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White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt holds a news briefing at the White House in Was

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt holds a news briefing at the White House in Washington March 25, 2026, near photos of Loyola University Chicago student Sheridan Gorman. Catholics in Chicago have expressed sympathy and sorrow over the loss of Gorman, who was shot and killed March 19 near the school campus, an act of violence that also inflamed the immigration debate. (OSV News photo/Kylie Cooper, Reuters)



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Catholics in Chicago have expressed sympathy and sorrow over the death of a Loyola University Chicago student who was shot and killed March 19 near the school campus.

The murder became the subject of political wrangling between local and state leaders and the Trump administration after federal authorities identified the shooter as a Venezuelan national without proper authorization to be in the country.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago said at a City Club Chicago appearance in downtown Chicago March 23 he had spoken with the family of Sheridan Gorman, who was a Loyola freshman.

"Tom and Jessica, the parents of Sheridan, are taking this very hard," said Cupich. "Tom said to me on the phone, 'You know, every parent says that their kid is the best in the world. Well, mine was.'"

"So I think it's important to really be in touch with the grief that's pretty raw in people's lives. And then, I think, to be able to say to the city, 'We have to wrap our arms around these people. Their grief is our grief,'" the cardinal said.

Officials said 18-year-old Gorman was out with friends to watch the northern lights at a lakeside park just north of Loyola's main campus. At around 1 a.m., a man with a gun approached them and they tried to flee. He discharged a shot that hit Gorman, killing her.

On March 20, Chicago Police arrested Jose Medina, 25, on first-degree murder, attempted murder and other charges.

The Department of Homeland Security said in a news release Medina was released into the country May 9, 2023, after being arrested by U.S. Border Patrol and "released again June 19, 2023, after being arrested for shoplifting." The department filed an arrest detainer requesting that Medina not be released, should charges be disposed of whether through a finding of guilt or innocence.

Loyola held a vigil at the packed Madonna della Strada Chapel on the evening of Gorman's death. Two Jesuit priests led the prayers, which were attended by her parents from Yorktown Heights, New York. Loyola President Mark C. Reed, in a school-wide letter posted on the university's website March 19, called Gorman's death "a tragic loss and our hearts go out to Sheridan's family, loved ones and all who knew her."

Michael Okinczyc-Cruz, executive director of the Center for Spiritual and Public Leadership, a Catholic social justice advocate, attended the vigil.

"We are heartbroken that Sheridan Gorman's life was taken in an act of violence, a cherished Loyola student and beloved family member. Our deepest condolences go out to all who mourn the loss of this beautiful soul," he said in a March 27 statement

sent to OSV News.

Gorman was a member of Loyola Cru, an international evangelical Christian campus ministry. Loyola Cru, in an Instagram post days after her death, described her as "compassionate, selfless, kind, generous, joyful, willing, and so much fun."

Dominican Father Brendan Curran, a Chicago-based immigrant advocate, told OSV News, "First of all, it's an absolute tragedy when a young, up-and-coming student ... senselessly loses their life. Being in a space that would normally be a very safe space just to visit, just to do the young adult thing of just hanging out with your friends in the college experience. What a tragedy and loss to all of us. And we can't lose sight of that."

With news that the man arrested in the shooting is not authorized to be in the U.S., local politicians pointed fingers at the Trump administration. President Donald Trump called Gorman's murder "devastating" and blamed the Biden administration's "open borders" policy.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said March 24 there were "real failures" in the immigration system that "extend beyond Illinois' borders." He said there has been a failure to reform it and that Trump failed "to follow his own edict to go after the worst of the worst" referring to the ongoing national immigration crackdown that sparked highly charged protests in Chicago in the fall.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson at a news conference March 24 was asked about Medina being from Venezuela. He noted the city and state's immigrant sanctuary policies were put in place well before his term, which started in 2023. They were approved by a Democratic mayor and a Republican governor respectively. He said the policies are designed to help migrants without papers "not feel intimidated when they reach out" to authorities. Johnson added, it was time for the president and Congress "to act and pass comprehensive immigration reform."

In a statement released to local media March 26, Gorman's parents chided Pritzker and Johnson for their remarks and noted five days had passed before they each publicly acknowledged Gorman's death.

"We are not interested in political arguments or in watching responsibility shift from one place to another. If there were failures – as the Governor himself has

acknowledged – then every one of them must be identified, examined, and addressed directly. The location of those failures matters less than the willingness to confront them honestly," said the Gorman family.

They added: "Our daughter is not a policy debate. She is a life that was taken, and that demands accountability."

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A Chicago Tribune report of the Gorman family's reaction to the local politicians' remarks said Pritzker's office on March 26 released a statement saying, "The family of Sheridan Gorman remains in Governor Pritzker's thoughts as they grieve and navigate the unimaginable loss of their daughter" and that the governor "believes" the suspect should face consequences "to the fullest extent of the law and with the entire weight and urgency of our justice system that her family deserves."

Okinczyc-Cruz said CSPL "laments" the political rhetoric "using this tragedy to push xenophobic policies and attack the dignity of immigrant families."

"Sheridan's death must not become a justification to inflict even more suffering and pain on immigrant families. Sheridan's murder shatters a sense of peace and safety that we desire to feel, and it is upon us all to honor her life by dedicating our lives to serving God and humanity as Sheridan so beautifully modeled during her life," he said.

While Medina's case is pending, Curran spoke in broad terms.

"First and foremost, an undocumented person who takes the life of another person is a person that must be processed for restorative justice appropriately in a way that holds them responsible, just as much as a person who's a U.S. citizen, who takes the life of another person," he said in a March 26 telephone interview. "That's the problem. The broken immigration system did not cause the death of this youth."

The promoter of peace and justice for his order in the U.S. and Canada, Curran said political debate in the wake of the suspect being a foreign national without papers "is a reminder to us of the importance of the harm that we do, in our immigrant community, to each other when we lift up arms, when we are doing other illicit activity. It is doubly harmful to us."

"It's already been an undue burden upon us that we have to be better citizens than lawfully permanent residents and citizens (of the U.S.) in order to survive in this society, in the anti-immigrant climate," he said.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.