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# Firearms and Crime in Illinois

APRIL 1993

With few exceptions, the overall rate of violent crime—murder, robbery, sexual assault, and aggravated assault—in Illinois has increased steadily since the mid-1980s. Statewide, reports of violent index crime rose almost 44 percent between 1984 and 1991. This trend has been particularly evident in Chicago, where violent crime reports were up 47 percent during this period (before declining, for the first time in five years, by 6 percent in 1992).<sup>1</sup> In the rest of Illinois outside Chicago, violent crime has been on the rise as well, increasing 35 percent between 1984 and 1991.

As violent crime has increased in Illinois, so has the use of firearms<sup>2</sup> in the commission of those crimes, most notably the use of handguns. Like the overall rise in violent crimes, the increase in violent crimes committed with a firearm has occurred in all regions of the state: Chicago, the “collar” counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, Will, and suburban Cook), and in the rest of Illinois.

### Firearms and Violent Crime

In Chicago, violent crimes committed with a firearm surged from about 18,500 in 1984 to more than 33,800 in 1991, an 83-percent increase, according to Illinois Uniform Crime Report statistics maintained by the Illinois State Police. Violent offenses committed specifically with a handgun rose even faster, nearly doubling between 1987 and 1991 alone (Figure 1). By comparison, the number of violent crimes committed with other firearms (including automatic and semi-

As violent crime has increased in Illinois since the mid-1980s, so has the use of firearms in the commission of those crimes. Increases in violent crimes—and in violent crimes committed with firearms—have not been confined to Chicago either: they have occurred in the suburban “collar” counties and in the rest of the state as well. This executive briefing takes a detailed look at the use of firearms in violent crime in Illinois. Our purpose is not to endorse any one approach to controlling the epidemic of gun violence. State and local lawmakers have been debating different strategies for some time, and will no doubt continue to do so. Our purpose is to provide these and other decision makers with accurate and timely information about the problem, to help them develop and implement better solutions to it.

Dennis E. Nowicki  
Executive Director

automatic rifles) has remained relatively stable in Chicago since the mid-1980s, although their number did increase nearly 24 percent between 1988 and 1991, to 1,713 offenses. Still, handguns are clearly the gun of choice for violent criminals in Chicago, accounting for 95 percent of all violent offenses committed with a firearm in 1991.

Outside Chicago, the basic trends are similar, though on a smaller scale. In the six collar counties that surround Chicago, reported violent crimes committed with a firearm rose 44.5 percent between 1984 and 1991, to 4,123 offenses. In the rest of the state, these offenses were up almost 29 percent, to 3,814 in 1991 (see Figure 1). In both regions, as in Chicago, handguns account for the vast—and growing—majority of the firearms used in these crimes, although other firearms (such as shotguns and rifles) are more likely to be used in “downstate” violent crime. In 1991, handguns accounted for 91 percent of all violent crimes committed with

<sup>1</sup>The Chicago Police Department substantially changed the way it reports crime statistics in 1983; this change resulted in statistically huge crime increases that year not only in Chicago but statewide as well. Because 1984 is the first full year Chicago reported crime statistics under its revised procedures, it is used as the baseline year for comparison. Also, index crime statistics for 1992 are available for Chicago only; 1991 is the most recent year that statewide data are available.

<sup>2</sup>For a complete definition of the term “firearm” under Illinois law, see the *Guide to Illinois Firearm Data*, published by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

a firearm in the collar counties; in the rest of Illinois, the figure was still nearly 86 percent.

Not only violent crime overall, but each of the four individual violent crime types have risen in Illinois since 1984. Firearms, again, have contributed to these increases, particularly with robberies. Overall, reported robberies in Illinois increased almost 50 percent between 1984 and 1991, but robberies committed with a firearm increased more than twice as much, 102 percent. In 1991, fully 40 percent of all robberies reported in the state involved a firearm, compared with fewer than 30 percent in 1984.

Likewise, aggravated assaults and murders committed with a firearm (up 51 percent and 46 percent, respectively) increased faster during this period than did the same crimes committed with other weapons. Criminal sexual assaults involving a firearm also increased (9 percent), although this was much smaller than the overall 54-percent increase in sexual assault offenses, which was driven largely by crimes involving personal force and other weapons such as knives. In 1991, approximately 32 percent of all index assaults and 9 percent of all criminal sexual assaults in Illinois were committed with a firearm. For murder, however, the percentage was

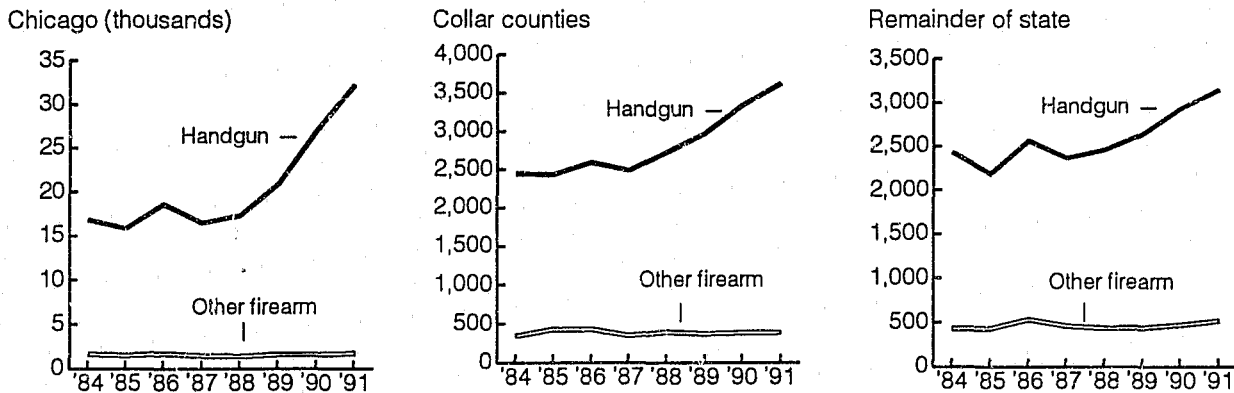
much higher: more than 67 percent of the 1,300 murders reported in 1991 involved a firearm, compared with fewer than 59 percent of the 1,029 murders recorded in 1984.

The increasing use of firearms in lethal violence has occurred in all regions of the state. In the collar counties, for example, the number of firearm murders grew from 66 in 1984 to 108 in 1991, a 64-percent increase (Figure 2). In addition, firearm murders are accounting for a growing *percentage* of all murders occurring in this region. In 1985, for instance, firearm murders made up about 46 percent of the 112 homicides that occurred in the collar counties. In 1991, when there were 59 more murders overall, firearms were involved in more than 63 percent of the offenses.

Similarly, firearm homicides in Chicago have generally increased in recent years: between 1987 and 1991, they rose nearly 73 percent.

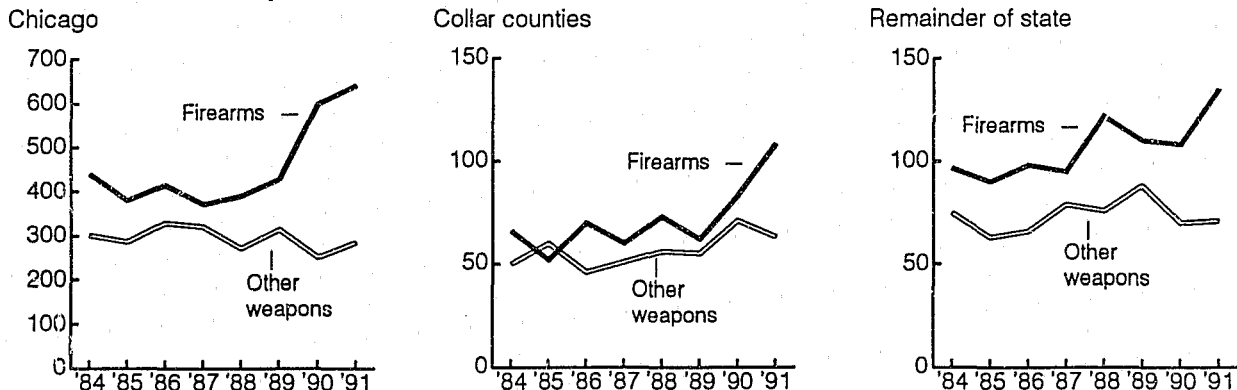
At the same time, the percentage of Chicago homicides involving firearms also grew, from fewer than 54 percent in 1987 to approximately 70 percent in both 1990 and 1991. And in the rest of Illinois outside Chicago and the collar counties, the trend was similar. Firearm homicides increased 39 percent between 1984 and 1991. The 135 such offenses in

**FIGURE 1**  
**Violent crimes in which a firearm was used**



Source: Illinois State Police

**FIGURE 2**  
**Weapons used in Illinois murders**



Source: Illinois State Police

1991 accounted for 65.5 percent of all homicides that year, up from 56 percent seven years earlier.

## Violations of Firearm Laws

In addition to data on firearm usage in the four violent index crimes, the Illinois Uniform Crime Reports maintain statistics on violations of deadly weapon laws. These offenses range from the unlawful sale and possession of a firearm and/or ammunition to unlawful use of a weapon.

As with violent index crimes involving firearms, reported firearm law violations have skyrocketed since the mid-1980s in Illinois. Statewide, these firearms offenses increased nearly 87 percent, from about 6,900 in 1984 to nearly 13,000 in 1991. Increases were recorded in all regions of the state: 104 percent in Chicago, 61 percent in the collar counties, and 58 percent in the rest of Illinois (Figure 3).

Like the trend in violent crime, the vast majority of these firearms violations involve a handgun. Of the more than 44,000 firearm violations reported in Chicago between 1984 and 1991, more than 87 percent involved a handgun. Unlawful possession accounted for 84 percent of all handgun

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## Crime Data in Illinois

In Illinois, all law enforcement agencies must report crime statistics to the Illinois State Police. The information is logged into the Illinois Uniform Crime Reports (I-UCR), an incident-based reporting program designed to provide crime statistics to law enforcement agencies, state and local decision makers, and the public.

The I-UCR includes a Crime Index consisting of eight major offense categories—four violent crimes and four property crimes. The four violent index crimes are defined as follows:

- **Murder.** The willful killing of a person. Index murder also includes voluntary manslaughter, which is the death of a person caused by gross negligence.
- **Criminal Sexual Assault.** Until 1984, "rape" was defined as the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will. In July 1984, Illinois' sexual assault laws became gender-neutral, and the old concept of rape was broadened to include all sexual assaults, completed and attempted, aggravated and non-aggravated.
- **Robbery.** The taking of, or attempt to take, anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person by force or threat of force or violence.
- **Aggravated Assault/Battery.** The intentional causing of, or attempt to cause, serious bodily harm or the threat of serious bodily injury or death. This category includes aggravated assault, aggravated battery, attempted murder, and since 1990, ritual mutilation.

Because these offenses often involve the use of a weapon, the I-UCR records weapons use according to several broad categories, including handguns, other firearms, knives, and other weapons. The I-UCR also records a number of other, non-index offenses, including deadly weapons violations.

violations in Chicago in 1984, a figure that increased steadily to more than 91 percent in 1991. During this same period, handguns accounted for 81 percent of firearms violations in the collar counties and nearly 74 percent of those in the remainder of the state. Unlike Chicago, however, unlawful use of a firearm (as opposed to unlawful possession) was the most common violation in both the collar counties and the rest of the state.<sup>3</sup>

## Guns in the Schools

Sadly, the use of firearms in Illinois is not limited to "the streets." Both anecdotal and statistical evidence suggest that guns have become a serious problem in some of the state's public school systems as well.

A recent survey by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority of students and teachers in 31 public schools statewide found that 5 percent of the students surveyed said they had brought a gun to school at least once during the 1989-90 school year.

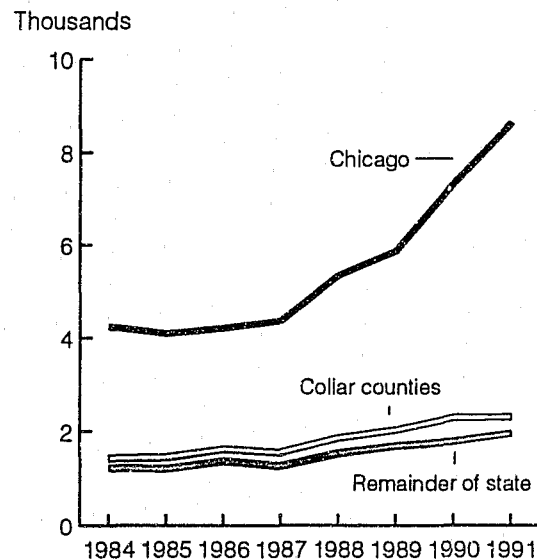
In Chicago, several highly publicized shootings, as well as some alarming statistics, have prompted officials to take a variety of anti-gun measures, including the installation of metal detectors in most public high schools. According to the Chicago Public Schools' Bureau of Safety and Security, the number of guns recovered in city schools increased from 183 during the 1990-91 school year to 200 during the 1991-92 school year. Through February of this school year, 115 guns had been recovered, a pace slightly lower than the previous year's. In addition, police made 168 arrests for unlawful use of a weapon in or around Chicago schools during the 1991-92 school year, up from 153 the year before. Arrests appear to be

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<sup>3</sup> The higher number of gun possession violations in Chicago is most likely related to the city's strict handgun ban, in effect since 1983.

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**FIGURE 3**  
**Firearm violations known to the police**



Source: Illinois State Police

down this year, however, with 70 recorded through February 1993.

In the Authority's statewide survey, about 1 in 12 students said they had been physically attacked in school, and nearly 8 percent of the victims reported that the attack involved a gun. Among teachers, about 1 in 28 said they had been physically attacked in school, but only 1.4 percent of these victims had been assaulted with a gun.

### Firearms In Illinois: How Many?

There is no comprehensive information on how many guns are owned by Illinois residents, legally or illegally. There are, however, some sources of data that can give a rough idea of the volume of guns in circulation:

- The number of FOID (Firearm Owner Identification) cardholders
- The volume of inquiries to the recently established F-TIP (Firearm Transfer Inquiry Program) hotline for background checks on firearm purchasers
- The number of firearms dealers in the state
- The number of new firearm registrations in municipalities that require them<sup>4</sup>
- The number of unlawful attempts to purchase firearms that are interrupted by the FOID or F-TIP controls
- The number of firearms confiscated and/or recovered do offer a general sense of the volume of firearms in circulation and the number of persons who desire to own one.

**FOID Cardholders.** FOID data reveal only the number of people in Illinois who legally may own firearms, not the number of firearms owned by each cardholder. At the end of 1992, the Firearm Owners Identification Card Unit of the Illinois State Police reported a total of 1,209,960 active FOID records (Figure 4).<sup>5</sup> Increases in the number of people holding FOID cards have been recorded in all parts of the state and for both men and women.

An additional 5,051 persons reportedly tried to purchase a firearm without proper identification during the period from 1988 to 1991; figures for 1992 are not yet available. Attempts to purchase a firearm without a FOID card is a Class A misdemeanor and is categorized as a deadly weapons violation.

The unit received 279,345 FOID card applications in 1992, a 34.3 percent increase from 1988. A total of 29,773 FOID cards were denied in 1992 and 33,363 revoked, increases of 54.1 percent and 32.7 percent over the 1988 denials and revocations, respectively (see Figure 4).<sup>6</sup>

**F-TIP Inquiries.** Since 1992, gun dealers have been required to call a telephone hotline—F-TIP (Firearm Transfer Inquiry Program)—for a criminal background check on persons who wish to purchase firearms. The Illinois State Police run a computerized check on the would-be purchaser's eligibility to buy guns. The number of F-TIP inquiries give an indication of how many people attempt to buy firearms legally in Illinois.

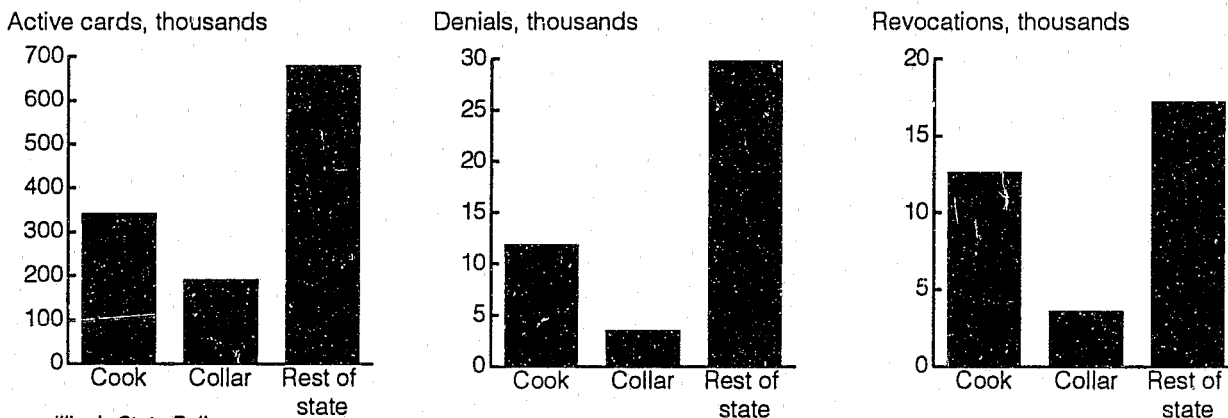
According to ISP, in 1992, 171,940 F-TIP inquiries were received from dealers regarding would-be purchasers. Of those,

<sup>4</sup> Illinois law does not require firearms to be registered. However, several cities, such as Chicago, require registration, and thus make it possible to gather more accurate information for those particular locations. Chicago banned the sale and possession of handguns in 1984.

<sup>5</sup> This is a count of active records, not individuals. For example, if someone's record were purged in June and a new record issued in August, there would be two active records during that year for that individual.

<sup>6</sup> Applications refer only to the actual, physical number of forms received. It does not apply to the number of individuals who may have applied or the number issued, nor does it have any correlation to the amount of money collected in fees during any fiscal year. Duplications may exist in cases where a person who originally was denied a FOID card reapplies, or where a single applicant sends in more than one form.

FIGURE 4  
1992 active FOID cards, FOID card denials, and FOID card revocations



Source: Illinois State Police

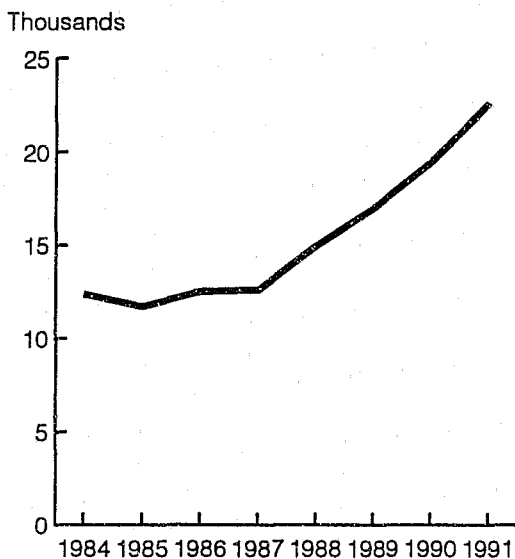
1,234 requests were denied—23 for felony convictions uncovered by F-TIP. The remaining 1,211 denials were for invalid FOID cards—668 were expired; 411 cancelled; 46 revoked for felony conviction; 45 revoked for mental institutionalization; and 41 were invalid for other reasons. F-TIP also found 367 arrest warrants for crimes ranging from failure to appear in court to unlawful use of weapons.

**Firearms Dealers.** All firearms dealers in Illinois and throughout the country must register with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, which also monitors dealers' compliance with firearm regulations. The bureau reports that there currently are nearly 10,300 firearms dealers in Illinois, or 13.5 percent more than in 1986. Statistical records on the number of firearms bought and sold by these federally licensed dealers are not maintained, however.<sup>7</sup>

**Registrations.** The City of Chicago, along with a few other Illinois jurisdictions, requires that firearms be registered with local authorities. There currently are more than 250,000 legally registered guns in the city, not including illegally owned handguns or other firearms. Between 1984 and 1991, the Chicago Police Department recorded 49,255 new firearm registrations.

<sup>7</sup>State law requires that dealers keep records containing the date of the sale (or gift made) of a firearm; the name, address, age, and occupation of the person to whom the weapon is sold (or given); the price of the weapon; the type; the description and number of the firearm; and the purpose for which it is obtained. The records must be furnished for inspection by a peace officer on demand.

**FIGURE 5**  
**Firearms confiscated in Chicago**



Source: Chicago Police Department

**Firearm Confiscations.** The Chicago Police Department records as "confiscated" guns that are illegally owned or used in a crime, or that are found or turned in to the police.

During the eight-year period from 1984 to 1991, more than 123,000 firearms, the majority of which were illegally owned, were confiscated in Chicago during criminal investigations. More than 80 percent were handguns. Firearm confiscations in Chicago increased by nearly 83 percent during this period (Figure 5).

**Recoveries of Stolen Firearms.** The Illinois State Police maintain statewide statistics on stolen firearms that are recovered by police. The number of firearms recovered by police in Chicago has increased—by 87.5 percent between 1984 and 1991. In the rest of the state, firearm recoveries have increased as well—by more than 95 percent—although the numbers are much smaller than in Chicago. Data on recovered firearms, however, may not include those recovered in the course of non-criminal offenses or those without serial numbers.

The high number of recoveries in Chicago may be partially attributable to firearms stolen outside of Chicago that are recovered in the city. ■

### Firearm Laws

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms enforces federal laws on illegal weapons. Firearm regulations and offenses in Illinois are further defined by state laws and, in some cases, individual jurisdictions.

There is a nationwide ban on machine guns.

Firearm ownership is principally regulated in Illinois by two statutes governing the acquisition and possession of firearms: the Firearm Owners Identification Card Act (430 ILCS 65/2) and that portion of the Illinois Criminal Code dealing with deadly weapons.

The Firearm Owners Identification Act was strengthened by a 1992 amendment to the act creating the Firearm Transfer Inquiry Program (F-TIP). F-TIP requires that each firearm dealer, in addition to ensuring that the would-be purchaser has a FOID card, call into an ISP 900-number hotline before selling a weapon. Through computers, the Illinois State Police can determine the validity of the FOID card and check whether the person has a criminal background or a history of mental illness that would make him/her a threat to the public safety.

For those meeting the legal requirements for firearm ownership, the "Deadly Weapons" (Article 24) portion of the Illinois Criminal Code (720 ILCS 5/24-1 et seq.) also mandates a waiting period before delivery of a firearm. Handguns and other concealable firearms require a 72-hour waiting period; 24 hours is required before delivery of a rifle, shotgun, or other long gun. This stipulation does not apply to mail order sales to nonresidents at a mailing address outside of Illinois, or to nonresidents who purchase a firearm at a trade show or display recognized by the Illinois State Police.

## For Further Reading on Guns and Gun Violence

*The Compiler.* Chicago, Ill., Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Spring 1992. Copies are available from the Authority; tel.: 312-793-8550.

*The Compiler.* Chicago, Ill., Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Summer 1992. Copies are available from the Authority; tel.: 312-793-8550.

*Guide to Illinois Firearm Data.* Chicago, Ill., Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1992. Copies are available from the Authority; tel.: 312-793-8550.

*Trends and Issues 91.* Chicago, Ill., Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1991. Copies are available from the Authority; tel.: 312-793-8550.

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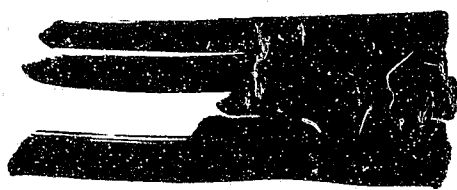
Dennis E. Nowicki  
*Executive Director*

This Executive Briefing was written by Susan Schultz, with assistance from Rebecca Carolyn Block, Thomas Derken, and Jonathon Harmening. It was edited by Kevin P. Morison and Maureen Hickey.

For more information, or additional copies of this report, contact the Authority's Information Resource Center at 312-793-8550.

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