

FBI Investigating Loretto Hospital's Vaccination Program

November 2, 2021



The FBI is investigating Loretto Hospital's COVID-19 vaccination program following reports that doses went to ineligible people with ties to hospital administrators, government records show.

Two federal grand jury subpoenas were issued to the Illinois Department of Public Health in May and September after Block Club Chicago revealed the hospital vaccinated ineligible people at Chicago's Trump Tower, where Loretto's chief financial officer, Dr. Anosh Ahmed, lived, as well as a luxury jewelry shop and a high-end Gold Coast steakhouse where Ahmed hung out.

The subpoenas, issued "pursuant to an official criminal investigation," seek patient records and other documents over a two-day period in March when Chicagoans were scrambling to secure scarce vaccination appointments.

Loretto administrators did not respond to requests for comment.

Read more about Loretto Hospital

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Loretto Hospital Got Vaccines to Help Black West Siders — but More Than Half of Early On-site Shots Went to White and Asian People

May 11, 2021



The subpoenas represent demands for records and information and made no allegations of wrongdoing against any Loretto official. They also do not spell out the scope of the grand jury investigation or its targets.

Still, those documents signal a new depth to the turmoil swirling around the small safety-net hospital on the West Side. The Illinois Attorney General's Office is already investigating the hospital following reports from Block Club and the Better Government Association that revealed one of Ahmed's [friends won contracts worth \\$4 million from the nonprofit hospital](#) while Loretto board members took [hospital-funded Caribbean trips](#), among other benefits.

"This is not a fishing expedition," said Chicago attorney Stephen Lee, who formerly served as a senior counsel to the Chicago U.S. attorney's health care fraud unit and who reviewed the subpoenas at the request of reporters. "Sometimes these investigations don't really go anywhere, but there's something they're looking into, and it's something more than just what's unethical."

[Ahmed resigned in March](#) amid the Block Club disclosures, [saying he didn't want to become a "distraction."](#) He did not respond to requests for comment Monday.

At a press conference Friday morning, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said her administration also was cooperating with the federal investigation. "They've asked individuals questions about things related to Loretto. I don't want to go any further because there is an ongoing federal investigation," Lightfoot said.

As the pandemic tore through low-income communities of color, officials administered Illinois' first vaccinations at Loretto in December, in large part to assure Black and Latino citizens they would be prioritized and protected.

On May 11, Block Club and the BGA [published an internal Loretto audit](#) that showed more than half of the hospital's early on-site coronavirus vaccine doses went to white and Asian people, while the neighborhood Loretto serves is 79 percent Black. Loretto had tried to keep that audit from the public.

About two weeks later, on May 27, the FBI issued its first subpoena to the state health department, demanding information on the vaccination status of 70 people inoculated through Loretto on March 10 and 47 people vaccinated by Loretto the next day, March 11. The second subpoena, sent four months later, on Sept. 15, asked health officials more broadly for all records on any COVID-19 vaccinations administered by Loretto at any location on those two days in March.

The subpoenas were released following a public records request by Block Club and the BGA, but much of the 14 pages — including the names of people who received vaccines on those two days — were blacked out because of medical privacy concerns.

At the time, inoculations were limited to health care staff, essential frontline workers and people 65 and older, but doses proved scarce even for members of those groups. Many people [scoured websites](#) for appointments, dialed endlessly into overwhelmed phone banks and responded to text alerts for slots that were quickly snatched up.



The FBI is investigating Loretto Hospital's COVID-19 vaccination program following reports that doses went to ineligible people with ties to hospital administrators. (Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago)

On March 10, Loretto administered doses to [ineligible people](#) at Trump Tower downtown, where Ahmed, who was also Loretto's chief operating officer as well as its CFO, owned a unit, according to the hospital's subsequent audit and other records.

Ahmed claimed credit for vaccinating Eric Trump during that March 10 event, though he later said he'd been joking. Ahmed took a photo with Trump and texted it to others, saying he "vaccinated Eric Trump" and calling the former president's son a "cool guy."

Digital data embedded in that photo shows it was taken the afternoon of March 10 at or near Trump Tower.

"Eric Trump happened to be in the building but we did not vaccinate him," Ahmed said in a statement shared through a spokesperson at the time. "A few residents including myself did take a photo with him. My post was meant as a joke"

Eric Trump — who is an executive vice president and trustee of the Trump Organization that owns the hotel and residence — did not respond to a Block Club

and BGA interview request made through the Trump Organization, including questions about whether he had been contacted by federal authorities or whether he took part in the vaccination event.

In a March letter to Loretto's staff, hospital CEO George Miller took responsibility for the Trump Tower event, saying he authorized it. Miller declined requests for comment Monday.

Other records made public about those two days in March shed only partial light on the FBI subpoena.



The hospital's self-audit stated it [administered 70 unapproved, ineligible vaccines at Trump Tower](#) on March 10, but it lists no vaccination event where 47 more people were inoculated.

The city's health department [suspended vaccine doses to Loretto](#) until the hospital could put its program in order. State Rep. LaShawn Ford of Chicago [stepped down from the hospital's board March 23](#) to protest its slowness in responding to the mounting scandals. The next day, [Ahmed resigned](#).

On March 25, Mayor Lori Lightfoot called for an [independent investigation into the hospital's vaccinations](#).

In the months since, the Illinois Attorney General's Office [launched an investigation](#) into "potential misuse of charitable assets" by Loretto administrators. A spokesperson declined to comment for this article, saying only, "We are not involved in the federal investigation."

The subpoenas state the current investigation is overseen by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sheri Mecklenburg, who often handles [complex financial cases](#), including white collar fraud and [crimes against the elderly](#). She referred questions to an agency spokesman, who declined comment.

An FBI public affairs officer also declined to elaborate on the subpoenas, saying, "DOJ policy prohibits the FBI from commenting on the existence or nonexistence of any investigation."

The state Department of Healthcare and Family Services — which administers the

Medicaid program that largely funds Loretto — received no similar subpoenas, according to the agency's response to a similar records request.