

What's Next?

Safer and More Just
Communities Without Policing



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I. The Path Ahead



I. The Path Ahead

For decades, the fastest growing investment of our local, state, and federal governments has been social control and oppression. **At least \$100 billion a year** is dedicated to law enforcement in the U.S. Rather than jobs, education, and healing, we've poured ever increasing amounts of taxpayer resources into surveillance, arrest, detention, incarceration, and deportation. Militarized police forces are a prime example of this dangerous and failed strategy.

We have long believed in the power, possibility, and necessity of a police-free future, and we recognize that this is a crucial time to press forward in demanding change.

The murder of George Floyd by a police officer has proven to be a galvanizing event. As resistance to police violence has bloomed in communities across the United States, more people than ever are coming to face the reality that police do not solve violence in our communities: they bring violence. Because we can no longer accept this reality, we must build a new one.

We propose no less than the creation of a “real safety” paradigm in our communities.

This task demands innovations in community communication technologies, multi-organizational coordination and accountability strategies, and fresh approaches to shared governance and improvement. Using revenue reclaimed from the taxpayer dollars and public funds currently devoted to policing, we will begin to develop new ways to meet the real needs of residents of our communities and cities. With these dollars, we will identify and invest in the existing programs, leaders, and organizations already devoted to developing new forms of community safety and begin to build the infrastructure needed to ensure the success of this new model.

This work is especially crucial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The need to expand the jobs base and health care supports for Black and Indigenous and migrant communities has grown at alarming rates. Meanwhile, city and state governments are anticipating major budget cuts, which will bring new waves of austerity. By shifting dollars away from policing and towards real safety, we can ensure that community needs are met, without violence, surveillance, policing,

or punishment. If we do not shift government investment paradigms now – away from control and towards human thriving – then these austerity measures will further harm our people and our communities, and lead to greater criminalization in response to the fallout of the economic crisis.

This is a key moment for identifying a clear way forward.

There is always a danger that this powerful uprising for change could be manipulated, as has been the case in the past, into projects that make only superficial changes to police, that reconstitute police forces under other names, or that redistribute the functions of policing among other public agencies and private organizations. It is essential that we identify the organizing strategies that will bring real change and avoid repeating or recreating the many misleading and ineffective reform responses to anti-police resistance that have met calls for change in the past.

We hope that this guide will empower you to begin building a police-free future in your community and provide you with some strategies for ensuring this.

II. Ten Key Steps



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There are, at least, **ten major steps** required to successfully launch a new paradigm for real safety.

These steps, many of which will be pursued simultaneously, include:

1. Establish Shared Values and Expectations

The M4BL ecosystem should establish core values and guidelines for new safety leaders and institutions. While these values and guidelines will be further shaped by local organizers and community leaders, our own expectation can provide a template for their interpretations.

Shared values might include ideas like:

- Policing is beyond reform and the goal is defunding and reinvesting funds in real safety
- We cannot seek justice for harm caused by police through institutions that are not explicitly designed to deliver justice
- Real change comes from material redistribution, not renaming systems

Shared values might also included commitments to:

- Experimentation and innovation across communities, not simply implementing one standardized plan
- Disability Justice
- Collective governance and feminist praxis models that center Black queer and trans communities and their needs

- Prioritizing participatory methods that are preventative and transformative, building skill within communities rather than turning to outside experts
- Learning from and building on long histories of BIPOC community-led infrastructure and support networks

2. Recruit Implementation Allies

We must engage and recruit the people who will be vital for successful implementation of a real safety paradigm. Workers from life affirming fields like community-based mental health, addiction recovery, harm reduction, street outreach, youth development, and the labor movement all have roles to play. The ideal roles of community leaders, non-profit institutions, and government agencies will need to be spelled out, and should include explicit direction of funds to BIPOC-led non-profit organizations as well as community-based organizations without non-profit status.

3. Establish City Planning Processes

Municipalities that commit to defunding their police departments will need dedicated time to work with community and movement leaders to build a new path forward that is shaped by the values and guidelines established by the M4BL.

Beyond simply replacing police with new actors performing the same functions, city governments will need to help residents in ways that police never have.

Plans must meet their residents' needs to:

- a. Find healing
- b. Resolve conflict
- c. Avoid and/or escape from danger
- d. Find supports
- e. Share concerns about a violation of 'real safety' guidelines
- f. Create conditions that prevent conflict and harm
- g. Address harm when it occurs

Additionally, they will need to address peacemakers' needs to:

- a. Find and provide resources for residents, which includes identifying existing resources within communities that could be revived or scaled up
- b. Get guidance/coaching for specific challenges
- c. Connect with one another about larger community issues brewing
- d. Share concerns about a core violation of 'real safety' guidelines
- e. Address harm when it occurs
- f. Build new community conditions that prevent conflict and harm through broad-based education, investment and resourcing, and other supports.

Residents should be deeply engaged in the research, imagination, creation, testing, and evaluation of safety programs through meaningful participation designed with and by community-led groups prior to or as part of adoption of formal plans.

Additionally, all municipal public safety programs proposed by city planning must go through a public review process prior to final decision on implementation.

The review must include public announcement of the program with sufficient time (at least 30–45 days) prior to decision and include accessible materials from the community-led investigation and proposal process, inclusive of analysis of proposals that were not moved forward, so the development process also creates opportunities for community-wide input and learning. The review process must include mechanisms for public input, and guidance for integrating feedback into the process. The RFP process for parties to execute any public safety program must allow for grassroots community based groups without non-profit status to apply.

In addition, leaders must take steps to ensure that the public review process does not create conditions for placing community based programs under invasive and intensive scrutiny.

The public review process should be evidence-based, but should not expose programs to police surveillance and sabotage or expose those served by community based programs to risk, including the risk of criminalization.

4. Municipal Budgeting for Racial Justice

Because the new safety paradigm will now be focused on meeting community needs, rather than suppressing them, it will need to be coordinated with most other components of city budgets. When residents need concrete supports to prevent and/or recover from harm, these other line items will be vital.

To ensure success, cities will need help to adopt a racial, gender and disability justice approach to their full budgeting process, thereby ensuring that Black and Indigenous communities – which have historically received more investments in social control but fewer investments in thriving – are able to recover from long decades of criminalization and disinvestment.

There are well-developed participatory budgeting processes/projects across the country. These processes are a useful way to create shared governance around redirecting police budgets.

5. Scale and Build

As discussed below, concrete alternatives to policing already exist in many cities and communities. These efforts must be identified, helped to scale, and brought into the larger ecosystem of a real safety paradigm. Additionally, new efforts must be developed, especially those that train, equip and support community residents to govern their own safety budgets, partners, and resources.

6. Orient Residents

Having been accustomed to policing for so long, community residents will need to be onboarded to or engaged in co-creating new safety practices and institutions to address harm and conflict, and/or in scaling up existing practices within the community.

These processes might include local leadership trainings on subjects such as holding partner institutions accountable, supporting neighbors after trauma/harm occurs, and preventing harm, as well as opportunities for local residents to lead community forums to develop practices. Special supports will need to be developed for residents who have already lost all faith in policing and turned to street

justice in the absence of legitimate external partners. It will need to be made clear that involvement in this work is voluntary and residents can play as large or as small of a role in safety practices as they are able to take on.

7. Collective Governance

Real safety requires sustained coordination across many different actors and institutions.

To ensure that all stakeholders are contributing in alignment with both one another and the necessary shared values, a formal structure for contribution and accountability will be needed.

Fortunately, many non-policing institutions are already much further ahead in both being accountable for their outcomes and participating in collective governance structure. Local committees that previously involved engagement with police might also be shifted to help develop and coordinate community safety strategies, or a commission of coordinating community organizations could be created.

8. New Communication Technologies

911 and mandated reporting centers will no longer be the numbers people call for support in times of crisis, pain, and/or loss. A new resident-focused communications infrastructure will be needed.

Additionally, tools for communication and coordination across implementation partners will need to be developed. M4BL ecosystem members and others seek to oversee the development of a technology platform (or platforms) that will allow for efficient, place-informed communication among peacemakers and restorative justice practitioners and transformative justice spaces within participating communities.

Communications will be used to develop community responses to harm and wrongdoing, enable residents to build local safety projects independent of the formal justice system, and coordinate leadership development needs and opportunities among neighborhood restorative justice leaders.

The ideal platform will be easy to use, accessible through phones, and easy for local leaders to coordinate and govern. It will enable high-quality responses across geographies, types of harm, and identities/positionalities and preserve confidentiality and information security.

It makes sense for cities or even neighborhoods to develop their own methods; the aim here is not to have a single centralized plan but instead for people to try things and learn from their own and each other's experiences. However, programs may need to be coordinated to provide support across neighborhoods, and funding should be distributed equitably, with emphasis on providing funds to historically underfunded and overpoliced neighborhoods.

9. Re-Entry for Former Police

Former police will need support to adjust to their new reality. Supports may include job training programs, counseling, support for accountability for harm done, orientation to new safety practices, and/or community support groups (for ex to help internalize new paradigms of safety).

Such supports are vital if we want these stakeholders to accept, rather than actively resist, the emergence of a better public safety paradigm.

These programs will need to be specialized projects localized within broader publicly accessible worker support programming so as to prioritize capacity for workers more holistically. Such programming will also support transition into other kinds of work for former police.

We cannot assume that all police officers, especially those who've grown accustomed to police power, will not resist transition into non-enforcement labor.

Former police who move into militias can be documented and their access to public funds related to aforementioned programming must be contingent upon them ending that association.

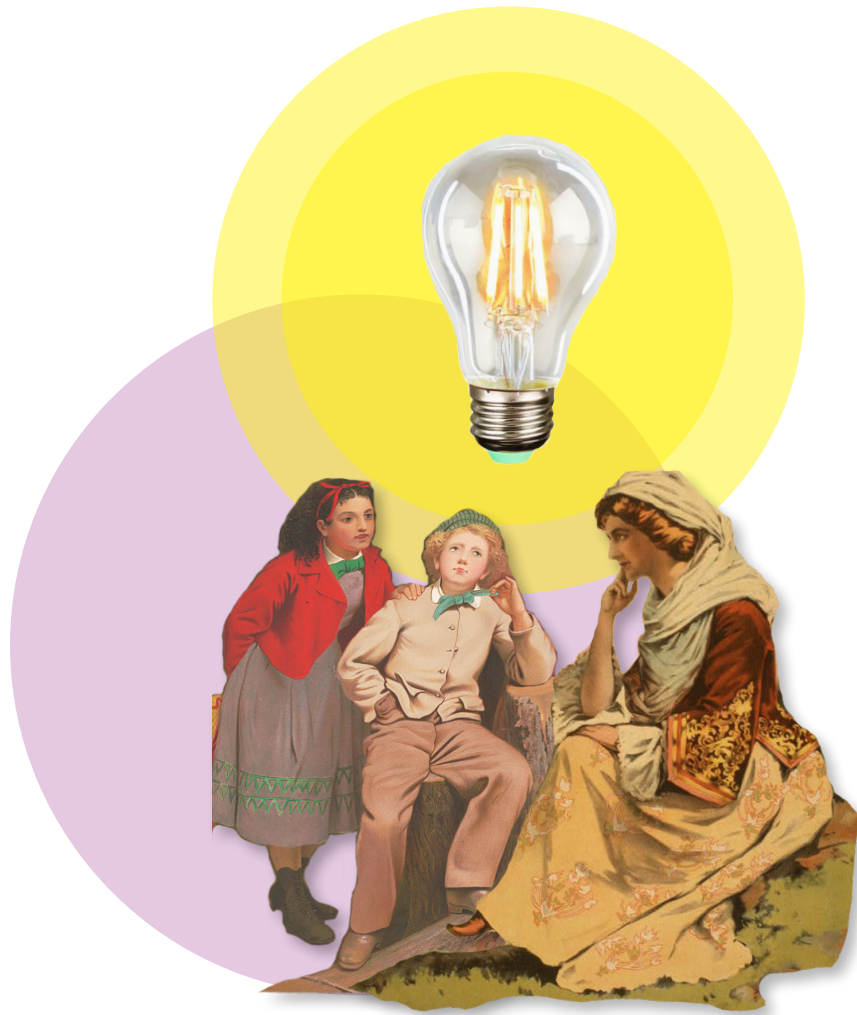
There may be opportunities to create or establish groups like anti-war veterans' groups beginning with people who left policing with/because of an analysis of its inherent violence to do some of this organizing work.

10. Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement

Each city that launches a new paradigm for real safety will require at least a 10-year period for ongoing refinement and improvement.

Continuous changes must be expected and should be supported with culturally grounded evaluation resources and supports. Investments must include long-term funding and structural commitments and preserve room for experimentation that is both successful and unsuccessful, with ongoing engagement of residents and

III. Messages & Responses When Facing Doubt



III. Messages and Responses When Facing Doubt

We affirm the power, possibility, and necessity of a police-free future. We also understand, however, that this is a new idea for many people.

What follows are some frequently-asked questions, and some responses to them. (Adapted From MPD150 & Expanded)

? What does police abolition mean?

Police abolition is a process of reallocating resources, funding, and responsibility away from police and toward community-based models of safety, support, and prevention. **It is a long-term project that requires shifting our emergency response procedures and putting actual safety-creating systems in place.** Our many efforts at reform, which stretch back over a century, have failed. These have typically addressed only a few parts of the larger system or required the police to assume responsibility for social service delivery.

? So are they getting rid of the police department tomorrow?

No. Police abolition is not about snapping our fingers and instantly defunding every department in the world, leaving communities without strategies to create and sustain safety. Instead, we must replace the police with systems that support real wellness and safety. To do so, we focus on reallocating resources from policing toward human needs like housing, child care, and health care.

? What would take the place of the police?

Police abolition is not about making police officers suddenly vanish, either. Instead, **we actively shift responsibility for community safety to the people who are best equipped to deal with those crises.** Mental health service providers, social workers, violence interventionists, victim/survivor advocates, religious leaders, neighbors, family members and friends— all of the people who really make up the fabric of a community—are better equipped to respond to crises than armed strangers who are statistically unlikely to live in the neighborhoods they patrol.

? How would this happen?

Through a community-led staged process of substitution of community-based services for policing through defunding police departments and investing in community-based alternatives and pilot projects, legislative and policy changes.

Many communities are already relying on non-police intervention and violence prevention programs across the country. Elsewhere in this guide, you'll find examples of programs that we can invest in now and build.

? Won't abolishing the police create chaos and crime?

No. because policing is not about crime control.

Such a small proportion of law enforcement activity is related to criminal matters that dramatically reducing policing today would not necessarily impair those functions.

Most of the calls they receive do not pertain to circumstances involving violence and harm matters, and the percentage of police effort devoted to violations of criminal law may not even exceed 10 percent. Less than a third of a police officer's on-duty work is related to violence and harm; as little as 6 percent of a patrol officer's time is spent on incidents that ultimately turn out to be criminal offenses. On average, police officers in the US arrest one person every two weeks. One study found that among 156 officers assigned to a high-crime area of New York City, 40 percent did not make a single felony arrest in a year. ¹

¹ Mark Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*, (London: Pluto, 2000), pp. 93.

Mark's citations:

Michael Banton, *The Policeman in the Community* (London: Tavistock, 1964), pp. 2, 7, 127; Egon Bittner, 'The Police on Skid-row: A Study of Peace Keeping', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 32, No. 5, 1967, pp. 699–715; David Bayley, 'What Do the Police Do?', in William

So police do very little of this work, and they often do it badly. When police do respond to instances of harm, they often arrive too late to be able to interrupt harm in progress; intervention by neighbors is more likely to be effective in the moment.

Though the police offer a false sense of security to the most privileged members of our society, we are facing the reality that police do not solve violence in our communities; they bring violence.

They don't make us safe; they undermine our safety. Cops don't just respond to violent crimes. They make traffic stops for broken tail lights; issue citations for so-called "quality of life" offenses like public drinking, "disorderly conduct," and fare evasion; and arrest people for minor drug offenses. Policing this wide range of "broken windows" behaviors only serves to keep more people—the most vulnerable members of our communities—under the thumb of the criminal justice system.

For Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, disabled people, workers, migrants, and LGBTQ people, systems of policing and control have been a primary sources of chaos and crime in our communities, and have failed in bringing safety or justice to our communities.

Salisbury, Joy Mott and Tim Newburn(eds), *Themes in Contemporary Policing* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1996), pp. 31–3; Steven Spitzer and Andrew Scull, 'Privatization and Capitalist Development: The Case of the Private Police', *Social Problems*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1977, pp. 18–29; A. Keith Bottomley and Clive A. Coleman, 'Criminal Statistics: The Police Role in the Discovery and Detection of Crime', *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, Vol. 4, 1976, pp. 33–58; Richard V. Ericson, *Reproducing Order: A Study of Police Patrolwork* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 5–6, 206; Robert



But aren't the police an important part of the systems that keep vulnerable people safe in our society?

No. Like the police, social service providers and the medical industrial complex have failed in bringing safety or justice to our communities.

At least 50% of people murdered by the police are disabled people. Over a twenty-year period ending in 2012, 81% of people² murdered by San Diego police officers were disabled people.³

Disabled people are vulnerable to police violence, but they also suffer at the hands of the “softer” police forces that are social service agencies and medical institutions, which routinely cage and disempower the people they purport to serve.

These government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and nonprofit medical institutions do not keep people safe, either. Children and adults who are neurodivergent or have cognitive disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than their neurotypical counterparts, often at the hands of the people who are supposed to be providing care.⁴

Stigma and ableism justify the violation of people's basic human rights through mechanisms like involuntary psychiatric treatment, family separation, mandatory reporting, and juvenile incarceration, all of which are proven to be ineffective at best and traumatizing at worst. The mental health system is also built on white supremacy.

² David M. Perry and Lawrence Carter-Long, [The Ruderman White Paper on Media Coverage of Law Enforcement Use of Force and Disability](#), March 2016

³ San Diego County District Attorney's Office, [Officer-Involved Shooting Review, 1993–2017](#), August 2019

⁴ World Health Organization, [Violence Against Adults and Children with Disabilities](#), n.d.

Writer Edward Hon–Sing Wong also notes that the mental health field’s “participation in racial violence and the policing of racialized bodies” has a troubling historical context: [psychiatry shares its historical origins with that of the racist science of eugenics](#).

Structural racism only increases the violence to which people are subjected in mental health care.

We cannot make the mistake of trading out one broken system for another, especially when those systems have been complicit with each other and at their cores, were built to maintain the current white supremacist power structures. Rather than focus on the “treatment” and “care” of disabled folks, we honor the legacy of Disability Justice organizers in imagining communal wellness and safety where no one is caged.

We support the development of, and community investment in, peer counseling, peer crisis intervention and peer coaching support networks, and non–lockdown and non–medicated respite centers. These efforts should be guided by the people most impacted by social service providers. The more accessible our world is, the safer our world will be for everyone.



But without the police, who will protect us from armed bank robbers, “home invasions” murderers, and supervillains?

In this transition process, we may need a small, specialized class of public servants whose job it is to respond to violent crimes. We also know that some of our community members building restorative justice and transformative justice models have already been addressing “violent crimes.”

But we can do more to prevent crime by taking care of one another than by funding more police. Crime isn’t random. Most of the time, crime happens when someone has been unable to meet their basic needs through other means. So to really “fight crime,” we don’t need more cops; we need more jobs, more educational opportunities, more arts programs, more community centers, more mental health resources, and more of a say in how our own communities function.

? What about white supremacist violence and “hate crimes”?

We can rethink racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic, and xenophobic violence as violence of domination, which we often label “hate crimes.” Rather than imagining hate crimes as a problem caused by one person’s or group’s “hate” of another, we can link individual acts of violence motivated by hate with the systems of oppression that both nurture and sustain that violence.

Efforts to punish hate crimes have significantly expanded police power.

The 2010 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act expanded the 1968 federal hate crimes sentencing enhancement law to apply to incidents of violence in which a person is targeted because of their actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability in addition to previously “protected” categories of race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin.

The new law also created the pretense, mechanisms, and funding (\$5 million a year) for federal law enforcement to assist local authorities in the investigation and prosecution of violent incidents determined to be hate crimes, made fund available for enhanced police training, targeted young people in specific ways, and added military personnel attacked in direct relationship to their service as a new category of “protection.” (Similar extensions were added to many local laws in the wake of the 2014–15 uprisings in the US through so-called “Blue Lives Matter laws”.)

Focus on “hate crimes” reinvests in the criminal legal system and the prison industrial complex and gives these systems the power to create meaning through punishment claiming to “acknowledge” the life of the harmed and the “hate” involved in an act of violence. This feeds the common sense presumption that we are both made safe by the surveillance, containment, and confinement of certain other people deemed “dangerous” to us and the idea that we are at our most human or most deserving when recognized by and included in that system. Ironically, as described in *Queer (In)Justice*, hate crime statutes, like other criminal laws, are more frequently mobilized against the people they claim to protect than

⁵ Sins Invalid, [Ten Principles of Disability Justice](#), September 2015

they are against white supremacists and those served by dominant power relations.

In instances of high-profile hate crimes, the PIC is mobilized not to address the histories of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and xenophobia behind these crimes, but to represent a form of “collective” expression of state protection and national belonging.

Hate crime statutes offer no protection against violence and no material change to the conditions that produced it after the fact.

To address the violence of domination we must work to end reliance on the PIC and other structures that perpetuate white supremacist violence. We must invest in strategies and structures that protect and sustain our communities. Instead of looking to the police, we can look to examples of community self-defense and amend historical models that have been community-based, but worked in collaboration with police. We can also build on the models developed by feminists of color to address gender-based violence and intimate partner and sexual violence without policing and imprisonment.



What about the rapists and batterers? What about the child abusers?

Feminists of color have long suggested that the criminal punishment system is not the best or most effective way to handle the harms caused by sexual violence, not least because the police themselves contribute to [sexual](#) and [domestic](#) violence.

Beginning in the 1970s, some feminists in the US have fought to criminalize rape, intimate partner violence, and child abuse in the legal system. But the tide has been turning. Mainstream feminist organizations and [coalitions against gender violence](#) have begun to listen to feminists of color and [LGBTQI DV advocates](#) who have long recognized that laws have failed to protect survivors.

Instead, feminists of color argue that sexual violence, domestic violence (or intimate partner violence), and child abuse must end without expecting policing to keep communities safe. Organizations like [INCITE!](#) have been fighting against the expansion of law enforcement and police militarization while also creating alternative community accountability and transformative justice responses to sexual

and domestic violence. Groups like [generationFIVE](#), founded and led by survivors of child sexual abuse, and the [Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective \(BATJC\)](#) have recognized that the criminalization of child sexual abuse and the demonization of people who commit child sexual abuse have not made people safer—but has made child sexual abuse go further underground, [preventing the disclosure of abuse](#) and foreclosing pathways to accountability and repair. Rather than reducing the risk and rate of child sexual abuse, imprisonment and mechanisms like “sex offender registries” actually [increase the risk](#) that people who commit these harms will commit future sexual violence.

At the same time, the system of imprisonment that purports to reduce sexual violence actually creates more.

The demonization of people labeled batterers and sex offenders has been used as an excuse for the build-up of prisons and jails, contributing to violence and [rape](#) within jails and prisons. Adults incarcerated for sexual violence are at [greater risk](#) of being sexually assaulted in prison. [Women](#) and [youth](#) who are incarcerated for having caused sexual harm are at greater risk for sexual abuse by both other incarcerated people and by guards. Criminal punishment for these harms does little or nothing to make communities safer. It simply relocates sexual and intimate partner violence behind prison walls.

Together, communities across the US have begun to address sexual assault, domestic violence and child sexual abuse through community-based, non-professionalized, collective responses that challenge policing and adopt the frameworks of community accountability and transformative justice as pathways to safety. Many of these efforts are found in the website [TransformHarm.org](#). This guide discusses transformative justice in greater detail in a later section.

A related approach, restorative justice, has also been used to address sexual and domestic violence. Restorative justice programs in the US typically operate in partnership with law enforcement, but there is increasing recognition of the fact that the vast majority of survivors do not contact the police to address sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and child sexual abuse. A growing number of advocates are bringing together restorative and transformative justice models, arguing that family- and community-based approaches to accountability and safety planning offer more promise than relying on police and courts.



But what about people who seriously hurt people in our communities?

- **First, we must recognize that the system of policing and criminal justice does not address the needs of survivors adequately.**

Any response to violence that begins with the police already excludes most survivors: 43% of survivors of intimate partner violence and two thirds of sexual assault survivors never call for help for a host of reasons, including the fact that calling the police also puts the survivor at greater risk of rape and battery: as extensively documented in *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*, police themselves contribute to [sexual](#) and [domestic violence](#). An officer is caught in an act of sexual violence every 5 days, and studies have shown higher rates of sexual and domestic violence among police officers. Additionally, a significant number of instances of violence (physical and sexual, fatal and non-fatal) by police officers against women, queer and trans people happen in the context of calls for help.

Our current responses are not only failing to prevent sexual and physical gender-based violence, they are perpetrating and multiplying it.

Less than half of survivors contact the police, and of those who do, half will drop out of the criminal justice process before their cases make it past the Grand Jury phase. Survivors judge, correctly, that the system we have in place can not be trusted to bring them safety in the aftermath of the harm they survived—and many believe that incarceration, typically the one thing the criminal justice system can offer in the end, has not worked to keep them or others safe. Thus, survivors often choose not to initiate a process that cannot promise them anything of use in the end. Many survivors fear the retraumatization and denial of dignity that comes with reaching out to the police after experiencing violence.

Lastly, many survivors want de-escalation, not criminalization. Knowing that a call for help might result in criminal or immigration consequences for their partner, or the removal of their children, is a barrier to involving the police. It is only in developing real solutions to harm that we stand a chance of centering and meeting the needs of all survivors.

- **Second, successful community-based responses to violence already exist.**

They include informal conflict de-escalation by neighbors, mediation responses

that interrupt cycles of retaliation, and responses that leverage the moral authority of respected people in the community to intervene in patterns of violence before they escalate and to hold those who have done harm accountable. These solutions can be credited with substantial contributions to safety now, and they serve not only to address harm, but to offset, to the degree possible, the harms caused by policing, both generally and in response to particular instances of violence. But these solutions are almost never adequately resourced and their efficacy is often hampered by the involvement of the police.

- **Third, policing is only ever a partial and temporary intervention, which is one of many reasons why it is so costly in both human and financial terms.**

By its nature, policing also escalates tensions and removes people and problems from the community, rather than finding solutions within the community. It deals with incidents and individuals, not patterns and networks of people, and usually only after the fact. Survivors and communities must wait for the police to apprehend one person for one specific thing and to address it as though it is separate from cycles of harm, unhealed trauma, loss, conflict and unmet needs.

Because policing and imprisonment exacerbate violence, they generate more harm. By contrast, community-based leaders and groups are positioned to implement solutions that are holistic, informed, individualized, and durable in ways reactive, armed outside intervention never can be. Once our primary responses to violence actually serve to reduce it, we will have fewer and fewer instances of harm to address and our resources to address them will therefore become more and more adequate over time.

- **Finally, because the outcomes of the policing of behavior classified as felonious are inherently tied to incarceration, it will continue to drive the separation, disenfranchisement, economic deprivation, and lasting violence that define jails and prisons—and that in turn drive violence in communities.**

Under our current criminal punishment system, people who cause harm currently have no incentive to admit to engaging in violent behavior and take accountability for their actions. If they do, they will have admitted guilt, which only further embeds them in the cycle of policing and incarceration. Here, the person who causes harm is punished by the state leaving the survivor without the opportunity to receive an apology or engage in a healing process that centers their needs.



But why not fund the police and fund all these alternatives too? Why is it an either/or?

It's not just that police are ineffective: in many communities, they're actively harmful, which causes many residents to lose trust in external support and take matters into their own hands, without proper training or supports, thereby feeding cycles of harm.

The history of policing is a history of violence against the marginalized — American police departments were originally created to dominate and criminalize Indigenous, Black, and communities of color, disabled people, migrants, people in the sex trades, trans and gender nonconforming people, and poor white workers, a job they continue doing to this day. The list has grown even longer: LGBTQ folks, disabled people, migrants, activists— so many of us are attacked by cops on a daily basis.

We need to include police violence in our understanding of the violence we are seeking to interrupt and prevent.

And it's bigger than just police brutality; it's about how criminalization, the prison industrial complex (PIC), the drug war, immigration law, family law, civil commitment law, control of reproductive rights and the web of policy, law, and culture that forms our criminal punishment system has destroyed millions of lives, and torn apart families.

Cops don't prevent crime; they cause it. Policing is inherently violent and disrupts our communities in ongoing ways.

There is no sense in building up a system that strengthens law enforcement and further implicates the social service agencies and organizations in the cycle of police violence. The funding and development of social services have often gone hand-in-hand with their close cooperation with the police. Government agencies and nonprofits are perpetually underfunded, scrambling for grant money to stay alive while being forced to interact with police officers who often make their jobs even harder.

In 2016, the Minneapolis Police Department received \$165 million in city funding alone. Imagine what that kind of money could do to keep our communities safe if it was reinvested.

Even people who support the police agree: we ask cops to solve too many of our problems.

As former Dallas Police Chief David Brown said: “We’re asking cops to do too much in this country... Every societal failure, we put it off on the cops to solve. Not enough mental health funding, let the cops handle it... Here in Dallas we got a loose dog problem; let’s have the cops chase loose dogs. Schools fail, let’s give it to the cops... That’s too much to ask. Policing was never meant to solve all those problems.”



What about body cameras? What about civilian review boards, implicit bias training, and community policing initiatives?

It’s not just that police are ineffective: in many communities, they’re actively harmful, which causes many residents to lose trust in external support and take matters into their own hands, without proper training or supports, thereby feeding cycles of harm.

There is no way to reform something that is working just as it was designed. Policing at its root is anti-black, anti-indigenous, and ableist, and it upholds all other forms of supremacy.

Police reforms, while often noble in intention, simply do not do enough to get to the root of the issue. They consume a tremendous amount of resources and deliver little to no justice. Video footage, whether from body cameras or other sources, wasn’t enough to get justice for Philando Castile, Samuel DuBose, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Natasha McKenna, Brianna B.B. Hill, Duanna Johnson, and far too many other victims of police violence. In fact, in many of these cases, people view such footage dismissing complaints as “unsubstantiated” because it’s one citizen’s word against a police officer’s. Likewise, a single implicit bias training session can’t overcome decades of conditioning and department culture.

History is a useful guide here: community groups confronting institutional racism in the 1960s demanded civilian review boards, better training, and community policing initiatives. Some of these demands were even met. But these reforms were, across the board, either ineffective or, if successful, dismantled by the police department over time. Even recent reforms are already being co-opted and destroyed: just look at how many officers wear body cameras that are never turned

on, or how quickly Trump's Justice Department moved to end consent decrees (which weren't actually all that effective anyway). We have half a century's worth of evidence that reforms can't work. It's time for something new.



This all sounds good in theory, but wouldn't it be impossible to do?

Policing and the other apparatuses of the prison industrial complex are new phenomena.

The police, as a global institution, have existed for less than two centuries—less time than chattel slavery existed in the Americas. People have been living and thriving without police on this very land, now known as the United States, for thousands of years. Throughout U.S. history, everyday people have regularly accomplished “impossible” things, from the abolition of slavery to the extension of voting rights to the establishment of the 40-hour work week. What's really impossible is the prospect that the police departments can be reformed, against their will, to actually protect and serve communities they have always attacked.

Abolishing the police doesn't need to be difficult and it isn't impossible. We can do it in our own cities, one dollar at a time.

* You also may wish to consult an additional FAQ document, [Dean Spade's “Common Question about Police and Prison Abolition and Responses.”](#)

IV. Existing Institutions That Help Create Real Safety



*by category

IV. Existing Institutions That Help Create Real Safety

You can find models, organizations, and community spaces that create safety without policing in cities and communities across the United States.

Some of these alternatives are developed within formal organizational structures. Others are small-scale, grassroots efforts or represent life-affirming traditions or long-standing programs and services within Black, Indigenous and other communities of color that have never relied on the police; these smaller groups may operate by word-of-mouth and informal networks. Black communities, long intentionally abandoned by the state, have long-standing histories of developing strategies for self-defense and meeting community needs, through community organizing and liberation movements such as the Black Panthers. Migrant, queer, and trans communities have done the same.

The **following list** is not meant to be a complete inventory of such efforts, but to remind us to look within our own cities for examples of informal and formal efforts to create safety outside of policing.

It's worth noting that many of these alternatives to policing are chronically unfunded and under-resourced; [less than 8%](#) of philanthropic dollars are invested in communities of color. We must not, therefore, hold the organizations and models listed below to unrealistic and ill-defined standards of success: a tiny grassroots organization cannot be expected to have the solution to police violence. Also, some choose to remain out of the public eye in order to keep their attention on building community capacity and developing sound practices. Others still operate outside the view of the mainstream to protect their processes from state intervention.

Alternatives to 911 Calls and Mental Health Response

- [CAHOOTS](#)

[CAHOOTS](#) (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) provides mobile crisis intervention 24/7 in Oregon's Eugene–Springfield Metro area. CAHOOTS is dispatched through the Eugene police–fire–ambulance communications central within the Springfield urban growth boundary, CAHOOTS can be dispatched while bypassing communications central entirely. Each team consists of a medic, either a nurse or an EMT, and a crisis worker who has at least several years' experience in the mental health field. CAHOOTS provides immediate stabilization in cases of urgent medical need or psychological crisis, assessment, information, referral, advocacy, and, in some cases, transportation to the next step in treatment.

- [Parachute NYC](#)

[Parachute NYC](#) was a citywide community–based program by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, through which a mix of clinicians and peer specialists offer support to people aged 18–65 experiencing a psychiatric crisis. Four mobile crisis teams provided immediate and ongoing support for up to two years, while four crisis respite centers operated as short–term places to stay when people were feeling that a crisis was imminent. The program also created a peer–operated support line. Unfortunately, the city did not replace private funding once a seed grant expired.

- [Fireweed Collective](#)

Fireweed Collective offers mental health education and mutual aid through a Healing Justice lens. The collective helps support the emotional wellness of all people and center the needs of those most marginalized by our society. Their work seeks to disrupt the abuse and oppression often reproduced by the mental health system.

The Fireweed Collective strives to cultivate a culture of care, free of violence, where the ultimate goal is not just to survive, but to thrive as individuals and as communities. They envision a world in which all communities get to self–determine the source of their care, medicine, and wellness.

- [Mental Health First](#)

MH First, a project of Anti Police–Terror Project Sacramento, offers a non–police response to mental health crises, including substance use disorder support and domestic violence situations that require victim extraction. MH First aims to interrupt and eliminate the need for law enforcement in mental health crisis first response by providing mobile peer support, de–escalation assistance, and non–punitive and life–affirming interventions, therefore decriminalizing emotional and psychological crises and decreasing the stigma around mental health, substance use, and domestic violence, while also addressing their root causes: white supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism.

Volunteer–based mental health crisis intervention service that aims to get someone to the next step toward safety e.g., to the next point of care like urgent care. (No medical interventions.) Because it’s volunteer–based, any liability is covered under Good Samaritan Laws. Volunteers get training designed by social workers, psychiatrists, and counselors & work a hotline open three days a week.

Non–US examples

As part of its national healthcare system, the U.K. offers the ability to [call the number 111 for medical assistance](#). 111 can send an ambulance, nurse, or mental health worker to the caller if needed. This number is separate from the emergency number, 999.

Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs

- [Spirit House](#)

Spirit House works to bring harm-free zones to Durham, NC. The Harm Free Zone (HFZ) supports a community-centered vision that helps repair the damage of racism and ameliorate the oppression of poor people of color by providing tools and training to both develop and strengthen capacity to prevent, confront, and transform harm. The Harm Free Zone envisions independent and self-directed community autonomy as necessary for creating shared collective accountability strategies and practice.

- [API Chaya](#)

API Chaya is a Seattle-based organization that empowers survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking to gain safety, connection, and wellness. They build power by educating and mobilizing South Asian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and all migrant communities to end exploitation, creating a world where all people can heal and thrive. The Community Solutions program, which works outside the criminal legal system, uses principles and practices of transformative justice to increase the capacity of community members to respond to harm in ways that center the healing and dignity of survivors of sexual violence, those who have harmed them, and the community that surrounds them both.

- [Oakland Power Projects](#)

Oakland Power Projects empowers Oakland residents to reject policing as the default response to harm by working with residents and organizations to highlight or create alternatives that actually work. We do this by connecting with communities and facilitating a **three-step process**: identify current harms; amplify existing resources; and develop new practices that do not rely on policing or law enforcement.

- [Safe OUTside the System \(SOS\)](#) of the Audre Lorde Project

[The Safe OUTside the System \(SOS\) Collective](#) is an anti-violence program by and for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans, and Gender Non Conforming people of color. They are devoted to challenging hate and police violence by using community-based strategies as alternatives to relying on the police. Safe OUTside the System is an anti-violence program led by and for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans, and Gender Non Conforming people of color.

Their projects include the Safe Neighborhood Campaign, which organizes and educates local businesses and community organizations on how to stop violence without relying on law enforcement; and a community support referral and service network for survivors of police and hate violence in Central Brooklyn. The SOS Collective has also produced a Safe Party Planning Toolkit to help build safety in party spaces without relying on the police or state systems. The kit, available in English and Spanish, includes information about preventing and intervening in violence, making a community atmosphere where violence is not welcome, and supporting survivors of violence.

- [Mothers Against Senseless Killings](#)

Mothers Against Senseless Killings (MASK) is a group of mothers in Chicago who have reduced violence by transforming a troubled block into a community without police. The moms are present on the block every evening, barbecuing, feeding residents, and building relationships with young people. They help diffuse tensions between young people and watch out for police, protecting young people who have been subject to stop and frisk.

- [Don't Offend](#)

Don't Offend, founded in Berlin, Germany, is a global network to [prevent the sexual abuse of children](#) by providing stigma-free care for those who want to seek treatment and avoid offending.

- [PreventConnect's Close to Home](#)

[PreventConnect](#), which works toward stopping sexual assault and relationship violence and engaging communities in prevention efforts, has a new e-course built on the community organizing model developed by the nonprofit organization Close to Home. [“Community-Driven Approaches to Violence Prevention: Close to Home.”](#) Developed by an independent consultant with expertise in gender-based violence prevention, the course includes interviews with C2H practitioners and describes the four-phase [Close to Home approach](#) to preventing violence through community connection, network development, capacity building, and advocacy.

Other Transformative Justice Examples

- [Transformharm.org](https://transformharm.org)

Multiple small-scale, informal groups have built upon restorative justice and transformative justice models to create local responses to violence, including sexual harm and intimate partner violence. They have relied upon the work of, and solidarity networks built by, many of the individuals and organizations featured on the website **TransformHarm.org**, in order to create community capacity to respond to violence in ways appropriate for their localities.

Sample transformative justice resources include:

- [Creative Interventions Toolkit](#)
- [Bay Area Transformative Justice \(BATJC\) Pods Mapping Worksheet](#)
- [Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement](#)
- [Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators](#)

For a broader collection of transformative justice and community accountability resources, see the website, [TransformHarm.org](https://transformharm.org).

Other Restorative Justice and Systems–Engaged Examples

While transformative justice models operate **entirely outside of policing**, some restorative justice and other violence intervention and prevention programs **retain some sort of relationship** with the criminal legal system while building pathways towards a police–free future.

In building intervention/prevention models that have some relationship with law enforcement or the justice system, it is vital to ask how that relationship can lead toward non–police solutions instead of upholding reliance on the police.

- [Common Justice](#)

Common Justice develops and advances solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity without relying on incarceration. Locally, they operate the first alternative–to–incarceration and victim–service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts. Nationally, they leverage the lessons from our direct service to transform the justice system through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experience and power of those most impacted. Rigorous and hopeful, they build practical strategies to hold people accountable for harm, break cycles of violence, and secure safety, healing, and justice for survivors and their communities.

- [Impact Justice’s Restorative Justice Project](#)

The Restorative Justice Project of Impact Justice provides training and technical assistance to [seven sites nationally](#), supporting community–based organizations and partners from the criminal and juvenile legal systems to introduce pre–charge restorative justice felony diversion programs which meet survivors’ needs through community–based intervention. The Restorative Justice Project also collaborates with communities to envision safe, effective restorative justice alternatives to systems intervention for intimate partner and sexual violence and child sexual abuse. Tools are provided in the [Restorative Justice Diversion Toolkit](#).

- [Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation](#) | Chicago, IL

PBMR offers broad-based programming to support young people involved in the justice system, those recently returned from incarceration, and those actively incarcerated. An RJ Hub organization, PBMR provides safe and welcoming spaces for youth and families in the Back of the Yards and Englewood neighborhoods, facilitates peacemaking circles, and offers GED tutoring, job training, and case management. Unique among the organizations listed here, the program is funded in part through its own social enterprise arm: a screen-printing apparel shop and a fresh produce delivery program.

- [RJ Hubs](#)

RJ Hubs is a community-led restorative justice approach to youth crime and conflict that offers safe spaces in which youth are welcomed and supported in building healthy relationships, expressing themselves, addressing trauma, and developing necessary skills and competencies for healthy lives.

- [Restorative Response Baltimore](#)

Restorative Response Baltimore provides support for processes that empower people to transform their conflicts into cooperation. By doing so, they can contribute to a vision of justice rooted in equity, community, and collaboration. The organization is guided by the beliefs that conflict presents opportunities for learning, healing, and transformation; people can create lasting solutions to their conflicts when everyone affected is given a space to share their stories; conflicts within the communities are best resolved within those communities; the wisdom is in the community; and stronger connections foster mutual accountability, sense of belonging and understanding.

- [The Ahimsa Collective](#)

The Ahimsa Collective recently launched a [Mutual Aid and Restorative Justice \(MARJ\)](#) network. MARJ is a relationship centered response to survival needs, trauma, social-emotional crisis and those actively experiencing harm: in particular sexual and domestic violence. MARJ is building a network of people, mainly throughout California, who assist others directly (and without any institution) in need of material, social-emotional care or offer crisis support for those experiencing harm. MARJ aims to create a web of collective care where we both rely on and assist each to build beloved community.

- [Gideon's Army](#) | Nashville, TN

[Gideon's Army](#) has four programming areas to support young people and dismantle the school to prison pipeline: schools (in-school RJ to prevent suspensions and expulsions), courts (RJ diversion by referral), policing (organizing and activism around police brutality, and the community (workshops for mental health, conflict management, grief). Gideon's Army also trains young people to work as violence interrupters and prevent gun violence in North Nashville.

Frontline Violence Interrupters

These programs all provide wraparound community support resources and case management services for young people and their families, but each also does frontline violence intervention work in their various communities.

- [Newark Community Street Team](#)

The Newark Community Street Team (NCST) is Newark, NJ Community-based violence reduction initiative, a complimentary strategy to policing redefining the way we understand public safety. Initiated in May 2014 by Mayor Ras J. Baraka, NCST, NCST works through a public health lens, employing a relationship-based intervention, mentoring, and case management model to reduce violence and crime in the city.

- [Cure Violence](#)

Cure Violence is a global organization that builds upon a public health model of violence intervention. It identifies and equips local leaders to address every instance of violence, approach those involved in violence and create pathways away from retaliation and further violence through one-on-one engagement, access to employment opportunities and resources and non-violent strategies.

- [READI Chicago](#)

READI Chicago is an organization aimed to reduce gun violence by focusing on young African American men. The program features a 24-month program providing personal support and sustainable employment to build the lives of young men as positive forces in their homes and communities.

- [TR4IM](#)

TR4IM is a Chicago based organization that works at the level of 8-block neighborhoods, building a seamless network of collaborative partners committed to impacting the effects of childhood trauma. The focus is to deal with trauma and violence in its broadest context by connecting community residents impacted by trauma and violence with resources and services that transport them to wellness.

- [LIFE Camp, Inc.](#) | Queens, NY

LIFE Camp, Inc. treats violence as a public health crisis and works to prevent and intervene in violence in South Jamaica, Queens, through leadership development, education and employment, and the Cure Violence Model of intervention. It is a member of the NYC Crisis Management System, a group of 50 community based organizations that work in neighborhoods that experience high rates of gun violence. The CMS trains and deploys street teams from organizations like LIFE Camp to deescalate disputes and connect high-risk individuals to community and support services.

- [Youth Alive!](#) | Oakland, CA

Through prevention, intervention, and healing programs, Youth Alive! trains young people to work as peer educators and policy advocates; runs a hospital-based peer intervention program and a violence interruption program; and provides counseling and trauma support services to the families and friends of homicide victims and to clients connected to them during intervention.

- [Birmingham Peacemakers](#) | Birmingham, AL

The Birmingham Peacemakers, a gun violence reduction program led by local pastors, is part of [Faith in Action Alabama](#) is a branch of a national multi-faith multi-racial organization that works for systemic change. Peacemaker leaders are part of a nonviolent street patrol that takes nightly walks through local neighborhoods and offers rapid-response victim services to those harmed by gun violence.

Violence Intervention Training

- [Professional Community Intervention Training Institute](#) | Los Angeles, CA

PCITI offers evidence-based, practitioner-driven training programs and certifications for community-based gang outreach intervention, first-responder violence deterrence, and de-escalation. Program benchmarks were set with input from the National Intervention Certification Board, and PCITI is the only such privately funded program in the nation. PCITI has trained over 15,000 gang intervention specialists, university students, mental health professionals, social service experts, emergency first responders (including law enforcement officers, firefighters) and public safety professionals.

- [Nonviolence Institute, Providence](#) | Providence, RI

The Nonviolence Institute runs gang violence intervention programs in Providence and Pawtucket, RI; community-based supportive services for victims of violence; and education and job training programs for young people. The organization also offers over 8,000 hours of nonviolence training programming a year and does legislative advocacy work at the city, state, and national levels.

V. A Deeper Dive on Police & Prison Abolition



V. A Deeper Dive on Police and Prison Abolition

When fully realized, police abolition dismantles the enduring systems and practices of power that have shaped the global capitalist system since its origins in the 16th century. The institution of policing is so deeply rooted in world-historical forces, the project of police abolition both faces immense challenges and imagines new possibilities.

The challenges are rooted in the relationship between police power and the state. Policing is the discretionary power to use state violence in whatever form and toward whatever ends authorities see fit. It is, by design, beyond the law, because policing is not law enforcement, but violence wielded for order maintenance. The social (and/or political, economic, racial, cultural ...) order that police maintain is the same one that shapes the biases of the law: capitalist class power and white supremacy.

But among the possibilities is the chance to build a new world free from violence, free from racialization, free from the misery and endless toil directed at endlessly increasing the profits and power of the few that own the world.

If policing is a process of capitalist order making, abolition is the creative practice of building new communal and non-coercive institutions at all levels of society.

Challenges

- **Police cannot be reformed because the institution is fundamentally built on the state's dispensation to use violence as they see fit.**

The doctrine of “police discretion” argues that the work of law enforcement cannot be carried out without preemptive blanket permission to use violence in any conceivable situation. Discretion isn't only an individual prerogative, but organizational and institutional. The courts have consistently refused to define the extent and limits of police discretion because, they say, you can never tell police ahead of time what is “reasonable” or “necessary,” as all situations are always and forever unpredictable. The courts won't even tell cops they can't drop a bomb on a building, as they did in Philadelphia in 1985, or use a robot to kill someone with a bomb, as they did in Dallas in 2016.

- **Police do not enforce the law and are not accountable to it.**

Police make law in every interaction by deciding who to approach, question, search, arrest, and who to ignore. Walking too fast, walking too slowly, and being stationary can all be pretexts for a police stop, and police officers invoke law after the fact to justify the way that they decided to restore “order.” From a police perspective, they don't deal with law. They deal with threats. In theory, Mike Brown had rights under the law but Darren Wilson saw him as a threat, and on the basis of that claim, the law allowed Wilson to murder him in cold blood. Mark Neocleous calls this “the permissive structure of the law.”⁶ This means that law will never hold police accountable because the police are explic-

itly allowed to decide how and whether to enforce the law, and the legal system empowers police to behave without legal restraint. This is why abolition is the only logical response to police. “Reform” implies that an institution has strayed from its core responsibilities, but the institution of policing is actually built on freedom from accountability. “Reforms” make the institution stronger and more efficient by covering it in a veneer of legitimacy.

- **Police officers are not the only figures through which the state exerts punitive power.** ⁷

The term “policing” was first used in the 15th century as part of an elite discussion concerning how the rising states of Europe could promote commerce and encourage people to work for the wage (instead of living a life of communal subsistence). Any representative of the government had police power. In feudal England, the bailiff or sheriff was empowered to oversee peasant labor and enforce debt repayment, which began the association

⁶ Mark Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*, (London: Pluto, 2000), pp. 93.

⁷ Markus Dubber, *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government* (New York: Columbia University Press: 2005). Mark Neocleous, *Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*, (London: Pluto, 2000)

George Rigakos., John McMullan, Joshua Johnson, and Gulden Özcan. *A General Police System: Political Economy and Security in the Age of Enlightenment*. (Ottawa: Red Quill Books, 2009).

between police and the protection of property. “Policing” was a term used to talk more generally about the work of administering a government until the first half of the 19th century, when the first police departments were formed in cities in Europe and the United States. Even then, police work originally included civil administration, public health, and urban planning: in its first fifty years, the responsibilities of the New York Police Department included everything from street sweeping and boiler inspection to sheltering the homeless and finding lost children.

Today, such functions of civil society are spread out among various government agencies, and the implementation of social policy still retains some of the power of police enforcement. The abiding concerns of state agencies are the very ones initially overseen by the police: the protection of private property, the creation of markets, the regulation of poverty, and the separation of the worthy or deserving poor from the undeserving and inscrutable “criminal element.” This is why so many people's experiences with, say, public education or social welfare agencies can be—or usually are—so oppressive: school expulsions and family separations are clearly wielded to enforce these standards. What’s more, grant funding for social services is often tied to compliance with the War on Drugs or the Violence Against Women Act, for example, making law enforcement a necessary part of service provision. Social policy is not designed to help all people equally. It's a police project to fabricate order and pacify the population.

- **Defunding the police does not mean re-funding the soft social police.**

We can’t allow the argument for defunding the police to mean that the armed, uniformed police are bad, but the soft social po-

lice are bad, but the soft social police are good. The paternalistic power embedded in the “helping professions” must be dismantled, and the work that people in this sector do must instead support autonomous and community-embedded services that provide for individual needs. Educators, medical workers, domestic violence advocates, and those working in related fields will need retraining in harm reduction and support in rethinking how to be in service to people without the restrictions that current liability laws and state appropriations place on their imaginations.

Debates about police reform often invoke the specific role of the social worker. It is all too easy to [turn cops into social workers](#) and [vice versa](#), and the social work profession relies on the resources of the state in educating social workers, who may receive their professional training in jails and prisons, but [do not study](#) criminal justice content in the classroom. Without appropriate education, [social workers entering these spaces risk reinforcing structural oppression](#).

Social work professionals are sharply divided on the question of the social worker’s role in the criminal justice system. The CEO of the National Association of Social Workers, the field’s largest professional organization, has expressed [eagerness to work closely with police departments](#), stating that “social workers help police excel in fulfilling their mission to protect and serve.” But, as we have illustrated, the mission of the police is not, in fact, protecting and serving their communities, and enlisting social workers in what Beth Ritchie and Kayla Martensen call “carceral services” only ensnares and punishes the people these groups purport to help. [Other members](#) of the profession also disagree with this orientation toward policing and criminalization. [Abolitionist social work](#) proponents seek to reckon with the profession’s “our complicity in colonization, in racial capitalism and the

ogics of neoliberalism, and in our relationship to the carceral state, all of which have become core to social work practice."

- **Defunding the police does not mean privatizing the functions of law enforcement.**

We are calling into question not only the legitimacy of public law enforcement agencies, but the broader system of order maintenance to which civil society has deputized them. Simply redistributing the tasks of law enforcement does little more than change the shape of the structure. Private security forces, vigilante groups, and even [neighborhood watches](#) and [citizens' patrols](#) are [no less deeply invested](#) in maintaining capitalist class power and white supremacy. But they often masquerade as transformative community interventions. We must proactively block the privatization of police as we defund law enforcement and reinvest in community-based projects.

- **Defunding the police does not mean shifting from a regime of mass incarceration to one of mass supervision.**

Advocates for police reform often cite the example of Camden County, New Jersey, where the police department was disbanded and replaced with a new agency committed to "community policing." But critics [like Brendan McQuade](#) have noted that while the face of the new community policing is barbecues, ice cream trucks, and baseball games, it's really backed by the introduction of new surveillance systems and police intelligence structures. Increased contacts with the community and decreases in reported crime are not the result of efforts to develop meaningful relationships with Camden residents, but of the edict to "proactively address crime conditions" through escalating surveillance and

aggressive enforcement of so-called “quality of life” laws.

Possibilities



- The abolition of policing is about building a new world: The antithesis of police is the commons.

The police exist not just to protect private property but to legitimate that very concept.⁸ Defunding the police needs to mean more than shifting budget priorities, and the rebuilding the commons doesn't mean expanding "the public sector." It means abolishing the social order and building a new society. We're not asking for kinder, gentler cops. We're asking for the re-creation of the commons: shared resources, infrastructures, and knowledge to allow communities to self-govern and thrive. The goal is collective flourishing and the common acknowledgement of our shared humanity.

How does this translate into actionable demands? A certain social democratic "common sense" fits in this framing: a universal

⁸ The creation of capital/private property/class and racialization are the same process. Race and, especially whiteness, is relationship to property. In classical enlightenment philosophy, white men are rational subjects that can own property and participate in bourgeois society. Women, people of color, indigenous people, "nature" are non rational others. They are objects of police. They are to put into an order by white men and using their police powers (this is what Dubber means when he talks about policing as patriarchal power. It's rooted in really, really, really old, pre-capitalist ideas about the management of household).

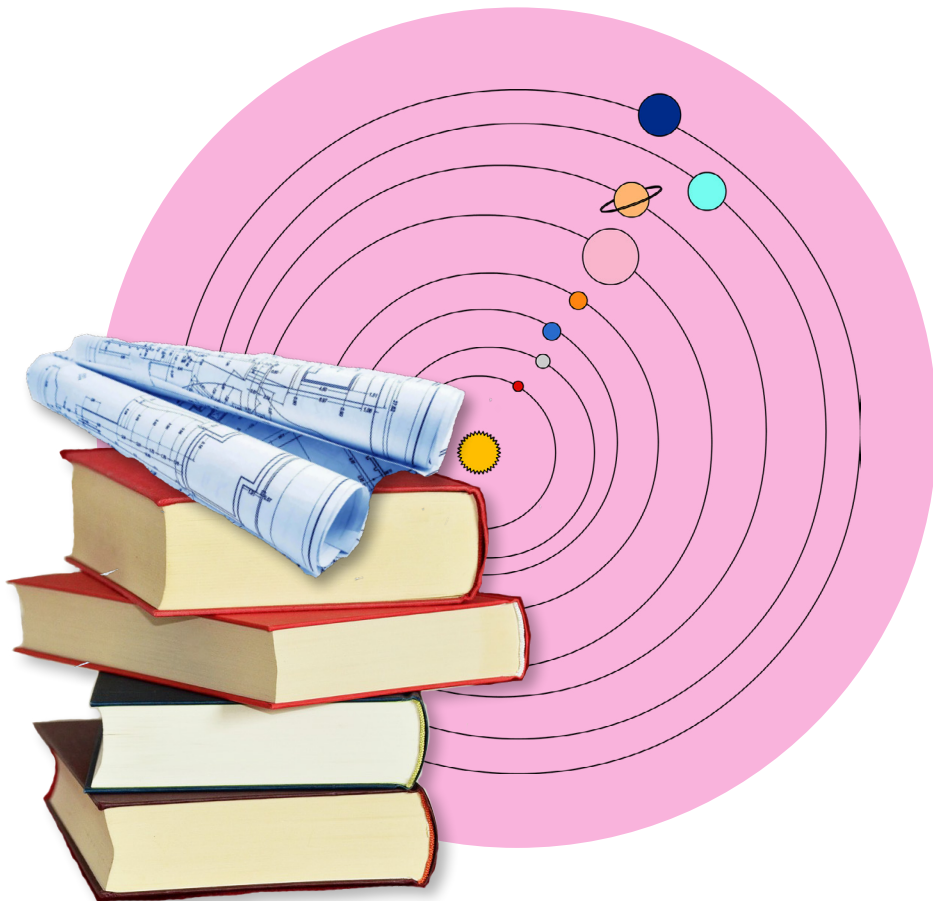
right to cradle-to-grave care (healthcare, education, child and elder care) and a basic right to life (housing, a job or income, etc.). To make these common goods and not forms of social policy that police, they need to be universal and de-commodified. That is, we have to agree that housing and healthcare, for just two examples, are universal human rights—not commodities that the state will selectively subsidize or deny in order to control the so-called “dangerous classes” and force compliance with sexual, gender, and racial norms.

But there is also something greater, a faint light on the horizon that abolitionists have labored to draw forth and that recent events have now made visible to many long lost in the darkness. We can go further. Recreating the commons means more than better social policy, e.g., free education and healthcare, but free access to things that make life worth living: de-commodified and collective means to access arts, culture, recreation, etc. It means more than access to things and services but new conception of community.

What would our cities and towns be like if they were built to meet varied needs and address conflict in non-punitive, restorative ways?

Some of the examples listed under Existing Institutions that Help Create Real Safety elsewhere in this guide can serve as the building blocks of reinvented commons. At their best, they are community-based institutions and practices for harm reduction and redress. They are examples that point to a future where we can solve our own problems, even the most serious and scary ones.

VI. More Resources & Models to Explore



VI. More Resources and Models to Explore

Mental Health

- [BEAM: Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective](#) | Los Angeles, CA

Collective of professionals, artists, community leaders devoted to Black healing through peer justice and mental health literacy training & service provision. Other resources include the Black Virtual Therapist Network, a Black trans wellness initiative, and a program that provides hygiene kits to Black folks in psychiatric facilities.

City Public Safety Departments

- [Albuquerque Community Safety Department](#) | Albuquerque, NM

A newly created “third branch” of the city’s public safety department (i.e., alongside police and fire departments) that deals with behavioral and mental health crises, homelessness. Unarmed professionals dispatched to respond to non-violent crimes. ACSD is being created at the local level and funded with existing local resources. Based in part on an [existing program](#) that sends “security personnel” (officers from city’s Security Services Division) to do welfare checks (what they refer to as responding to “down-and-out” calls) that EMS/fire department were previously dispatched for. The SSD is under the city’s [Department of Municipal Development](#), which is separate from the police department. This program had a no-cost implementation. The new Community Safety Department will be staffed with social workers, clinicians, transit workers, DMD’s [security officers](#), and potentially peer supporters trained in de-escalation and behavioral health.

International Conflict Response

- [Nonviolent Peaceforce](#) | St. Paul, MN/Lausanne, Switzerland

NP is a global nonviolent peacekeeping program that utilizes grassroots-level community organizing to deal with peace and security crises. The organization trains unarmed, non-partisan local actors to intervene in violent conflicts by removing civilians from active conflict zones to providing mediation between warring factions and violence prevention during elections to negotiating the safe return of kidnapped family members and monitoring internally displaced persons camps. Since its founding in 2003, the NP has sent staff to Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Iraq, Myanmar, and South Sudan, where they train hundreds of local peace observers and serve tens of thousands of people.

Public Policy and Advocacy

- [Community Justice Action Fund](#) | Austin, TX

The CJAF addresses gun violence through advocating for a comprehensive public policy agenda, training survivors of gun violence to serve as leaders and community Peacemakers, and training everyday people who want to work on gun violence prevention. [The CJAF offers a curriculum for policymakers who want to reduce gun violence in their communities without relying on policing.](#)

Anti-Patriarchal Programs Inside Prisons

- [Success Stories](#)

Success Stories delivers a 12-week feminist abolitionist curriculum in places where people have committed harm or are survivors of systemic harm (prisons, jails, group homes, reentry programs, and schools). Success Stories helps people who have committed harm to understand the role patriarchal structures play in individual and systemic acts of harm and to set new goals for themselves. Program graduates receive ongoing support for the rest of their lives.

Other Resources that can be used as background research

Policy Tools

- **Investing Public Funds in Community Safety Strategies:**

This tool can help jurisdictions identify strategies for investing public resources and help direct public funds toward community based solutions beyond law enforcement and corrections. (Urban Institute)

- **Investments in Public Safety Beyond Policing– Budget Priorities:**

An evaluation tool on investments in public safety beyond policing, with analysis of 12 cities, to help grassroots leadership, local elected officials can divest from criminalization

- [Research brief](#) re: interrupters
- [CAP brief](#)