

This summer our nation witnessed protests on a scale not seen for decades. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others at the hands of law enforcement have spurred outcry in city after city, exposing for the nation what has long been a lived reality for many communities: our policing and criminal legal systems have failed to create real safety for everyone. Our nation's law enforcement [arrests, shoots and kills more people](#) than any other developed nation, and we lead the world in incarceration rates. The United States spends [twice as much](#) on police, courts and prison systems as we do on cash welfare systems, and yet we still have [high rates of unsolved violent crime](#). Under-resourced communities are [disproportionately burdened](#) by our policing and prosecution strategies, which frequently result in unmanageable fines and fees or incarceration, leading to further impoverishment. For communities of color, who have [borne the brunt](#) of punitive policing and incarceration practices, [trust in law enforcement](#) is disturbingly — but unsurprisingly — low.

Some leaders have taken this moment to listen to or stand with those calling for change and envision new public safety strategies that work for everyone. However, others have sought to reinforce a tough-on-crime, 'law and order' approach that resists an in-depth examination of our systems and instead defaults to increased use of law enforcement and even militarized tactics to impose control on communities. The current administration has repeatedly [promoted deployment of military forces](#) in cities experiencing unrest while rebuffing federal [efforts to introduce sweeping reform and oversight](#) of law enforcement. A Department of Justice commission on policing, [purportedly convened last year to examine best practices for law enforcement](#), has been [publicly critiqued](#) for its failure to address divides between law enforcement and communities of color and for its emphasis on studying ['underenforcement' of criminal laws and 'refusals by State and local prosecutors to enforce laws or prosecute categories of crimes.'](#) In fact, this commission was recently found to be in [violation of federal law](#) for failing to include any non-law enforcement voices or to conduct meetings with transparency. In some states where communities are re-examining their investments into traditional policing, elected officials have issued dire warnings -- without any evidence -- that any such reforms will spur lawlessness and crime. Several governors have even [paired their rhetoric with legislative proposals](#) to assume control over local law enforcement or even strip funding from these cities.

While stoking fear and leveraging public safety for political gain is nothing new, in this moment of national reckoning, it exacerbates the very disparities and divisions in need of repair. It also distorts the public's understanding of what actually makes us safe, and undermines the hard work being done in many jurisdictions to introduce transformative, research-driven, community-based public safety strategies. Finally, it ignores hard-earned lessons from the past and neglects the expanding body of research

and best practices available to us that point to new, more effective strategies for improving community safety.

We are representatives from law enforcement, crime survivors, community groups, activists, academics, and impacted people who have personally observed the harms that our world-leading reliance on policing, prosecution and incarceration have wrought. We understand that true public safety requires policies that create stability and security for everyone, including those we have historically marginalized, demonized and destabilized. We must reimagine our strategies so as to include solutions that address the underlying issues driving contact with the criminal legal system. We know that meaningful, lasting improvements will require committed, persistent engagement with the communities we have neglected. They will need robust investments in healthcare, education, and infrastructure rather than traditional forms of enforcement and control.

This report sets forth a new vision for public safety and illustrates some of the paths already being paved toward more responsive and restorative criminal legal systems. It recognizes new strategies rooted in research and community collaboration, with revised goals focusing on stabilizing and investing in communities that have been harmed by the wrongheaded approaches of the past—those championed by the tough on crime, law and order crowd. This vision does not require us to choose between safety and justice; rather, it recognizes we cannot have safety without justice. We urge communities across the nation to join us in seizing this unprecedented opportunity to reimagine public safety and plot a new course for our country.