ZIP code, background or immigration status.”

The event concluded with a 1992 recording of García's final remarks as a Chicago alderman, in which he reflected on the Council Wars era, the growth of Latino representation and the colleagues and community leaders who helped transform Chicago government.

The recording provided a fitting conclusion to a conversation that bridged nearly four decades of history, as García reflected on his public service and the importance of passing the torch to future generations.

As part of the program, Clerk Valencia also recognized Congressman García's decades of public service, presenting him with a letter of appreciation and flowers in acknowledgment of his contributions to Chicago and the communities he has represented.

The program is part of the Office of the City Clerk's ongoing efforts to preserve, modernize and make Chicago City Council's legislative history more accessible to the public.

“When we open our archives, we open a window into the decisions and debates that shaped our city,” **Valencia added.** “It's not enough to preserve history. We must make it accessible, learn from it and use those lessons to help shape Chicago's future.”

###

About the Office of the City Clerk

Led by Clerk Anna Valencia, the Office of the City Clerk is responsible for serving as the secretary of the City Council, administrator of the City's Wheel Tax, also known as a City Sticker, and administrator of Chicago's municipal ID, CityKey. The Office also partners with Chicago Public Schools on the NextGen youth civic engagement program, works with community partners on fines and fees reform and is a part of efforts to improve the lives of women and girls. Learn more about OCC at www.chicityclerk.com and connect with OCC on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

About the Council on Library and Information Resources

The Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning. To learn more, visit www.clir.org and follow CLIR on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).