



# Reimagining Public Safety A Toolkit for Cities and Towns



### About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence Federal policy and drive innovative solutions. This report represents a collaboration across several of NLC's centers and teams including, but not limited to, The Institute for Youth, Education and Families, The Center for City Solutions, Federal Advocacy and Race Equity and Leadership (REAL).

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## Introduction

In February of 2021, NLC launched the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force made up of local leaders from across the country. The NLC Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Recommendations Report, "[A Path Toward Safe and Equitable Cities](#)," released in October, outlines five high-level recommendations for city leaders to improve the ways in which they ensure the safety of all residents. Whereas the Recommendations offer a general framework, this supplemental Toolkit shares detailed, actionable steps that City leaders can take.

This Toolkit consists of five sections that detail practical steps toward realizing the Task Force recommendations:

- ◆ Redefine Public Safety
- ◆ Engage, Restructure & Balance
- ◆ Deploy Appropriate Response
- ◆ Embrace Accountability
- ◆ Seek Guidance and Support

The Toolkit provides extensive context and examples for city leaders to replicate, reference, and adapt as they implement reimagined approaches to public safety that work well in a local context. Examples come from cities of varying sizes from across the country.

To truly reimagine public safety, cities must reflect, evaluate, engage, and act. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that this type of transformation requires a leader or leaders to think outside the box and toward innovation. This must all be done in conjunction and in true collaboration with various stakeholders – most notably, Black, Latinx, and Indigenous residents and those in communities of historic disinvestment.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE SCOPE OF THE TOOLKIT

The Toolkit places its emphasis on functions most commonly within the scope of local governments. This leaves out several important considerations for public safety and resident trust in government. For instance, whereas a few consolidated cities directly administer detention facilities for youth and adults, probation and other forms of community supervision including electronic monitoring and community supervision, most cities do not. Nevertheless, all cities need to give attention to the roles and effects of these systems in conjunction with county or state government partners.

In addition, the Toolkit does not focus on school safety, though once again, truly comprehensive planning, goal setting, and policy change initiatives of city leaders will engage school district- and school-level stakeholders regarding changes in the education domain as well.

Lastly, the Toolkit does not directly address some topics worthy of additional attention by city leaders, including domestic violence and death by suicide.

# Redefine Public Safety

## NLC RPS TF RECOMMENDATION ONE:

### DIRECT MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP TOWARDS SAFETY AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL

*The time has come for the leaders of the nation's cities, towns, and villages to declare that community safety requires a broader and more holistic definition including the components of public health and well-being, and that cities can make structural changes to align local policies to this new definition.*

*Our present framing for public safety is insufficient. The framework needs expansion beyond the traditional use of the word safety to embrace a far broader set of conditions and circumstances that center public health or more simply, well-being.*

*This focus on public health places an emphasis on living conditions free of hazards that cause illness or contribute to housing instability; on the availability of jobs that pay a living wage; on access to well-maintained open spaces and a built environment that delivers clean air and water, usable streets, and reliable technology connections.*

*This requires deep and complex public discussions and joint decisions about shared goals. In addition, the indicators and measurements to determine progress on these goals will necessarily change and expand. Instead of only measuring, for example, arrest rates or jail populations, new descriptors of improvements will measure housing conditions, economic mobility opportunities, and racial equity outcomes.*

#### A PATH TOWARD SAFE AND EQUITABLE CITIES

NLC Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report, October 2021

## OVERVIEW

Directing municipal government leadership toward providing safety and well-being for all involves discovering what safety means to residents, and how city government and its partners can contribute to providing safety and increasing well-being. This discussion anticipates further guidance available in Sections 2 and 3 of the Toolkit about ways to reduce overdependence on law enforcement as the sole guarantors of public safety, while specifically giving attention to leadership activities such as setting citywide goals, reporting regularly on measurable progress, adopting a broader range of indicators, and reducing the overuse and misuse of jails and other criminal justice responses. As in so many other areas detailed in this Toolkit, some cities already serve as the leading edge of implementing such actions and suggest what other city leaders can do. That said, this Toolkit and Recommendations represent a call to action, given that no municipality has comprehensively accomplished structural change across the board as yet.

*“Focus on making sure that every single face of city government works towards the goal of keeping residents safe. Policing alone will not save us.”*

MAYOR BRANDON SCOTT, Baltimore, MD

## SETTING GOALS FOR SAFETY AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL

Goal-setting efforts initiated by the mayor or city manager – perhaps with the participation of the City Council or an interagency or community task force – provide a way to build consensus around the results that a city seeks, and typically also launch discussions about how to achieve those results. The opportunity for cities seeking to Reimagine Public Safety centers around questions of what safety and well-being mean for residents – specifically Black, Latinx, and Indigenous residents as those most impacted by current public safety harms – and other stakeholders.

## CASE STUDIES



**The City of Charlotte, NC (pop. 957,425)** [SAFE Charlotte](#) plan, developed with support of a Community Input Group, establishes four broad principles, each followed by specific recommendations and action steps:

- ◆ Support safe, healthy, and inclusive neighborhoods, including policing, fire protection, and the environment
- ◆ Build affordable housing and provide opportunities that align with creating great neighborhoods
- ◆ Implement a comprehensive mobility network and advance strategies to create a livable connected city that embodies our environmental sustainability and resiliency goals
- ◆ Create a thriving economic climate where businesses are connected to highly skilled talent and technologies



**New York City, NY (pop. 8.4 million)** provides an example of community involvement in setting goals and using those goals to guide broad efforts to improve living conditions and well-being. An NLC partner, the [Center for American Progress](#), recently profiled [NeighborhoodStat](#), a joint problem-solving process developed by the New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. "NeighborhoodStat empowers residents of public housing developments to work directly with city leaders to strengthen public safety by addressing the social, economic, and environmental conditions that are linked to crime," notes the Center. "The process relies on active participation and buy-in from members of the community, establishing the legitimacy of the city's efforts to strengthen public safety."

As a source of further suggestions about areas that citywide goals could address, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center [recently developed a list of categories](#) encompassing programs, policies, and strategies for which evidence shows an ability to reduce violence without resorting to police intervention:

- ◆ Improve the physical environment
- ◆ Strengthen anti-violence social norms and peer relationships
- ◆ Engage and support youth
- ◆ Reduce substance misuse
- ◆ Mitigate financial stress
- ◆ Reduce the harmful effects of the justice process
- ◆ Confront access to guns

Considering a range of venues within which the city wants to ensure safety and well-being may also help inform citywide goal setting. For instance, venues worth considering include schools, hospitals, public housing developments and other neighborhoods, and public transit.

## TRACK AND SHARE PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

With goals in place, city leaders' attention can turn to establishing public channels to ensure transparency in tracking and sharing progress toward meeting those goals. Methods and approaches may range from online dashboards to regular reporting to City Council and residents. (For more on resident engagement, see Section 2). Along the way, to ensure reduction of racial disparities and move toward equity, leaders will need to direct their data teams to collect data and produce reports disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and neighborhood. Leaders will also need to ensure widespread accessibility of information, especially among those most impacted by current public safety harms. In addition, in order to achieve reporting on agreed citywide indicators, setting up public reporting mechanisms will likely involve negotiating new and improved data sharing agreements with agencies such as housing authorities, economic development commissions, jails, local justice system agencies, and county health departments.

## CASE STUDIES



**Milwaukee, WI (pop. 594, 548)** provides an interagency example hosted at the Medical College of Wisconsin, the [Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission](#). With a focus on reducing homicides and non-fatal shootings, this collaboration of law enforcement professionals, criminal justice professionals, and community service providers regularly exchanges information about the city's homicides and other violent crimes to identify methods of prevention from both public health and criminal justice perspectives. With support from several sources, the Commission created a first-of-its-kind [data hub](#) through which researchers and law enforcement can analyze trends and dynamics regarding individuals and neighborhoods. The hub tracks arrest, pretrial, and health department data from the city of Milwaukee. Its design allows for regular feeds of updated data as well as new data sets, such as workforce development and Department of Corrections data. Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett notes that the Commission “helps solve crimes, and also helps us prevent violence in the city.”



**Louisville, KY (pop. 617,790)**, like many other cities, has invested in and closely monitors results from [hospital-based violence intervention](#) through the [Pivot to Peace](#) program, as a key technique to reduce retribution and other poor outcomes of violence.



## ADDRESSING GUN VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Despite generally decreasing crime rates, 2020 brought about increases in gun violence in many cities across the country. Recognizing the need to address the increases—**which may have slowed**—informed observers attribute the fluctuation to a variety of causes, and still recommend the use of targeted approaches to reduce violence through prevention and intervention. As a way of establishing a new framework for understanding gun violence, well before the recent developments, elected officials in cities such as Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD, Richmond, VA, New York City and Flint, MI, acted to declare gun violence a public health crisis. These declarations have the effect of shifting city responses from enforcement alone to overall wellness and prevention. In turn, the declarations help balance and shift the responsibility for addressing gun violence to a wider range of stakeholders.

Such declarations and follow up also align cities with a **four-step public health approach to violence prevention** outlined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

1. Define and monitor the problem,
2. Identify risk and protective factors,
3. Develop and test prevention strategies.



## ADOPT A NEW AND BROADER RANGE OF INDICATORS

A key opportunity to reinforce and strengthen reimagined approaches to public safety involves adopting and using a new and broader range of indicators to describe who in a city feels safe and well, and in what settings. This involves moving beyond reliance on crime, arrests, and recidivism rates to describe and define what is going on vis-à-vis wider public safety and well-being. Emergent examples, such as those in use in Louisville and Charlotte as noted above, serve as initial beacons for a broader effort yet to come.

Context here comes from the current heavy, if not sole reliance on crime statistics to describe current public safety conditions. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's [Uniform Crime Reporting program](#) aggregates data reported by local law enforcement agencies, largely regarding arrests for a few selected crimes against persons and property; a new [National Incident-Based Reporting System](#) is coming into use. The Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics provides an additional resource that brings in a crime victim perspective through [annual surveys](#) asking individuals about reported or unreported crimes they experienced in the prior six months.

As filtered through various media and individuals' understandings and biases, relying upon the current sources to describe public safety appears to have a cumulative distorting effect: Americans tend to believe that crime rates are up even when the data show the trend is down. In 20 of 24 Gallup opinion poll surveys conducted since 1993, at least 60% of U.S. adults have said there is more crime nationally than there was the year before, despite the generally downward trend in national violent and property crime rates during most of that period.

In reimagining public safety, city leaders can drive discussion toward new indicators that: a) reflect agreement as to what actual safety, well-being, and justice for all their residents involves; b) measure whether residents have consistent, equitable access to those desired conditions; and c) establish a basis for taking further steps when inequities present themselves. For instance, a short list of what it looks and feels like to experience safe living conditions could include:

- ◆ Fair working conditions including living wages and sufficient, affordable child care;
- ◆ Safe places to live and learn, including adequate housing and quality schools;
- ◆ Rapid, calm resolution of interpersonal, individual, and person-against-property incidents, minimizing the use of formal state-sponsored means of resolution and maximizing community-based means; and
- ◆ A sense of ongoing access to fairness and justice among residents when interacting with any representative of government, particularly those carrying weapons or with the power of arrest.

The final portion of this section proposes a new set of indicators for cities to consider.

Toolkit Sections 2, 3, and 4 describe other kinds of municipal leadership beyond goals and indicators. The experience of cities in the [California Violence Prevention Network](#) and the [National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention](#) demonstrates the importance of multiple forms of leadership, including providing a moral voice, pursuing policy innovation, and ensuring administrative follow-through.

## FULFILLING CITY ROLES IN REDUCING THE OVERUSE AND MISUSE OF JAILS

Reducing the overuse and misuse of jails represents a crucial policy-and-practice intervention for cities seeking to reimagine public safety. Significantly reducing the use of jails in particular helps avoid the negative effects of incarceration, community supervision, and other forms of correctional control that can create trauma, [economic instability](#), and [may even increase crime](#). It also addresses the racial disparities that pervade current use of jails. The scale is immense: Some 9 million people cycle in and out of U.S. jails each year; most spend time in jail pre-trial, i.e., without having been convicted of a crime and often simply because they cannot afford bail. In a key effort to turn in another direction, dozens of sites participating in the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's [Safety and Justice Challenge](#) have changed their approaches to cases in which antisocial behavior stems from mental health needs or substance use disorders, as well as for young people charged with involvement in criminal activity (see also Section 3 of this Toolkit).

City leaders can work across governments with justice system agencies to braid a range of policy and programmatic options to form comprehensive, sustainable, and scalable initiatives to reduce the use of jails responsibly. Indeed, recent research from the [JFA Institute](#) and the [CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance \(ISLG\)](#) substantiates that declining jail populations do not compromise public safety. This continuum of options for cities includes mechanisms to offer more appropriate interventions and supports for people in crisis including pre-arrest diversion, triage centers, and

restorative justice, as well as joint efforts with counties, for instance to reduce the use of pre-trial detention.

## PROPOSED AFFIRMATIVE MEASURES AND INDICATORS OF SAFETY, WELL-BEING, AND JUSTICE

Major categories of public safety and well-being indicators, as well as sub-indicators, could include the following. Understanding the patterns and implications from these indicators will require tracking and disaggregating them by setting – such as schools, homes, neighborhoods – as well as age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender.

### RATES OF UTILIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, AND PHYSICAL HEALTH SERVICES

- ◆ Drawdown of Medicaid or other insurance reimbursements
- ◆ Incidence of mental health and physical health issues
- ◆ Numbers of beds or treatment sites
- ◆ Deaths by suicide
- ◆ Prevalence of trauma and adverse childhood experiences
- ◆ Length of waiting lists for various services
- ◆ Availability of culturally competent health care

### ADOPTION OR EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY RESPONDER APPROACHES

- ◆ Changes in dispatch staffing and procedures
- ◆ Deployment of community response mechanisms
- ◆ Budget allocations to community responders / changes in law enforcement budgets
- ◆ Reduced enforcement of low-level offenses

### ADOPTION OR EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

- ◆ Budget allocations to violence interruption, hospital-based services, etc.
- ◆ Changes in behavior among recipients of intervention and prevention services, such as school engagement, employment, recourse to retaliation

### INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

- ◆ Arrests, prosecutions, convictions, sentences
- ◆ Under community supervision
- ◆ Reentry into incarceration
- ◆ Rate of system involvement primarily due to behavioral health reasons, homelessness, or both

### INCIDENCE AND CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE, PROPERTY CRIME, AND VEHICULAR INJURY

- ◆ Prevalence of firearms and related injury and death, number of shootings
- ◆ Domestic violence
- ◆ Felony assault / sexual assault
- ◆ Robberies, thefts, break-ins
- ◆ Cost of treating injuries stemming from violence
- ◆ Traffic injuries and fatalities
- ◆ Adoption or expanded use of trauma-informed and restorative responses

### PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF PRO-SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH, YOUNG ADULTS, AND RETURNING CITIZENS

- ◆ Availability and takeup of high-quality multiple education pathways, employment, and training + education indicators such as attendance, progress, graduation
- ◆ Availability and takeup of high quality, affordable childcare (ages 0-5) and out-of-school time programs and supports (grades K-12)
- ◆ Access and takeup of safe housing and transportation
- ◆ Access and takeup of services such as expungement and related legal assistance
- ◆ Access and takeup of regular connections to nature and healthy food options
- ◆ Access and takeup of small business supports



# Engage, Restructure, and Balance

## NLC RPS TF RECOMMENDATION TWO:

### BALANCE THE RESPECTIVE ROLES OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, RESIDENTS, AND PARTNERS

*Implementing a new, balanced framework for public safety and well-being, in a manner that promotes trust, requires city leaders to center resident engagement processes throughout – specifically to increase the engagement and input of Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities that disproportionately face the most acute safety issues both because of disinvestment and the negative impacts of the criminal justice system. Such engagement can inform initial formation of policies and indicators as well as subsequent reviews of results and lay the groundwork for structuring new ways to manage a wide range of situations through increased transparency and collaboration.*

*Adjusting to the new framework also means redefining the scope and roles of government agencies, something that communities have demanded and for which many police leaders have asked, in lieu of having their departments hold perceived or actual sole responsibility for providing public safety.*

*Further, a broader framework necessitates involvement of the wider range of community- and county-based partners with the ability to contribute to safety and well-being. Notably, this balancing exercise implies consideration of city budget resources and other new or leveraged funds around a new vision, and aligning spending according to role, scope, and relative contributions to safety and well-being.*

#### **A Path Toward Safe and Equitable Cities**

NLC Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report, October 2021

## OVERVIEW

Increasingly, police departments have become over utilized as the only method by which to achieve safety in cities. Through the engagement and involvement of residents and community partners and through a shared ownership of community safety, a more balanced public safety system is attainable. In order to move toward new approaches to public safety, cities need to pursue collaboration and find an effective balance across agencies, residents, and partners.

Using public funds and leveraged resources to promote effective and equitable public safety, as defined by community members, is key to achieving a more balanced system. Further, the urgency of the moment requires city officials to think about what changes are possible immediately, as well as what groundwork can be done to sustain changes and meet longer-term goals.

Three key elements are needed to achieve this balance: effective and inclusive community engagement, redefining the scope and roles of city government agencies, and reorienting city budget resources and leveraged funds around new vision.



## EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engagement and involvement of residents in every step of a process is an effective first step in moving toward this balance of roles. While there are various ways to bring in resident voices, it is important for city leaders to ensure that processes intentionally include those most often left out, yet often most impacted and harmed by current policies and practices. Black, Latinx and Indigenous residents, those residing in neighborhoods of historic divestment, youth and young adults, returning citizens, and victims of crime and police violence are all voices that must be at the table as part of the decision-making process. Cities cannot rectify longstanding distrust — and often fear — of law enforcement, government, and other elements of the criminal/legal system without the full participation of impacted residents and the acknowledgement of prior harm.

*“We can transform our institutions, but not without identifying existing problems and injustices. Recognize the harm that exists and implement solutions to prevent the problems from happening in the future.”*

MAYOR SHARON WESTON BROOME, Baton Rouge, LA



An inclusive engagement process features:

### ACCESSIBILITY

Whether online or in person, resident engagement — particularly of those most impacted and often left out — must be accessible. Offering multiple ways to participate contributes to accessibility as well. Some key accessibility questions for municipal leaders:

- ◆ If seeking resident engagement in person, can residents without personal vehicles readily walk or use mass transit to attend? Will costs be reimbursed? Is the space accessible to those of different abilities?
- ◆ If virtual, do residents have Wi-Fi? Cell phones? Computers? If not, how can we get this type of accessibility to them?
- ◆ If using surveys or written materials, has the city distributed them in multiple languages, and in a form that works for those with vision impairments? Are they written at a level that is understandable to everyone? Are there both electronic and paper versions available?
- ◆ How are we getting the youth voice at the table? What forms of communication work best for them? Are we considering social media and text messages?
- ◆ Do meetings or consultations take place at a convenient time or at multiple times?

### TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

- ◆ Access without trust will not lead to effective engagement. Ensuring that those facilitating this engagement are trusted members of the community is an important factor in authenticity. This involves elected officials actively engaging and incorporating black- and brown-led community organizations, faith-based institutions, activists, youth-led movements, credible messengers and other local leaders. Past false promises and failed commitments have led to longstanding distrust in many neighborhoods and communities. Rebuilding this trust requires acknowledgement of past harm and consistent, authentic commitment.
- ◆ Transparency is key to maintaining trust and moving toward more authentic community engagement. At each step of the process, open sharing of information, goals, and data helps to support ongoing engagement and involvement.

## COMPENSATION

- ◆ When possible, compensating residents for their thoughts, insight, and participation is a good practice. Compensation can come in various forms and helps to ensure that people attend, stay, and contribute to the work to reimagine public safety. Residents are experts; they are consultants in this work and therefore compensation is the best practice. However, to [avoid transactional relationships](#), transparency around the importance of their contributions and in maintaining open information sharing and involvement must be paired with compensation.

## YOUTH VOICE

- ◆ Intentional inclusion of youth and young adults is a necessary aspect of community engagement strategies. Authentic youth engagement requires adults to acknowledge power structures that have historically presented barriers to youth truly being a part of city resident engagement. Ensuring that youth are actual partners in the work, that their voices are valued, and that they feel safe, respected, and comfortable, is the only way for true partnership to exist.

“I want my colleagues to know that young people care deeply, and we want to be a part of that change – real progressive change. We want to be a part of intergenerational cooperation and engagement.”

SHANIA BENNETT, the [youngest elected](#) Committee Person for the 48th District 12 Division in Philadelphia, and a Cities United Young Leader



## CASE STUDIES



**Oakland, CA (pop. 425,097)** established the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force through a City Council vote in July 2020 to better engage the community in the conversation regarding public safety. The Task Force was convened to recommend ways the city could rapidly reimagine and reconstruct public safety systems for Council consideration.

Membership from communities with relevant experience, including formerly incarcerated individuals, victims of violent crimes, communities impacted by police violence, immigrant communities, historically underrepresented populations, and those with expertise in health/public health, labor/union, and law enforcement operations/budget was prioritized.

In April 2021, the Task Force presented a draft set of recommendations to the City Council, and a month later, released the Oakland [Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report and Recommendations](#). The report details ways that the Task Force engaged with community members throughout the process, including focus groups, public education campaigns, town halls, listening sessions, and surveys. The task force made 152 recommendations in total.

Council President Bas and Councilmember Carroll Fife subsequently [authored a resolution](#) prioritizing recommendations from the Task Force to integrate in the city’s FY 2019-21 city budget, including significant expansion of citywide services and supports for trauma-informed mental health response, civilian traffic enforcement, violence interruption, gender-based violence response, restorative justice, youth programming and housing solutions.



**Champaign, IL (pop. 87,636)** last year “held five [community listening sessions](#), inviting members of the public to share their vision for the future of public safety in Champaign.” According to the City, “the listening sessions were the first step in a community engagement process to gather information from the public so it can be shared with the City Council as they make future public safety policy decisions to best address the needs, interests, and values of our community.”

## CASE STUDIES



**Austin TX (pop. 950,807)** City Council passed a budget in August 2020 to redefine public safety, and also created a City-Community Reimagining Public Safety Task Force to consider new ways to help and support the community in times of crisis. Over the course of seven months, the Task Force held listening sessions to broaden the engagement of residents. The Task Force, which included city staff, local leaders, activists and community members, presented a comprehensive set of [reform recommendations](#) to the City Council on April 20, 2021.

## REDEFINING THE SCOPE AND ROLES OF CITY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

In the analysis of public safety and where responsibility lies within local offices, many cities are restructuring government agencies and even creating totally new structures, offices, or positions. These entities provide new means through which to support residents and neighborhoods in order to equitably address community needs, address crime, and work toward community safety. In some cases, this may also mean reallocating resources and leveraging various funding sources to best reflect local priorities and needs.

Recent years have witnessed substantial growth in cities establishing Offices of Violence Prevention and Neighborhood Safety (OVP/ONS), especially since 2020. While structure, size, and budgets vary, these offices function to support community-driven safety efforts and programs. Creating and sustaining an OVP/ONS is a signal that a city is committed to uplifting and harnessing non-enforcement-based public safety work. Typically, such offices develop programming that acknowledges trauma and emphasizes strong community ties, increasing access to resources (educational, workforce, physical and mental health, etc.) and creating supportive, peaceful neighborhoods. In addition, as a growing number of cities adopt comprehensive plans to reduce and prevent violence, creating an OVP/ONS becomes an essential means to implement the plan.

## CASE STUDIES



**Richmond, California (pop. 109,884)** was among the first cities to develop and launch an office of this kind. The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) took shape in 2007 as the city experienced record homicide numbers. The city positioned ONS as an entity outside of the justice system, with no power to arrest, convict or prosecute, to build and maintain trust with those most likely to become victims or perpetrators of violence. They office utilizes street outreach and credible messengers to connect with those most likely to be engaged in gun violence and most resistant to change. Through city and community connections, alternative opportunities, support and care are presented to stakeholders. In its first ten years, a 71% reduction in gun violence causing injury or death was reported in the city.



**Milwaukee, WI (pop 594,548)** created the [Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention](#) in 2008, using a public health-based approach to reduce violence in the city through partnerships with government, non-profit, neighborhood, and faith-based groups. The office operates under the City's health department, with the goal of stopping violence before it starts. Community-wide prevention is the most effective, long-term solution to violence, and the Office of Violence Prevention engages a wide range of partners to facilitate a multidisciplinary, population-level approach to influence the social, behavioral, and environmental factors that contribute to violence. The OVP brings together agencies, experts, and community resources on efforts that reduce domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, human trafficking, gun violence, and more.

Prior to increases in 2020, Milwaukee had seen violent crime decrease in priority areas since the inception of the OVP. In 2021, the office requested additional funding through ARPA investment to better combat community gun violence.

## CASE STUDIES



**Albuquerque, NM (pop. 559,374)** The move by Mayor Tim Keller to create a Community Safety Department represents a somewhat different approach that still involves restructuring city functions. Mayor Keller recognized the need to provide a trauma informed, public health response, in order to provide more appropriate services to certain situations and relieve pressure on the city's police and fire departments. This recognition led to the creation in 2020 of a totally new city department: the [Albuquerque Community Safety \(ACS\)](#) Department. ACS fields responders who are unarmed and have training as social workers, behavioral health workers, clinicians, or peer-to-peer support workers. A strong community engagement effort pre-dated the creation of the office and resulted in a [detailed report](#). ACS is an official third branch of 9-1-1 in Albuquerque and the nation's first cabinet-level department of its kind. ACS responders have begun taking dispatches from 9-1-1 and the department is currently funded at \$7.7 million. "Police officers should be fighting violent crime, firefighters should be fighting fires, paramedics should be responding to medical emergencies," ACS Director Mariela Ruiz-Angel said, and "trained, unarmed professionals should be addressing calls on mental health, addiction, inebriation, and homelessness where there is not a threat to public safety."

## REORIENTING CITY BUDGET RESOURCES AND LEVERAGED FUNDS AROUND A NEW VISION

Creating a new framework for public safety requires embracing a broader definition of public safety and aligning and directing public spending to agencies and activities that support the well-being and safety of community members. No comprehensive version of such a realignment exists as yet, but there are several considerations and illustrative next-step examples for city leaders.

## LOCAL SAFETY BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

In 2018, state and local governments spent [\\$119 billion on police](#), with localities delivering 86% of this spending. Among local governments, cities typically spend the most on police as a share of their direct general expenditures (13% in 2017, the most recent year data is available), but counties and townships fund police at relatively similar shares of their budgets.<sup>1</sup> This section focuses on police spending because it accounts for the largest component of [state and local public safety spending](#) and is a function for which cities most often have direct responsibility, unlike jails, prisons, and courts. Still, it's worth noting that state and local governments spent \$81 billion on corrections and \$49 billion on courts in 2018.

Community-based public safety approaches, such as community violence intervention, typically receive funding at relatively modest levels relative to traditional justice agencies and approaches. For example, Colorado's Community Reentry program (reentry and rehabilitation) and the District of Columbia's Cure the Streets program (violence prevention) both [cost roughly \\$3 million annually](#) in their respective pre-pandemic budgets.

Overall, spending on policing is a function of historical factors and cost of living, not related to variation in actual changes in crime and safety. Police spending as a share of total state and local general expenditures has remained at [roughly 4% since 1977](#). That is, while the total amount spent on police has increased significantly, *the share* of state and local spending going to police has not changed despite huge variation in crime rates over that period. Indeed, there is no research-based "optimal" level of police presence.

Nearly all (97%) state and local spending on police went toward operational costs in 2018, with a majority (59%) dedicated to salary and wages. (Personnel costs are also the majority of spending for other traditional public safety programs.) Thus, any shift in public safety funding requires re-thinking what a local public safety workforce looks like and does. The structure for these investments matters, too. For example, public safety challenges – including but not limited to just crime rates – are dynamic, and some parts of the budget are responsive to that (e.g., spending on police overtime) but not others (e.g., grants to community violence interruption partners).

Investment in education, health, housing, and other social supports can have a huge impact on public safety and ensuring investment in these longer-term public safety strategies is just as critical as funding more immediate public safety priorities such as violence prevention. Cities need to take a holistic approach to public safety – and work across levels of government – to achieve these goals.

## STRATEGIES TO ADJUST LOCAL PUBLIC SAFETY BUDGETS

Strategies to adjust local public safety budgets vary because the circumstances, funding structures, and public safety needs of each community are unique. However, the most important consideration is to ensure that budget adjustment strategies are aligned with the desired outcomes. The following questions can help guide these conversations:

1. Are the changes focused on building new safety infrastructure, on reducing the scope or impact of policing and justice involvement, or both?
2. Are the changes temporary, or are they sustainable in an ongoing way?
3. Do the changes reflect residents' priorities (specifically Black, Latinx and Indigenous residents and those in neighborhoods of historic divestment)?
4. What is it possible to achieve now, and what is possible to make progress toward in the long run?
5. How can you assess whether the changes were successful in terms of maintaining safety and reducing harm associated with prior practice?

There is a wide range of approaches to budgeting for broader public safety goals, but they generally fall into two categories: 1) creating or harnessing **new revenue sources** to address urgent public safety issues, or 2) **shifting resources** from traditional to newer safety approaches. If your community is looking to change how city government seeks to promote resident safety, your government will need to consider something on this list.

Examples of using **new revenue sources** include:

- ◆ Using [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\)](#) funds to invest in public safety programs. The ARP provided cities with \$65.1 billion in direct financial support, with half delivered in May 2021 and the other half provided in May 2022. Cities can spend the funds through December 2024. Treasury permits cities to use these funds for a variety of uses related to the pandemic, including replacing lost revenue, and has specifically cited police and other public safety services as qualifying programs. The [mayor of Minneapolis](#) prioritized such programs within an \$11.5 million public safety portion of ARP funding that also includes investment in MPD capacity. See Section 3 for examples of cities that have pledged ARP funding to violence interruption.

- ◆ Using a **social impact bond (SIB)**. For example, Denver recently used SIBs as a vehicle to combine financing from private investors and public dollars from Medicaid and housing assistance programs to implement a Housing First approach to rapidly get people experiencing homelessness into housing. The [evaluation of the initiative](#) was funded by the city and county of Denver. Participants accessed and maintained housing, while use of shelter beds, police contact and jail stays and jail days all decreased. Given the evidence of benefit, other cities may wish to replicate this approach using direct budget investments.
- ◆ Using ballot initiatives, where available, to garner dedicated tax revenue for public safety purposes. [Several California cities](#) have successfully taken this step.

Examples of **shifting resources** include:

- ◆ Prioritizing new safety approaches by creating, expanding, and resourcing them using budget line items within government to coordinate and consistently fund safety and antiviolence efforts, outside of traditional justice agencies.
- ◆ Removing civilian functions from the police department and allocating budget savings from high officer turnover and hiring freezes to public safety initiatives.
- ◆ Redirecting budgets to non-police infrastructure.
- ◆ Re-allocating budget resources within police and traditional justice agencies to focus on activities that address serious public safety issues more effectively. For example, research indicates that clearance rates for serious violence can be improved through the dedication of enhanced investigative resources, along with improved management structures and oversight processes.



## CASE STUDIES



**The City of Los Angeles, CA (pop. 3.89 million)** [Gang Reduction and Youth Development \(GRYD\) Office](#), which was established in 2007, by 2020 had an annual budget of over \$30 million, with contracts funding 25 community-based service providers for delivery of a combination of prevention, intervention, and incident response in 23 areas across the city.



**The City of Seattle, WA (pop. 737,015)** removed civilian functions from the police department in November, 2020. These changes reduced the overall size of the Seattle Police Department and freed up funds to support [a city initiative to invest in projects that benefit communities of color](#), a portion of which will be allocated via [participatory budgeting](#).



**In Phoenix, AZ (pop. 1.62 million)**, the [Phoenix Union High School District took this approach in the summer of 2020](#) when it ended a contract with the Phoenix Police Department for school resource officers. The district is instead reallocating the \$1.2 million annual budget through a [participatory budgeting process that includes teacher, parent, and student voices](#) to determine how public safety resources will be spent.



**The Boston, MA (pop. 675,647)** Police Department undertook and rigorously evaluated an [effort](#) to enhance their investigative practices for homicides, successfully improving their clearance rate. They further found that gun homicides and nonfatal shootings shared many similar case characteristics, but the homicide cases received much more sustained investigative effort. This suggests that devoting equivalent resources to investigations of nonfatal shootings could increase the rates at which they are solved, thus enhancing public safety.

## LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND CONSTRAINTS ON MUNICIPAL ACTION

While local officials have a lot of discretion over their public safety budgets, the ability to exercise that discretion can be hampered by restrictions arising from state-level preemption of local changes, or constraints embedded in the definition of public safety agencies in places like city charters. Aligning public safety budgets with public safety effectiveness broadly defined requires the leeway to make those decisions.



## CASE STUDIES



The **Austin, TX (pop. 950,807)** City Council voted in August 2020 to [cut the police department budget by nearly one-third](#), or about \$150 million. Funds were meant to be reallocated to community-based services and resources. However, in June 2021, [Texas enacted legislation to penalize cities that reduce law enforcement budgets](#) by placing restrictions on sales and property tax increases, among other penalties, and requires cities with a population over 1 million to hold elections before reducing law enforcement budgets. As a result, efforts to reallocate police funds have halted and civilian functions initially transferred out of APD will be restored. Austin illustrates how state-level politics can interfere with efforts to reallocate funding from police budgets to other public safety resources and infrastructure. Local officials facing similar constraints may need to look to harness new revenue sources to avoid the immediate consequences of reducing police budgets.



**Ithaca, NY (pop. 30,569)** provides an example of what is possible when different levels of government align in support of reimagining public safety. The city and surrounding Tompkins County collaborated on an effort to rethink the city and county public safety approach, with budget adjustments to match, captured in their [Reimagining Public Safety report](#) which responds to the New York State Executive Order 203 *New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative*. The report, developed in collaboration with the Center for Policing Equity, is notable for the intergovernmental nature of the joint effort, which allowed for thinking across the public safety responsibilities at the municipal and county levels, the extent of community engagement, and the degree of transparency in sharing material on the development of the report, including budget components. Among other means of allowing community input into the process, the draft report and appended material we made readily accessible [online](#). While the implementation of the many components of the strategy outlined in the report are either pending or in very early stages, the work in Ithaca can serve as a model for undertaking a broad and collaborative rethinking approach to local public safety provision.

## PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Many communities have identified participatory budgeting as a useful model to facilitate community involvement and power in setting public safety budgeting priorities. Participatory budgeting is an innovative democratic approach through which residents engage in deliberation, negotiation, and monitoring to work with the government to identify their priorities, the way they believe key local problems should be solved, and how public funds should be allocated to solve them. In practice, a portion of public budgeting is made available for allocation via a participatory budgeting process, and residents propose options for using those resources, and vote among the candidate ideas.

## Additional Resources

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

[Community Engagement](#), Racial Equity Tools Online Resource Library  
[A Path Toward Community Engagement](#), Living Cities

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

[Authentic Youth Civic Engagement](#), National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families  
[Authentic Youth Engagement: Youth-Adult Partnerships](#), Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

### BUDGETING & FINANCE

[Outreach Toolkit, Facilitator Training and related documents](#),  
Participatory Budgeting Project  
[Shifting Police Budgets: Lessons Learned from Three Communities](#),  
Urban Institute  
[Investing Public Funds in Community Safety Strategies](#) and [How Can We Fund a Continuum of Care and Opportunity?](#), Urban Institute



# Deploy Appropriate Responses

## NLC RPS TF RECOMMENDATION THREE

### SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND THE USE OF CIVILIAN-LED AND COMMUNITY-BASED WELL-BEING AND PREVENTION-FOCUSED STRATEGIES

*Building upon the momentum established in numerous cities that have already begun to see promising results, municipal leaders should expand civilian response mechanisms for emergency and crisis response calls. This entails connecting people in need to the most relevant services and support, while reducing reliance on armed, uniformed response.*

*In parallel, and to meet the challenge of gun and domestic violence, city leaders should ramp up use of effective community-based strategies for violence prevention, intervention, and reduction. Across crisis response and violence reduction, local leaders will do well to rely on trauma-informed practices, utilize credible messengers, and adopt restorative justice mechanisms as alternatives for dispute and conflict resolution.*

#### A PATH TOWARD SAFE AND EQUITABLE CITIES

NLC Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report, October 2021



## OVERVIEW

Law enforcement has historically served as the primary response agency for calls for service and violence in cities, regardless of whether they are the best suited to do so in any situation. Additionally, victimization and violence often go unreported – a signal of the need for alternatives. These alternatives do exist and have spread to more cities in recent years.

[A recent study](#) of eight cities by the Center for American Progress and Law Enforcement Action Partnership found that 23% to 39% of 911 calls were low priority or non-urgent while only 18% to 34% represented life-threatening emergencies. With investment in response infrastructure and training, cities can divert many of those non-urgent calls to other methods of intervention that would better serve the parties involved. Trained professionals can address behavioral health concerns, homelessness, substance misuse, and other non-violent issues alongside or independent of the police department. Street outreach and mobile response teams can complement responses initiated through 911. Additionally, cities can strategically deploy violence interruption and intervention professionals – credible messengers – to serve as alternative responders.

*“In the absence of collaboration, we have always deployed, unfortunately for those seeking help, members of law enforcement to do what they have not been trained to do. We have all been rather complicit in sustaining a model that has not really addressed the root causes or what individuals need.”*

COUNCILMEMBER MONICA RODRIGUEZ, Los Angeles

A variety of local models of alternative response and prevention have proven to be effective. These models can result in:

- ◆ Appropriate and more racially equitable responses
- ◆ The diversion of individuals from criminal justice responses to appropriate treatment options
- ◆ Decreased levels of violence in neighborhoods
- ◆ Opportunities for community employment and involvement in safety efforts
- ◆ Connection to resources, support, and trauma-informed care

Models for alternative response are consistently evolving. While some have been studied and proven to be effective, others are just emerging but provide promising innovations. When planning for, evaluating, or enhancing these programs and initiatives, it is important to do so with the engagement of residents, specifically those most impacted, as outlined in Section 2.

Considerations to support strong community-based strategies include:

- ◆ Ensuring equity is centered in both development and implementation; without attention to equity, it is likely that strategies will primarily benefit city residents in neighborhoods that already receive a lot of services
- ◆ Developing or tapping into the continuum of care needed to connect individuals to the appropriate care or resource (i.e., once diverted, where do they go to access services?)
- ◆ Prioritizing alternatives to jail and emergency rooms
- ◆ Engagement of all relevant stakeholders (impacted residents, city agencies, local nonprofits, community-based organizations, mental health/substance use organizations, etc.)

There are several initiatives and models to consider when assessing the needs of your local community.

## Co-Responder Models

Co-responder models vary in practice, yet generally involve law enforcement and clinicians working together in response to calls for service involving a person experiencing a crisis. The model provides law enforcement with appropriate alternatives to arrest as well as additional options to respond to calls. More importantly, it creates a means by which to support and treat individuals in crisis, as opposed to criminalizing them. These models must be paired with a crisis continuum of care that promotes the development of and access to quality mental and substance use disorder treatment and services as opposed to arrest and incarceration. In addition, the continuum of care must include a specific focus on analysis of demographic data and a focus on racially equitable options for care.

Co-response models vary, and cities can implement them in a variety of ways. Whether by technology (telehealth paired with law enforcement), collaboration with peer support specialists or through multidisciplinary teams, co-response provides options to municipalities better suited to address the issue at hand rather than turning to arrest and incarceration over treatment and care.

### CASE STUDIES



**Colorado Springs, CO (pop. 464,871)** The Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) and the Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) collaborated with AspenPointe, a local behavioral health organization, to form a specially staffed mobile integrated mental health emergency response team. First deployed in December 2014, the [Community Response Team](#) (CRT) consists of a CSFD medical provider, a CSPD officer, and a licensed clinical behavioral health social worker. The medical provider performs medical clearance and screens for psychiatric admission eligibility, while the police officer ensures scene safety, and the social worker provides behavioral health assistance. This approach significantly reduced admissions to the emergency department by directing individuals in crisis to community resources, like the local Crisis Stabilization Unit or county detoxification facility. The local 911 call center helps by diverting qualified calls directly to the CRT, therefore decreasing the burden of these calls from the regular EMS, fire department, and police department dispatch.

## CASE STUDIES



**Indianapolis, IN (pop. 864,447)** The [Mobile Crisis Assistance Team](#) (MCAT) pilot program launched in August 2017, serving the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD)'s East district. Spearheaded by the city of Indianapolis, MCAT is a multiagency partnership program between IMPD, Indianapolis Emergency Medical Services (IEMS), and the Sandra Eskenazi Mental Health that aims to redirect time intensive, complicated, pre-arrest situations to dedicated, specially trained teams. The program was recently [evaluated](#) by the Public Policy Institute at Indiana University.



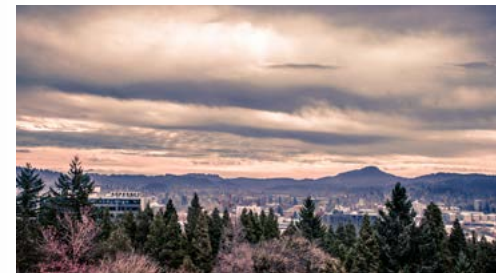
**Poulsbo, WA (pop. 10,602)** The Poulsbo Police Department partners with behavioral health navigators in the city's [Behavioral Health Crisis Outreach Program](#). The program initially began in the court system and expanded to a law enforcement partnership in 2017. It has since been extended to [multiple police departments](#) and is funded through the Kitsap County Treatment Sales Tax and participating cities. Navigators are hired as police department employees. Officers in participating departments request navigators when they identify people in need of behavioral health treatment or services. Navigators are available in crisis situations but are primarily called in after police contact occurs to follow up with individuals, families, and caregivers. Navigators work with individuals to proactively identify treatment options, overcome obstacles to accessing services, and improve communication between the criminal justice and behavioral health systems. They work in partnership with officers in the field and/or independently.

## Community Responder Models

Some cities have recognized that the involvement of uniformed, armed responders, even alongside clinicians, may reduce the effectiveness of responses to calls for service. Using trained, unarmed community responders provides a less intimidating and more people-centered approach to mental health crises, substance use disorders, homelessness, and more.

The Community Responder model takes alternative response a step further than co-response in its approach to crisis response. It removes the role of law enforcement in at least the initial interaction with those in need of support, treatment, and resources. A key factor a municipality should consider in the development and implementation of community response models involves the need to professionalize the role through adequate and equitable compensation and sustainable staffing mechanisms.

## CASE STUDIES



**Eugene, OR (pop. 176,654)** The [CAHOOTS](#) team (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) is dispatched through the same 911 system as the Eugene Police Department; the goal was to create an alternative to police response for people experiencing social service and behavioral health needs whenever possible. The team has steadily increased its scale of operations, responding to more than 24,000 calls in 2019 – roughly one-fifth of total 911 dispatches – and only called for police back-up in 1% of those calls. The model has also proven cost-effective. According to estimates from the Eugene Police Department, it costs roughly \$800 per call to dispatch the police. CAHOOTS has substantially cut back on the need for police response, saving an estimated \$8.5 million in taxpayer dollars every year. Notably, the team operates out of a Federally Qualified Health Center, White Bird Clinic, under contract to the city.

## CASE STUDIES

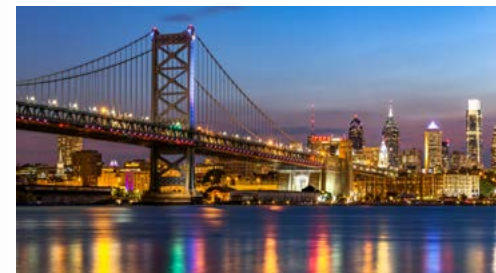


**Denver, CO (pop. 705,576)** “In the first six months of Denver’s [Support Team Assisted Response \(STAR\)](#) program, mental health clinicians and paramedics have responded to 748 low-level incidents, like trespassing and welfare checks. None of those responses required police assistance or led to arrests or jail time. More than two-thirds of contacts were with people who were unhoused, and STAR staff were able to help connect them with shelter, food aid, counseling, and medical services. ‘We have more than enough work with regards to violent crime, property crime and traffic safety,’ said Chief of Police Paul Pazen, ‘and if something like STAR or any other support system can lighten the load on mental health calls for service, substance abuse calls for service, and low-level issues, that frees up law enforcement to address crime issues.’” (Excerpt, [Coalition for Public Safety 2/12/21 newsletter](#))

## Changes to 911 Dispatch

In order to ensure matching a broader array of responder options to any given situation, changes to 911 dispatch are often needed. Such changes allow for the action to begin at the time of the call as opposed to after the wrong responder has already been dispatched, thus reducing the likelihood of a confrontational encounter taking place. In 2020, the Federal Communications Corporation [adopted rules](#) to establish 988 as a new, nationwide, easy-to-remember three-digit phone number for Americans in crisis to connect with suicide prevention and mental health crisis counselors. Cities can look ahead to the rollout of the 988 line that can also serve to direct calls for service to the proper responder.

## CASE STUDIES



**Philadelphia, PA (pop. 1.58 million)** [The new 911 Triage and Co-Responder Program](#) includes a behavioral health specialist from the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services (DBHIDS) who was embedded into Police Radio for the first time in 2020. It will assist Philadelphians calling 911 through two ways: a) formation of a “triage desk” located at 911 Radio Control and Dispatch offices to better identify and triage behavioral health crisis calls to 911 and from patrol officers; and b) a planned expansion of the co-responder program to provide a unique and tailored response to 911 calls and requests from patrol officers.



**Seattle, WA (pop. 737,015)** In May of 2021, the City Council of Seattle voted to move 140 positions from the Police Department’s 911 dispatch center to the [Community Safety and Communications Center \(CSCC\)](#). While this center is still under construction, the move represents a culture shift and a step toward appropriate crisis response mechanisms.

## CASE STUDIES



**Phoenix, AZ (pop. 1.63 million)** In an example of public-private partnership, dispatchers in the Phoenix Police Department's Communications Bureau may refer eligible 911 calls to the nonprofit Crisis Response Network (CRN). NLC Colleagues at the Vera Institute of Justice created a [thorough case study](#) of the program, including attention to Medicaid payment mechanisms.

*“We as cities are dealing with decades of disinvestment from our safety net, which leaves us in a tough situation to address the issues around violence and safety.”*

NIKKI FORTUNATO-BAS, City Council President, Oakland, CA

## Violence Interruption, Intervention, and the Use of Credible Messengers

Rather than utilizing city government, namely police, as the sole responder to violence, cities can embrace community violence interventions and support the advancement and development of these initiatives and programs. Often, these interventions are dependent on the deployment of credible messengers – people who are respected members of a community who work to aid and influence others in their communities. Utilizing and uplifting the lived expertise of those closest to a challenge or issue has proven to be effective in curbing violence in specific zip codes and neighborhoods.

## THE FEDERAL COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

**The Fund Peace Campaign**, a coalition of black- and brown-led organizations, activists, and community leaders, took collective action that led to the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to fund Community Violence Interventions via the American Jobs Plan. The Campaign has also been integral in pushing state and local officials to utilize American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds toward proven methods of gun violence reduction.

**The Biden-Harris Administration** is also convening and supporting a Community Violence Intervention (CVI) Collaborative of 15 jurisdictions that are committing to use a portion of their ARPA funding and other public funding to increase investment in their CVI infrastructure, including support for returning citizens/reentry.

[Related, campaign co-convenor Cities United released A Guide to Investing in Safe, Healthy, and Hopeful Communities.](#)





Community Violence Interventions operate with similar missions, but their methods vary. Cities can support existing local programs by providing additional funding, structural support and means by which to professionalize and uplift the important role credible messengers play locally.

There are several Community Violence Intervention models:

## STREET OUTREACH AND VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION

Street outreach models are centered in public health approaches to address violence. Highly trained credible messengers and street outreach workers utilize strong resident relationships and mediation tactics to address conflict in communities.

### CASE STUDIES



**New York, NY (pop 8.4 million)** [Cure Violence](#) is an evidence-informed public health approach that identifies and engages individuals most likely to be involved in gun violence – especially when at risk of engaging in retaliatory shootings – and deploys interventions aimed at curbing that behavior before it occurs, at the neighborhood (rather than city-wide) level. Interventions take place before escalation turns to gun violence by employing “violence interrupters” – typically individuals with lived experience and community ties – to quell street disputes and link potential shooters to case management and supportive services. In two New York City neighborhoods, a study by the Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice showed a positive association between the use of violence interrupters and steep declines in shootings, as well as increased confidence in the police. [Additionally, young men in neighborhoods with Cure Violence have shown increased trust in police.](#)

### CASE STUDIES



**Newark, NJ (pop. 282,529)** The Newark Community Street Team ([NCST](#)) draws upon an evidence-based, trauma-informed approach to violence reduction that has been implemented in several cities across the country. NCST services include a [Safe-Passage Program](#); Public Safety Roundtables; wellness evaluation and therapeutic counseling in partnership with the Department of Health and Community Wellness; support through the application process for the Victims Compensation Fund connecting survivors of crimes with support services; and employment and education referrals in partnership with Newark Jobs Connect. An [evaluation by UCLA’s](#) Social Justice Research Partnership found that NCST enabled individuals and families to experience a deep sense of safety in their neighborhoods.

## GROUP VIOLENCE INTERVENTION (GVI)

GVI programs require a strong coordination effort between communities, social service providers and law enforcement to combat violence. The interventions focus on those at highest risk of violence as identified by law enforcement. A network of collaborative partners provides intervention efforts to support in connecting individuals to services to avoid further engagement in violence. GVI generally involves a strong message delivered through a face-to-face call-in with all parties – that if violence continues, harsh penalties will be imposed.

### CASE STUDIES



**Louisville, KY (pop. 615,924)** Launched in 2020 by Mayor Greg Fisher alongside community leaders, police, members of the city’s business and non-profit community, [Louisville’s GVI program](#) focuses on the small number of people at extremely high risk for violent victimization *and* offending. Thus far, the work has involved local analysis that includes looking into homicide data while also auditing groups known to engage in violence. As the work moves toward implementation, the next steps will be direct engagement with these groups.



**Boston, MA (pop. 675,647)** [Operation Ceasefire](#) launched in 1996 as a citywide strategy to address juvenile and gang violence, particularly gun violence. Predating the GVI terminology, Operation Ceasefire was the first program of its kind and was responsible for a 63% reduction in youth homicide victimization.

“It is easy for people to go back to the notion that more police equal safety. But we need to get at prevention”

COUNCILMEMBER JANESE LEWIS-GEORGE, Washington, DC

## HOSPITAL-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Hospital-Based interventions focus their initial efforts within trauma centers and emergency rooms. When someone comes in with a violent injury, highly trained staff members engage with victims and their families and friends to avoid retaliation and further violence.

### CASE STUDIES



**Hackensack, NJ (pop. 43,846)** [Project HEAL: Help, Empower, and Lead](#) is a community-based program dedicated to supporting people affected by violence. The effort is collaborative and includes a partnership with the Jersey Shore University Medical Center and community groups. When individuals are seen in the emergency room for a violent injury and have become medically stable, a Violence Intervention Specialist meets with them to provide support, guidance, and connections to resources. Statistics show that those who are seen in hospitals for violence are likely to be seen again for another injury or even death; the Project HEAL team recognizes that healing from violence often requires things like counseling, educational opportunities, healthcare coordination and navigation, housing supports and relocation services, job training and placement, patient advocacy, safety planning, and more.



**Philadelphia, PA (pop. 1.58 million)** The [Violence Intervention Program](#) (VIP) at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia was established in 2012. Prior to VIP, many youths who came to the hospital for violent injury were discharged back into the community only to be re-admitted with similar violent injuries. The VIP program is comprised of a team that helps the youth, and their families navigate complex systems of care to meet their needs within the communities in which they live. Eighty percent of the goals created in collaboration with youth and their families are resolved through referrals, resources, education, and advocacy provided by VIP.

## YOUNG ADULT ENGAGEMENT, SUPPORT, AND VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION

**Chelsea, MA (pop. 40,787) and Baltimore, MD (pop. 585,708)** Since its founding in 1988 in Chelsea, MA, Roca Inc. has focused on the mission to disrupt cycles of incarceration, poverty, and violence in young adults traditionally difficult to reach. Roca recognizes that 16- to 24-year-olds who have experienced extensive trauma are the primary victims of urban violence.

Trust with young adults is built over four years via credible messengers, with an intervention model that gives young people the tools to support to change the trajectory of their lives. The model is comprised by four focus areas: Create Safety and Stability; Teach Life-Saving Skills; Practice Skills, Relapse, and Repeat; and Engage Institutions and Systems.

Roca has seen immense success due to the intentional intervention model and strong reputation in the community as a safe haven for young adults. Built on the philosophy of relentless outreach, Roca continues to connect to young adults and provide services even after graduating from the model. While over **85% of young men who come to Roca** have a violent record, four out of five stop engaging in crime after engaging with the program. Additionally, 95% of young men who complete the first two years of the ROCA program were not re-incarcerated. Roca has recently expanded to include similar work in Baltimore.

## MAYORAL COMMITMENTS TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTIONS VIA THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

**Baton Rouge, LA (pop. 224,149)** Mayor-President Sharon Weston-Broome recognized a need to address local violence and **utilized CARES act funding** to provide mentorship opportunities, connect people to public benefits and improve youth program availability, all in attempt to increase safety in her city. Additionally, Baton Rouge – and specifically their police chief, Murphy Paul – is one of the communities recognized by the Biden administration for using some of the **ARP funding** for community violence intervention.

**St Louis, MO (pop. 301,578)** Mayor Tishaura O. Jones committed **\$11.5 million** to improve public safety through increased funding for violence intervention programs and youth programming and jobs to keep youth engaged and safe. This is a part of a larger local initiative to reimagine public safety. St. Louis is also working alongside the Biden-Harris Administration in the use of community interventions to combat gun violence.

“The process of developing and strengthening credible messengers is about not only an investment in them, their training and importance, but about a shift from the current reliance on the public safety paradigm into an investment and reliance on community to play its rightful role in peace making.”

CLINTON LACEY, President and CEO, CM3  
(The Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement)





## Reentry

Providing supports at the point of reentry from jail and prison for “returning citizens,” and thus building structures that reduce recidivism, remain important city responsibilities in the public safety realm. Some municipalities have established reentry offices, which a recent NLC landscape scan show fulfilling roles along a continuum: providing direct services, providing referral services, providing a combination of direct and referral services, and serving as a coordinating hub. In addition to any city services and roles, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, and institutions of higher education often serve as go-to providers of reentry supports – and constitute potential or existing partners for cities.

Building upon its landscape scan, the recent NLC Institute for Youth, Education and Families report [The Challenge & Promise of Reentry in Municipalities](#) lays out several case studies of promising city programs and outlines several areas of opportunity for city leaders to pursue. These include:

- ◆ Improving expungement and other record-sealing efforts;
- ◆ Connecting returning citizens to university-based credentialing and professional development programs;
- ◆ Focusing efforts to a greater degree on young adults ages 18-25;
- ◆ Closing service gaps and implementing measures to improve strategic coordination of the nonprofit-led efforts that dominate the field. Cities can take advantage of the infrastructure and network created by the organizations currently working on reentry and submit joint applications for federal funding that emphasize coordinating or other roles;
- ◆ Including returning citizens in planning and implementation of services and coordinating efforts;
- ◆ Creating more cross-program and cross-agency collaboration with corrections, probation offices, sheriffs, jails, and the courts to ensure that reentry supports begin “behind the wall” and to minimize re-arrest and re-incarceration, particularly for technical and process violations; and
- ◆ Promoting collaboration with business leaders and among city agencies, particularly for key reentry needs such as housing, employment, and physical and mental health care.



In addition, the report points out opportunities for city leaders to spark additional inquiry into what works in reentry, to develop better knowledge of programs and practices worth replicating across the field.

### CASE STUDIES



**New Orleans, LA (pop. 383,997)** In response to Louisiana’s reinvestment reforms, which led to many returning citizens coming home to the city, New Orleans created a triage unit within the local probation office specifically meant to connect these residents to resources. While not originally meant to be a long-term investment, the triage center led to the creation of the Reentry Task Force, which allows the city to serve as an umbrella agency for over 60 nonprofit and city agencies.

Cities such as [Philadelphia](#), [Washington, DC](#), [New York City](#) and more, have prioritized reentry services within their mayoral initiatives.

## Additional Resources

### CO-RESPONDERS, COMMUNITY RESPONDERS, 911 DISPATCH

[\*Addressing Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness – Briefs and Case Studies\*](#), National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families and Arnold Ventures

[\*The Community Responder Model\*](#), Center for American Promise and Law Enforcement Action Partnership

[\*Field Notes: Law Enforcement – Developing and Implementing Your Co-Responder Program\*](#), Council of State Governments Justice Center

[\*Responding to Individuals in Behavioral Health Crisis via Co-Responder Models\*](#), National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families and Policy Research, Inc.

[\*Transform911\*](#), The University of Chicago Health Lab

### VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

[\*Group Violence Intervention Resources\*](#), National Network for Safe Communities

[\*Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Resources\*](#), The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention

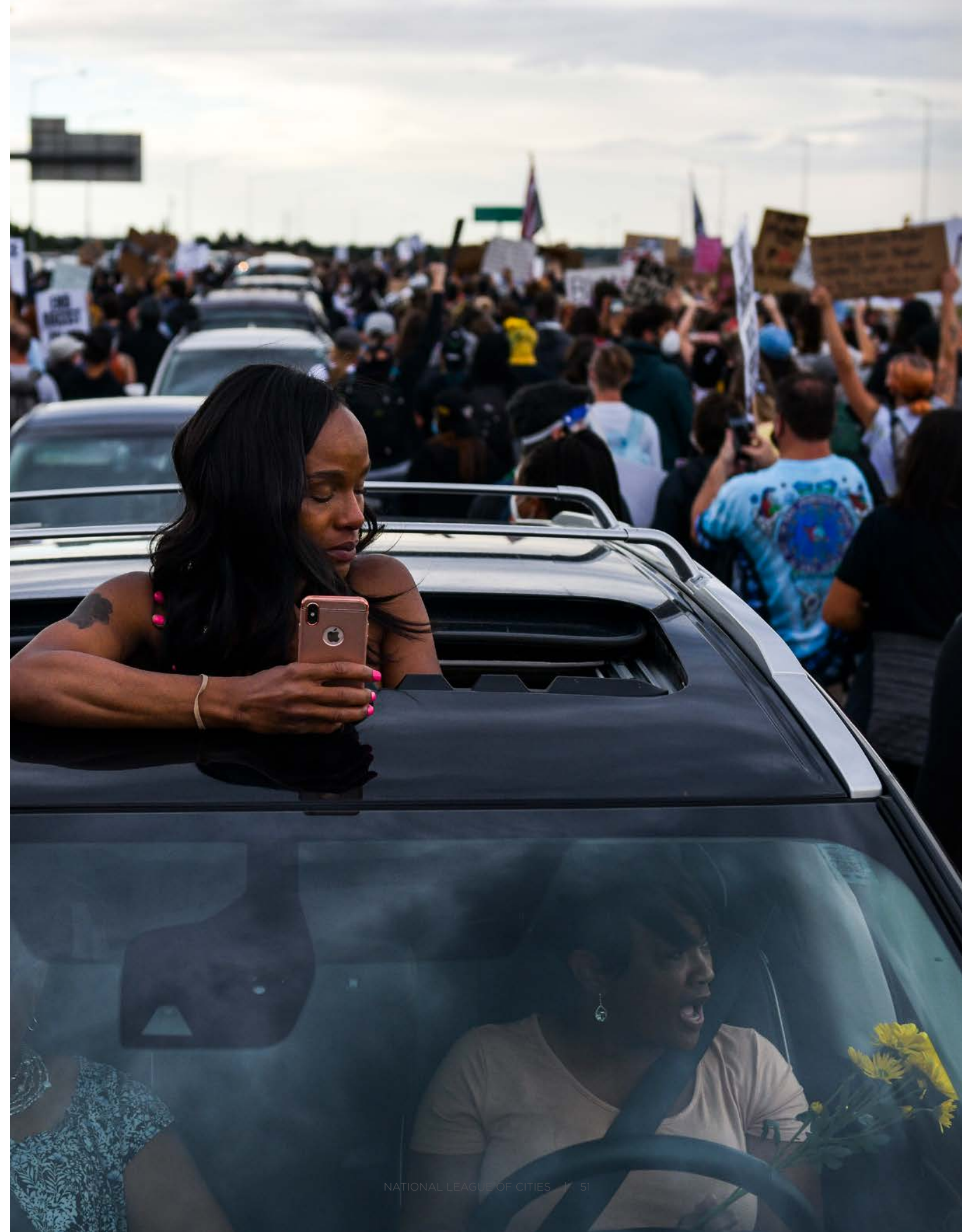
[\*The Credible Messenger Justice Center\*](#)

[\*The Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement – CM3\*](#)

### REENTRY

[\*Transition from Jail to Community Initiative Resources\*](#), National Institute of Corrections/Urban Institute

[\*The Challenge & Promise of Reentry in Municipalities\*](#)  
National League of Cities



# Embrace Accountability

## NLC RPS TF RECOMMENDATION 4

### **EMBRACE AND ENSURE FULL AND TRANSPARENT OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT IN ITS ROLE AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY**

*To increase trust and improve the relationship between all members of the community and local law enforcement, city leaders must address several key areas that fulfill their ultimate responsibility for public safety and well-being. This involves updating the structures for setting, publicizing, and evaluating progress of public safety and the related mechanisms for allocating resources to achieve outlined goals.*

*Exercising oversight to achieve accountability means evaluating and re-formulating investigative, standard-setting, and disciplinary processes within the executive branch, city council, and independent civilian review bodies where such exist. It also means working with labor unions to bring the next round of contracts reached through collective bargaining into conformance with accountability-driven oversight and updated public safety and well-being goals.*

#### **A PATH TOWARD SAFE AND EQUITABLE CITIES**

NLC Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report, October 2021

## OVERVIEW

In addition to their overriding responsibility to provide for public safety and well-being, local governments and elected officials are responsible for holding municipal employees with policing powers accountable for providing “equal protection under the law” – and for creating mechanisms to reinforce and demonstrate that commitment. In practice, local elected officials have frequently relegated these responsibilities to law enforcement executives and internal law enforcement procedures. Over time, city residents and leaders have consistently pointed out the flaws and shortcomings of existing accountability mechanisms and recommended a complete overhaul, particularly since 2020.

Incidents of misconduct, particularly those that involve Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and residents in neighborhoods of historic divestment, along with inadequate accountability mechanisms, raise questions about unequal protection of the law, and significantly erode the trust residents put in municipal government and law enforcement. Increased accountability and oversight of law enforcement improves police legitimacy, which can help to reduce crime by increasing the likelihood community members cooperate with police in addressing crime. It can also improve residents’ confidence in city government overall, given that police often serve as the most visible representatives of government in many neighborhoods.

*“Just buying body cameras does not increase accountability, because often times it just records officers’ bad behavior and does not actually change it. Systems have to be put in place in the police department to have various levels of review and accountability. Body cameras are a part of that, but far from the answer.”*

LEE DOUGLAS, Chief of Police, Newark, NJ

In this context, leadership by municipal elected officials to reimagine public safety involves taking full responsibility for accountability and oversight, particularly regarding local law enforcement agencies. A number of municipalities of all sizes around the country have taken important steps toward this goal. To ensure values such as transparency, to demonstrate accountability in action, and to build or rebuild trust between leaders and residents, many more local government leaders should consider acting in the following four areas:

**Standards:** Set standards for effective, non-biased operations.

**Data:** Provide ready access to racially disaggregated data regarding progress toward public safety goals, as well as infractions, incidents, and civilian complaints.

**Accountability:** Ensure accountability-driven oversight in conformance with updated public safety and well-being goals, including in the next and future rounds of collective bargaining agreements.

**Civilian Oversight:** Establish or further empower civilian-led oversight mechanisms with the authority to investigate and follow up on complaints of misconduct as well as policy and practice violations.

In addition to municipal officials themselves – and beyond the scope of this Toolkit – four other governmental entities also have roles to play in accountability, particularly with regard to cases of excessive use of force and abuse of power as well as in normal operations: public safety and law enforcement officers themselves; public safety executives and supervisors; state officials; and federal officials. (More on state policy and federal resources below). Municipal officials will need to coordinate closely with these groups in moving ahead with a Reimagining Public Safety agenda. Finally, before implementing new oversight and accountability mechanisms, municipal leaders should engage a broad array of community stakeholders, making a particular effort to engage residents who have the most contact with law enforcement. (See Section 2 of this Toolkit for more information about resident engagement).

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP THE PUBLIC SAFE

The federalist system of government embodied in the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives the states the power of policing to establish and enforce laws protecting the public's welfare, safety, and health. As a political subdivision of a state, municipalities have varying degrees of authority to govern policing services.

Local governments are responsible for establishing and enforcing laws to protect, serve, and ensure the safety of their residents. The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution require the states and local governments to provide due process and equal protection, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, when enforcing their laws.

## CITY POLICY ACTION ON ACCOUNTABILITY IN 2020

To act upon the need for greater accountability, numerous cities have recently passed or updated a wide range of ordinances and procedures. Key city legislative and regulatory actions have focused on police use of force and weapons; reporting and review of use of force incidents and officer misconduct complaints; officer hiring, recruitment, and training; and use of body camera footage. See the Appendix to this section for a list of sample actions, by category.





## Four Areas for City Action

### SET STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE, NON-BIASED OPERATIONS

Setting standards for effective public safety operations free of bias involves several components. (See also Section 1 recommendations on setting and measuring goals and the Recommendation Two section on resident engagement). Policy options for city leaders to consider include:

- ◆ Mandate adherence to nationwide standards for policies and training, for instance by requiring accreditation through a body such as [The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies \(CALEA\)](#). CALEA has [operated since 1979](#) as a joint credentialing authority of law enforcement's major executive associations.
- ◆ Establish standards and policies confirming law enforcement's commitment to unbiased policing, processes for police-community racial reconciliation, and implementing effective racial bias training.
- ◆ Set goals for diversity in recruitment and hiring.

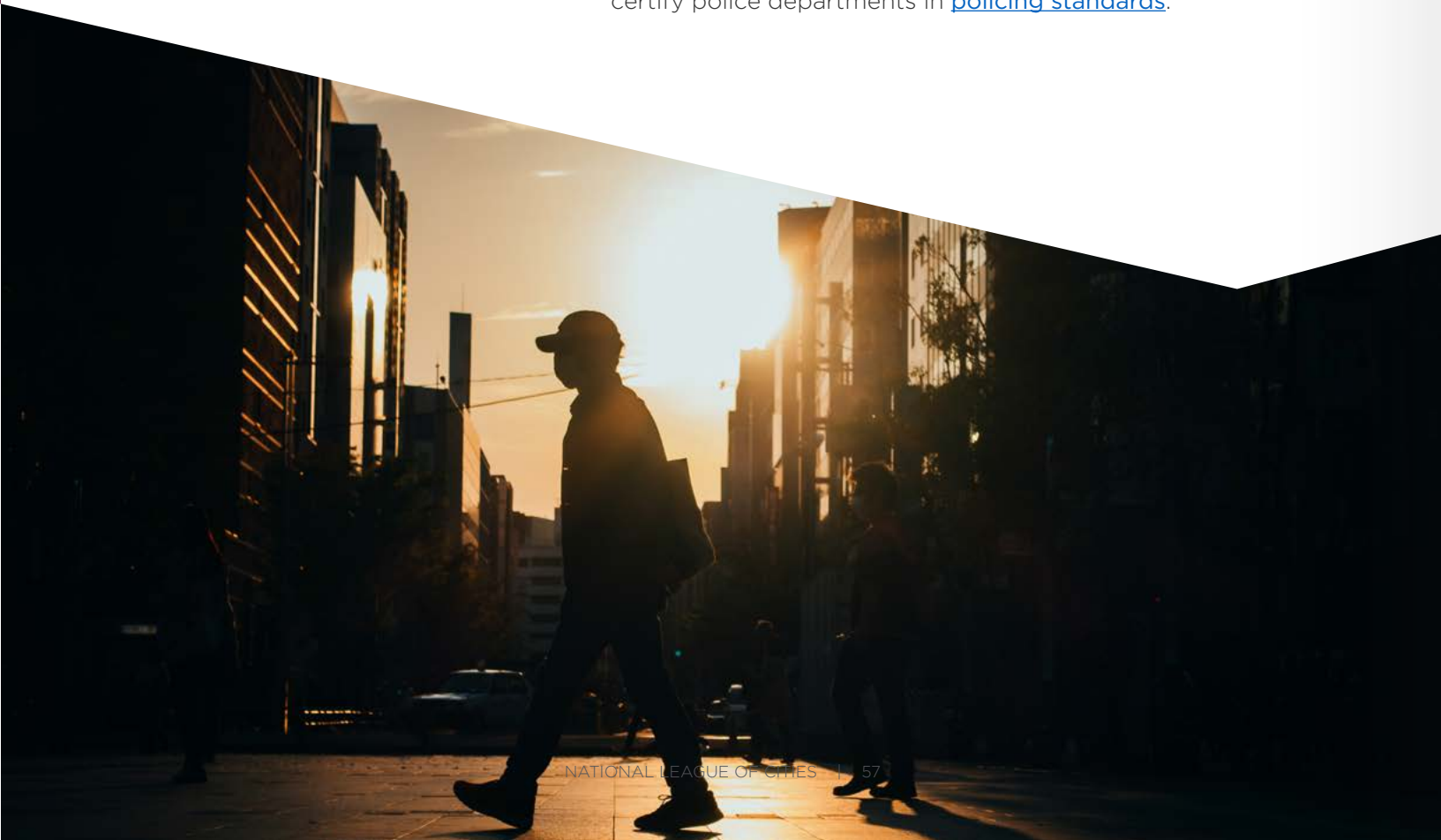
### CASE STUDIES



**Fresno, CA (pop. 537,100)** Fresno City College led the creation of a [Police Academy Task Force](#) in 2020. This body will recommend curriculum changes concentrating more on community policing, anti-racism, and implicit bias. Currently, cadets go through 1,030 hours of training before graduating from the academy. Of those hours, 664 are mandated from the state Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) program. The rest are Fresno City College requirements. The Task Force could lead to additional hours of training or improved/modified curriculum for the current hours.



**Youngstown, OH (pop. 64,783)** The Youngstown Police Department [has written a new policy](#) to emphasize the Youngstown Police Department's commitment to fair and bias-free treatment of all people. The department already had multiple rules that prohibited biased policing, but the new policy takes that another step. The effort is part of the certification process through the Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board, which works in partnership with the Ohio Department of Public Safety to certify police departments in [policing standards](#).



## THE COPS OFFICE AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

The US Department of Justice Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office maintains the Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) to help local law enforcement agencies address concerns. CRI-TAC provides agencies with expert and peer advice on a host of issues, including training, use of force, recruitment and retention, officer safety and wellness, analysis, de-escalation, crises intervention and violent crime reduction. CRI-TAC is a federally funded program offered at no-cost to the law enforcement agency.

## PROVIDE READY ACCESS TO RACIALLY DISAGGREGATED DATA

In this digital age – and to maximize government transparency, racial equity, and opportunities for civic engagement – it's a high priority to make public safety data readily available for residents. To help identify possible profiling or bias in the pattern of enforcement and conduct, cities need to such data available disaggregated by demographics (race, gender, and ethnicity) as well as by neighborhood or precinct. In addition to enforcement data, local governments should also look to disaggregate all data about interactions with the public, including interactions with persons experiencing homelessness or behavioral health crises, to understand the challenges communities face as well as how interactions resolve. More than 140 agencies participate in the [Police Data Initiative of the National Police Foundation](#), providing a substantial experience base with open data.

Key areas for city action include:

- ◆ Establishing accessible, regularly updated “go to” sources for data online, such as dashboards;
- ◆ Displaying disaggregated data relevant to the ways that residents commonly interact with law enforcement and public safety programs, such as traffic stops, citations, arrests, behavioral health incidents, substance use, truancy, calls for service, and response times on calls for service; and
- ◆ Displaying data regarding use of force incidents and civilian complaints.

### CASE STUDY



**Columbus, OH (pop. 878,553)** In 2021, the City of Columbus invited the Department of Justice to review the Columbus Division of Police and provide assistance. “This is an important day for the future of policing in Columbus,” said Mayor Andrew J. Ginther in announcing the invitation. “This is not about one particular officer, policy, or incident; rather, this is about reforming the entire institution of policing in Columbus. I am confident in the partnership and the additional tools the DOJ’s COPS Office will bring to our city.”

### CASE STUDY



**Chattanooga, TN (pop. 179,690)** The Chattanooga police department has established a mechanism to track crimes and arrests by creating a [Policing and Racial Equity Dashboard](#). The dashboard displays closed investigations, as well as citations, arrests, use of force, and citizen complaints by race from the last two and a half years. The dashboard shows some disparities. Black, indigenous, and other people of color in Chattanooga have a higher probability of being arrested than white residents, but the number of non-arrest citations issued is almost proportionate to the population.



## ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY-DRIVEN OVERSIGHT – INCLUDING IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS

In many cities, collective bargaining agreements with public safety employees set significant parameters on matters of accountability, oversight, and transparency. For city leaders, approaching the next and future rounds of collective bargaining with the intent to reimagine public safety accountability can result in a shift in those parameters as well as procedures and structures. Areas for attention include:

- ◆ Shifting the locus of responsibility for discipline and termination, to ensure that this falls squarely within the scope of city administration. For instance, Washington, DC (pop. 692,683) recently passed an ordinance that requires all matters on the discipline of sworn law enforcement personnel to be retained by management and not be negotiable in collective bargaining agreements.
- ◆ Reconfiguring internal procedures for handling misconduct. As an example, in a July 2020 move that affected nearly 10% of the city's sworn officers, the Chicago, IL (pop. 2.7 million) City Council approved changes to police supervisors' contracts that would allow anonymous misconduct allegations against high-ranking police officials.

“There are a lot of police unions that are listening and want to be on the right side of history. They cannot continue to resist every single call for accountability.”

RON DELORD, Labor Consultant

## ESTABLISH OR FURTHER EMPOWER CIVILIAN-LED OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

In addition to attending to procedures and practices for handling issues and complaints within city government agencies and departments, enlisting residents for direct roles in oversight represents an important option for cities. Two complementary structural options are worth considering:

### A NEW OR REPURPOSED OFFICE OF POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY.

#### CASE STUDIES



**Seattle, WA (pop. 753,675)** The [Office of Police Accountability](#) has authority over allegations of misconduct involving Seattle Police Department (SPD) employees relating to SPD policy and federal, state, and local law. OPA investigates complaints and recommends findings to the Chief of Police. OPA is led by a civilian director and supervisors, while its investigations are carried out by a mix of SPD sergeants and civilian investigators.



**Grand Rapids, MI (pop. 198,401)** The [Office of Oversight and Public Accountability](#), created in August 2019, serves as the liaison between public safety departments and the community. OPA works to create mutual trust and respect between public safety departments and the community they serve.

## CASE STUDIES



**Chicago, IL (pop. 2.7 million)** The Chicago City Council, through an ordinance, established the [Civilian Office of Police Accountability \(COPA\)](#) to replace the Independent Police Review Authority as the civilian oversight agency of the Chicago Police Department. The mission of COPA is to:

- ◆ provide a just and efficient means to fairly and timely conduct investigations within its jurisdiction;
- ◆ determine whether allegations of police misconduct are well-founded;
- ◆ identify and address patterns of police misconduct; and
- ◆ make policy recommendations to improve the Chicago Police Department, thereby reducing incidents of police misconduct.

As additional examples to consider, the cities of [Boston](#), [Houston](#), and [Boise](#) have also established Offices of Police Accountability. Rochester, NY, recently approved the establishment of a [Police Accountability Board](#).

## FULLY INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT BODIES, SUCH AS CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARDS

The key national membership organization in this field describes four basic models: review-focused; investigation-focused; auditor/monitor focused; and hybrid.

## CASE STUDIES



**New Orleans, LA (pop. 388,424)** The Civilian Review Board in New Orleans operates in conjunction with the [Office of the Independent Police Monitor \(OIPM\)](#), which is an independent, civilian police oversight agency created in August of 2009. A peer review of OIPM by the Police Assessment Resource Center in 2016 found promise in the work of the agency. Additionally, in 2019 a review panel provided a strong rating and suggested additional funding.



**Cedar Rapids, IA (pop. 132,301)** The City of Cedar Rapids worked closely with Advocates for Social Justice to develop recommendations that were then folded into an ordinance. The recently [appointed Citizen Review Board](#) has the ability to review data, make recommendations, and link to the community and other reform-oriented authorities.



**Madison, WI (pop. 254,977)** [Madison](#) recently [implemented a civilian oversight model](#) that allows for increased community involvement and additional elements designed to make the model more proactive. This includes the addition of an [independent monitor](#) with the authority to review and analyze data as well as make policy recommendations. The monitor can request further review of misconduct investigations or initiate its own independent investigation.





## CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT AT ITS BEST

The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) recommends that independent oversight bodies have several characteristics. They should be proactive, independent, community-driven, empowered with subpoena power and final decision-making authority for discipline, transparent, financially, and operationally sound, adaptable, and individualized to local goals. According to NACOLE, localities should provide these bodies with subpoena power to compel the production of documents and witnesses, allowing them to investigate, gather, analyze, and review information, produce public reports, and make informed recommendations related to policing issues of significant public interest. Localities should also be able to empower these bodies to make the final decisions on disciplining officers, adjudicating use of force, recruiting practices, and creating policies.

“Civilian oversight gives a voice to community members, bringing transparency to a traditionally opaque process, and works to build trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.”

SUSAN HUTSON, Board President, The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement

## The State Legislative Context for Accountability and Oversight

In parallel with extensive accountability actions at the city level, state legislatures took a proactive role in public safety accountability and oversight during legislative sessions in 2020 and 2021. Indeed, since May 2020, 47 states have passed 348 laws on policing reform. The National Council of State Legislatures' (NCSL) [policing database](#) has tracked more than 3,000 bills in state legislatures across the nation on topics ranging from use of force, mandatory body cameras, training, investigations and discipline, police officer well-being, and policing alternatives.

States enacted laws that addressed use-of-force standards, legal duties and liabilities of law enforcement officers, certification requirements of law enforcement officers and agencies, oversight, use-of-force investigation, qualified immunity, decertification of officers, collective bargaining, training requirements, use of force data collections requirements, traffic stop data collections, and changes to police bill of rights laws. Several states, including Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Mexico, have banned or limited qualified immunity as part of their police reforms. In New Mexico, Rep. Georgene Louis (D) led the effort to pass the [New Mexico Civil Rights Act](#), which bans qualified immunity and allows citizens to sue in state court over civil rights violations.

Importantly, such laws at minimum set a framework, and at times require or proscribe accountability actions by cities – including the scope of city-initiated offices of accountability and oversight. City leaders need a mechanism to stay current on the implications of state statutes for local accountability and oversight, and to flag times to get involved in advocacy to ensure alignment between state requirements and local desires. Going forward, the legislative tracking and advocacy provided by the 49 state municipal leagues provides an essential resource for cities.

## ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE THE IMPACT OF POTENTIAL REFORMS

The Council on Criminal Justice Task Force on Policing, in partnership with the Crime Lab at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy, has to date conducted 16 assessments of proposed policing reforms. Each policy assessment provides an overview of the state and extent of the evidence on each topic and the expected impact of each reform on public safety, misuse of force, police-community relations, racial disparities, and officer safety.



## Additional Resources

[\*Accountable Now Use of Force Database\*](#), The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

[\*American Rescue Plan Act Spending Database - Access to Justice\*](#), National Conference of State Legislatures

[\*Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics \(ICAT\) Training Guide\*](#), Police Executive Research Forum

[\*Public Safety Blueprint for Change\*](#), AFL-CIO Task Force on Racial Justice

[\*The Path to Progress: Five Priorities for Police Reform\*](#), Council on Criminal Justice Task Force on Policing.

[\*Standards of Conduct\*](#), International Association of Chiefs of Police Policy Center

[\*Neighborhood-Driven Policing Revisited\*](#), National Police Foundation

# Seek Guidance and Support

## NLC RPS TF RECOMMENDATION FIVE

### SEEK GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FROM PEERS AND EXPERTS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF NLC

*Beginning and pursuing a local effort to transform a city's approach to achieving public safety represents a daunting and often thankless task for any leader. This is especially true as cities also seek to recover and rebuild from the pandemic and address multiple challenges requiring elected officials' attention.*

*As part of the local decision-making process, the health and well-being of local elected leaders should also be prioritized. NLC has a strong commitment to protecting the well-being of city leaders, in part through providing structured and informal connections to peers and quick access to policy expertise and the most promising practices.*

*In this light, city leaders undertaking the steps described in the first four recommendations can count on NLC, as well as partners such as [Vera Institute of Justice](#), [Urban Institute](#), [Cities United](#) and [John Jay College of Criminal Justice](#) for support.*

#### **A Path Toward Safe and Equitable Cities**

NLC Reimagining Public Safety Task Force Report, October 2021



## OVERVIEW

Elected officials face many challenges and opportunities in their roles every day. The year 2020 brought on the unexpected additional challenge of a global pandemic, alongside reinvigorated demands to transform systems of public safety. The weight of these compounding issues rests heavily on local leaders and their communities. For elected officials in municipalities to serve their constituents most effectively, they themselves must practice [self-care as well as seeking out resources and support for the work ahead](#). Leaders can take strength from the knowledge that they are not alone. The conversations of the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force reinforced the need for elected officials to have access to peer and expert support, particularly in efforts to make transformational change with the full participation of communities of color and neighborhoods of historic divestment. The work is difficult and complex, and leaders have access to a wide range of support and information to do it well.

The National League of Cities' centers, constituency groups, technical assistance projects, and federal advocacy efforts provide many and varied spaces for local elected officials and their teams to find resources, camaraderie, and support. In particular, the [Justice Initiatives team](#) within the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, and the [Public Safety and Crime Prevention Federal Advocacy Committee](#) provide ongoing venues for learning and discussion. Building upon the 2021 Task Force Recommendations and Toolkit, NLC will continue to provide resources on its [Reimagining Public Safety web page](#).

# Reimagining Public Safety Resources Available from Key Partners

In order to facilitate city leaders' access to thought leadership and additional resources, NLC recruited several partner organizations to inform the Task Force process – and recommends all four of those organizations as expert sources of support and guidance going forward. Each has areas of specialization and substantial resources for cities to consult; these partners may also make technical assistance available to cohorts of cities or generate new tools and resources. This section outlines each organization and some of its capacity to support cities and towns.

**Cities United (CU)** aims to build and support safe, healthy and hopeful communities for young Black men and boys and their families. CU supports a national network of mayors who have committed to reducing the epidemic of homicide and shootings among young Black men and boys between the ages of 14 and 24 by 50%. In addition, CU consistently uplifts, centers, and amplifies the voices of young leaders and community organizations and activists.

CU supports its national network through [dynamic programming](#) that includes:

- ◆ Roadmap Academy – a week-long immersion for teams from partner cities to support building out their comprehensive public safety roadmap;
- ◆ [Youth Leader Fellowship](#) – an intensive six-month experience designed for 18-24-year-old young leaders in CU partner cities; and
- ◆ [Reimagining Peace Challenge](#) – a project focused on increasing the number of cities implementing community homicide and shooting response strategies.

Several CU resources provide relevant content and context for local leaders:

- ◆ [Reimagining Public Safety: Moving to Safe, Healthy & Hopeful Communities](#) (2020)
- ◆ [A Strategic Resource for Mayors on Disrupting Community Violence and Preventing Homicides](#) (2018)
- ◆ [Roadmap to Safe, Healthy & Hopeful Communities](#) (2017)
- ◆ [A Strategic Resource for Mayors on Police-Involved Shootings & In-Custody Deaths](#) (2017)
- ◆ [Interventions for Reducing Violence and its Consequences for Young Black Males in America](#) (2017)

**John Jay College of Criminal Justice:** John Jay is a majority-minority institution of higher education that reflects the diversity of voices that must be heard in reimagining public safety. John Jay educates the future leaders for justice, safety, and peace – whether they go on to run advocacy campaigns, wear a uniform, serve their communities, conduct research to evaluate policy or uncover bias, or all of these. As a research institution, John Jay has an internationally recognized reputation and decades of experience working with law enforcement to design, implement, evaluate, and assess criminal justice reforms. Under the leadership of President Karol Mason, who brings a track record from the Justice Department of designing and implementing initiatives to build community trust with law enforcement, John Jay has continued to expand longstanding institutional partnerships with advocates, community leaders, and police chiefs across the country. John Jay has a number of centers and projects that can support municipal leaders in their work to re-imagine public safety:

- ◆ [The Future of Public Safety Report](#)
- ◆ [National Network for Safe Communities](#)
- ◆ [Institute for Justice and Opportunity](#)
- ◆ [Data Collaborative for Justice](#)
- ◆ [From Punishment to Public Health](#)

**Urban Institute:** The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization whose mission is to open minds, shape decisions and help craft solutions through economic and social policy research. Much of Urban's research and policy work specific to public safety takes place through the [Justice Policy Center](#), which promotes justice, dignity and well-being for all through research, evaluation and policy analysis. The Institute's [State and Local Finance Initiative](#) conducts complementary inquiry into public safety finance and budgeting. Additional Institute research, development of data-driven recommendations and training, and technical assistance touches on issues of relevance throughout the Toolkit, including housing, health, education, and the social safety net. Specific current projects and resources within the Urban Institute that can support local leaders in their efforts to reimagine public safety include:

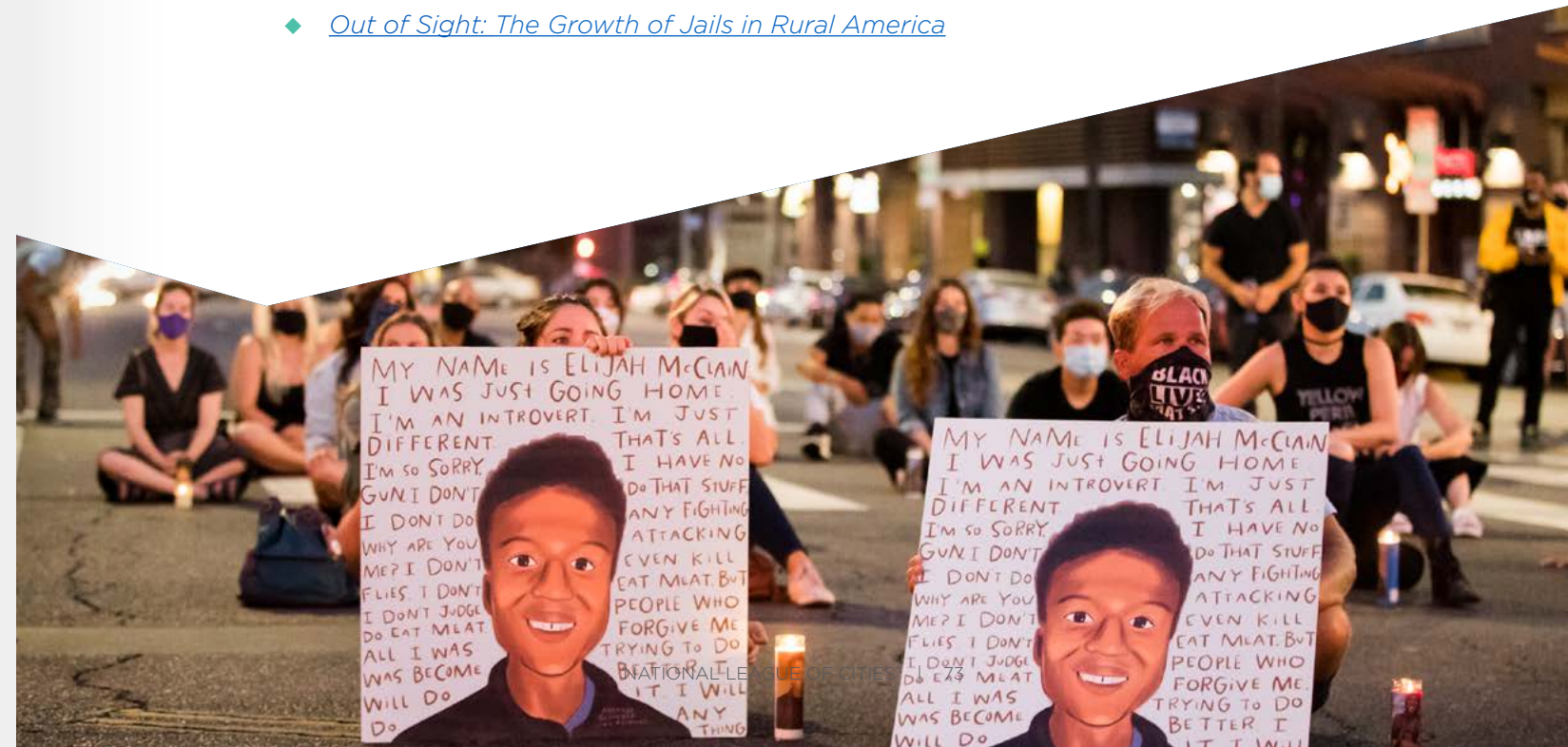
- ◆ [Boosting Upward Mobility from Poverty](#)
- ◆ [National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership](#)
- ◆ [Racial Equity Analytics Lab](#)
- ◆ Publications:
  - ◆ [Federal Investment in Community-Driven Public Safety](#)
  - ◆ [Promoting a New Direction for Youth Justice](#)
  - ◆ [A Guide to Community Strategies for Improving Emerging Adults' Safety and Well-Being](#)
  - ◆ [Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative](#)
  - ◆ Using Medicaid to Connect Justice-Involved People to Coverage and Care
    - ◆ [Medicaid Areas of Flexibility to Provide Coverage and Care to Justice-Involved Populations](#)
    - ◆ [Connecting Criminal Justice with Health Care](#)
    - ◆ [Criminal Justice Expenditures: Police, Corrections, and Courts](#)
  - ◆ Youth gun and gang/group violence practice guide (forthcoming)

**Vera Institute of Justice** is powered by hundreds of advocates, researchers, and activists working to transform the criminal legal and immigration systems until they're fair for all. Vera's mission is to end the overcriminalization and mass incarceration of people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty. The team at Vera has four strategic priorities:

- ◆ End the criminalization of people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty
- ◆ Drastically reduce the use of jails, prisons, and detention centers
- ◆ Center dignity and minimize the harms of criminal legal and immigration system involvement
- ◆ Support safe and thriving communities with comprehensive strategies that ensure accountability and are rooted in public health

Vera encourages city leaders and staff to explore its [projects](#) and [research](#), particularly in the topic areas highlighted in this list:

- ◆ [Community Violence Intervention Programs, Explained](#)
- ◆ [How to Use Budgets to understand Criminal Justice Fines and Fees](#)
- ◆ [Investing in Evidence-Based Alternatives to Policing](#)
- ◆ [Arrest Trends Live Resource](#)
- ◆ [What Jails Cost: A Look at Spending in America's Large Cities](#)
- ◆ [How the American Rescue Plan Can Foster an Equitable Recovery](#)
- ◆ [Out of Sight: The Growth of Jails in Rural America](#)



# Appendix: City Policy Action On Oversight And Accountability, 2020-21

## A POINT-IN-TIME SNAPSHOT AS OF SEPTEMBER 2021

### BANNING CHOKEHOLDS

Cities of Birmingham, AL, Dallas, TX, Denver, CO, Detroit, MI, Houston, TX, Omaha, NE, Philadelphia, PA, Raleigh, NC, San Diego, Seattle, WA, Tampa, FL, and Washington, DC

### BANNING NO-KNOCK WARRANTS

Houston, TX and Louisville, KY (The Louisville Metro Council voted unanimously to pass ban Breonna's Law, which banned no-knock warrants.)

### REQUIRING OFFICERS TO INTERVENE WHEN THERE IS UNREASONABLE USE OF FORCE

Atlanta, GA, Baltimore, MD, Birmingham, AL, Dallas, TX, Detroit, MI, Omaha, NE, Tampa, FL, and Wichita, KS

### REQUIRING REPORTING OF USE OF FORCE OR DEADLY USE OF FORCE INCIDENTS

Atlanta, GA, Denver, CO (requires officers to report any instances of pointing a gun at a person), Detroit, MI, El Paso, TX, and New York, NY (NYPD will publish all trial decisions or settlements reached going forward, effective immediately.)

### LIMITING THE USE OF RIOT CONTROL WEAPONS

Austin, TX (prohibits the use of weapons like rubber bullets, bean bag rounds, tear gas, and pepper spray during protests), Kansas City, MO, Portland, OR, Seattle, WA, and Washington, DC

### REQUIRING FATAL USE OF FORCE CASES TO BE REVIEWED BY AN OUTSIDE AGENCY

Columbus, OH (requires all fatal use of force cases and cases of death in police custody to be referred the Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Investigation), Kansas City, MO, Sacramento, CA, San Jose, CA, and Tampa, FL (requires Florida Department of Law Enforcement to investigate all police-involved shootings)

### BANNING HIGH-SPEED POLICE CHASES OR POLICE SHOOTING AT MOVING VEHICLES

Norfolk, VA (high-speed police chases are banned in all cases except those involving felonies that have resulted in serious injury or death) and Raleigh, NC (officers are prohibited from shooting at moving vehicles)

### REQUIRING OFFICER TRAINING ON DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

Atlanta, GA, Baltimore, MD, Detroit, MI, Houston, TX, Louisville, KY, Milwaukee, WI, Oklahoma, OK, and Raleigh, NC

### REQUIRING TRAINING ON IMPLICIT BIAS

Baltimore, MD, and Louisville, KY

### REVISING POLICIES ON WHEN OFFICERS USE BODY CAMERAS

Atlanta, GA, Denver, CO (body cameras are required to be recording when executing tactical operations), Louisville, KY (requires police officers to wear and use body cameras while executing search warrants), Seattle, WA (requires officers to activate body cameras during protests and demonstrations), and Washington, DC

### ESTABLISHING OR REVISING POLICIES ON WHEN POLICE DEPARTMENTS RELEASE OF BODY CAMERA FOOTAGE

Atlanta, GA, Dallas, TX, and New York City, NY (NY Police Department is required to release all video and audio footage taken by police body cameras within 30 days in the following circumstance: officer discharges a firearm that hits or could hit someone; officer discharges a taser in a way that results in death or substantial bodily harm; or officer's use of force results in death or great bodily harm.)

## **INCREASING TRANSPARENCY ON OFFICER MISCONDUCT COMPLAINTS**

Baltimore, MD (building public dashboards displaying data on the number and disposition of complaints against police officers, instances of uses of force, and traffic stop data broken down by race), and New York City, NY (The NYPD will make comprehensive disciplinary records fully transparent online.)

## **REVIEWING HIRING AND RECRUITMENT PRACTICES FOR OFFICERS**

Baltimore, MD (hire an independent third-party organization to conduct a comprehensive review of hiring and recruitment practices, including a review of data for discriminatory impacts or practices in our testing and background investigations), Louisville, KY, San Francisco, CA, San Jose, CA, and Washington, DC (banned the hiring of officers with previous misconduct on the job.)

## **REVISING DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Dallas, TX (requires monthly reporting of officer contact data on all traffic stops and citations), and El Paso, TX (requires police department “to provide reports on racial profiling to encourage the elimination of racial disparities in arrests and other law enforcement actions”)

## **ESTABLISHING OFFICER RISK ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS**

Dallas, TX (identify officers who might require more training), and San Francisco, CA (screen officers for indicators of bias and strengthen the SFPD’s Early Intervention System for the use of force violations)

## **IMPROVING WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTIONS**

Kansas City, MO (requires whistleblowers seeing misconduct within Kansas City Police Department to have a codified process through which they can report complaints about officers to the Office of Community Complaints and the Board of Police Commissioners)

# Acknowledgements and Toolkit Details

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