

# Holyoke resident demands action after fatal shooting on Sargeant Street

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Cars work their way through the intersection of Sargeant and Maple streets in Holyoke. (Hoang 'Leon' Nguyen / The Republican, File)

**HOLYOKE** — After a fatal shooting on Sargeant Street earlier this month, a lifelong Holyoke resident is publicly calling out city leadership, saying violence has reached a breaking point, and residents no longer feel safe.

Angelina Rivera, who was born and raised in Holyoke, [spoke out in a video](#) on social media April 24 after the death of Tony Abreu, who was shot April 18 while neighbors and children were outside nearby.

In statements to The Republican, Rivera said the shooting reflects what she sees as a broader public safety crisis marked by daytime violence, open drug use and a lack of accountability from city officials.

“This wasn’t an isolated incident,” Rivera said. “Right now, safety in this city is in a freefall. I’ve lived here for over 50 years. I’ve seen Holyoke at its best, and what we’re dealing with today is a level of disregard for human life and property I’ve never seen.”

Rivera rejected efforts she said frame the city’s problems as minor quality-of-life issues.

“This isn’t about litter,” she said. “This is about a total collapse of accountability.”

She accused city leaders of failing to present a clear plan to address violence and said residents are frustrated by what she described as symbolic responses. “We get photo ops, empty statements and power plays,” Rivera said. “But we don’t get a real plan to protect the people who live here.”



A pregnant woman was shot on a PVTA bus in the area of Maple and Sargeant streets, and was taken to Baystate Medical Center, where she later lost the baby, on Oct. 4, 2023. (Irene Rotondo / MassLive.com, File)

## **Calls for action and accountability**

Rivera said residents plan to attend a [May 11 public meeting](#) at City Hall with specific demands, including a clear, step-by-step strategy from the mayor and City Council to reduce violent crime.

“No vague talking points,” she said.

She also called for an audit of properties that repeatedly generate police calls and stronger enforcement against landlords or business owners who fail to maintain safe environments.

Rivera said the city should redirect funding from what she described as unnecessary projects toward public safety and infrastructure.

“We need proof the people running this city care more about residents than politics,” she said.

Rivera described her video as a “leadership audit” of the mayor and City Council.

A paranormal investigator by profession, Rivera said her work has shaped how she approaches public issues.

“My job is to investigate claims, examine evidence and call out what doesn’t make sense,” Rivera said. “That’s exactly what I’m doing here.”

She also addressed city leaders during a City Council meeting last week, criticizing what she called a “business as usual” approach.

“It is literally killing us,” Rivera said.



A memorial for a newborn at Sargeant and Maple streets in Holyoke on Oct. 4, 2023. The baby had been shot near this spot, while still in the womb, and later died. (Hoang 'Leon' Nguyen / The Republican, File)

## History of violence weighs on neighborhood

The most recent shooting occurred on the same street where, in 2023, a pregnant woman riding a bus was struck by a stray bullet during a dispute outside the vehicle. The woman was eight months pregnant at the time and later lost the baby.

“That baby never got to take his first breath,” Rivera said. “When bullets start flying, they don’t have names on them.”

And there are all kinds of victims, she noted. “They are hitting the childhood of every kid who has to watch it.”

She also criticized what she described as uneven enforcement, saying minor property violations are addressed quickly while properties linked to repeated criminal activity remain unchanged.

“They’re experts at enforcing the rules that make them money,” Rivera said.

Rivera further criticized city-funded cleanup events, saying the money would be better used on violence prevention.

“We don’t need rakes for leaves,” she said. “We need rakes for bullet casings.”

She said she believes the suspect in Abreu’s killing was known to police, and that landlords and that residents had previously reported disturbances at the apartment. Rivera said many neighbors are afraid to speak publicly.

## Mixed reaction from residents

Other residents who responded to Rivera’s video expressed differing views on crime and accountability.

Janne Rentas said conditions on city streets have worsened, even during the day.

“These crimes aren’t just happening at night,” Rentas said. “Holyoke isn’t that big. Police should be stationed in the areas causing the most trouble.”

Others cautioned against blaming city leaders for all acts of violence.

“Sometimes there’s nothing anyone can do to prevent tragedies,” Noel Valentin Diaz said. “You can’t blame the mayor or the council.”

Zach Grzelak said drug use and homelessness remain the city’s biggest challenges.



Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia wipes away tears as he recounts events surrounding a shooting that left a newborn baby dead in October 2023. Police Chief David Pratt is behind the mayor. (Don Treeger / The Republican, File)

## **Mayor responds to criticism**

A frequent poster on social media, Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia said he welcomes public criticism, even when residents strongly disagree with the city's actions.

"When people talk and communicate, the city is learning," Garcia said in an interview Tuesday.

Garcia said leaders should embrace civic discourse and acknowledged the city has struggled at times to communicate its efforts effectively.

He said the city has focused on holding landlords accountable through increased code enforcement and patrols.

"When you talk about public safety, it's not just policing," Garcia said. "All of these things have to work together."

## **City efforts and public safety strategy**

Garcia pointed to audits of the Police Department, increased collaboration with nonprofit groups and the use of data-driven tools, including ShotSpotter technology, as all helping to address gun violence.