



April 20, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries Speaker of the House House Minority Leader
2468 Rayburn House Office Building Longworth House Office Building, 1607 Washington, DC, 20515-0520 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader Senate Minority Leader
Hart Senate Office Building, 322 Russell Senate Office Building, 317 Washington, DC 20510 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Minority Leader Jeffries, Members of the House, Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, and Members of the Senate,

On behalf of the Community Safety Working Group and the 69 undersigned organizations, we urge you to advance a Community Safety Legislative Agenda that prioritizes genuine safety in our communities. All people should be safe in their homes, workplaces, streets, schools, parks, and other neighborhood spaces. But our current approach to safety is not achieving this goal. Today, Congress dramatically underspends on programs that [extensive evidence](#) shows to make us safer, while pouring billions into punitive interventions that leave too many people *less* safe.¹

¹ See i.e., Thea Sebastian, Hanna Love, Sam Washington, Anthony Barr, Insha Rahman, Blake Paradis, Andre M. Perry, and Sakira Cook, *A new community safety blueprint: How the federal government can address violence and harm through a public health approach*, The Brookings Institute, September 21, 2022.

It is time to embrace a new paradigm that uses evidence-informed interventions² to reverse this trend and build safety that works for all people — a paradigm that creates safety not through additional police, jails, or prisons, but through addressing root causes and preventing harms

before they occur. These critical investments in community health, non-carceral crisis response, violence prevention, safe and affordable housing, economic stability, education, youth and families, community infrastructure, and other community needs are only a start toward the bold transformation that our communities require. But the following policies would represent a critical step in this direction. Moreover, they could begin building a foundation for the safe and equitable future that *all* of our people deserve.

1. COMMUNITY HEALTH & PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Investing in preventive approaches is easily our most effective, long-lasting way to keep individuals, families, and communities safe. When we invest in violence intervention, non-carceral crisis response, access to voluntary care, peer counseling, and improvements to our public health workforce, we make our communities stronger, healthier, and safer overall. We also save billions in avoided costs, with nearly every study evaluating preventative measures finding that benefits far outweigh costs.

Building on this evidence base, our organizations support bills that directly reinforce community health and preventative safety through violence intervention, non-carceral crisis response, access to voluntary care, peer counseling, non-carceral approaches to traffic safety, and improvements to our public health workforce. Over this coming cycle, specific priorities include:

- **Creating a safety infrastructure rooted in public health & prevention.** We support legislation — such as [The People's Response Act](#) — which would create a new “Division on Community Safety” within the Department of Health and Human Services, then use this Division to fund evidence-informed interventions that advance safety outside of policing structures, bolster preventative, non-carceral safety programming, and otherwise treat safety as a public health issue.
- **Making paradigm-shifting investments in violence intervention.** We support bills — such as the [Break the Cycle of Violence Act](#) — which would create a new Office of Community Violence Intervention (CVI) within the Department of Health and Human Services, then use this office to support CVI workforce development and to fund CVI programs that are fully non-carceral in nature.
- **Providing robust support for non-carceral crisis response.** We back proposals — such as the [Mental Health Justice Act](#) — which would support state governments, local governments, and community-based organizations to operate fully non-carceral

² By “evidence-informed,” we mean shaped and guided by evidence surrounding programs and interventions that demonstrably enhance safety goals, including evidence that is quantitative, qualitative, rooted in lived and community experience, or otherwise building on programs that are achieving tangible impact on the ground.

programs that train and dispatch mental health professionals, not police officers, to respond during mental health and related crises.

- **Facilitating deep investments into community health workers & local care.** We champion measures that would leverage federal grants and health programs, such as Medicaid and Medicare, to recruit and train CHWs, peer counselors, and healthcare professionals who serve community needs, conduct outreach, and provide physical, mental health, and substance use care to underserved populations. We would also support measures that support this community safety workforce through scholarships, loan forgiveness, creative partnerships, and other forms of career incentives.

2. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY & HOUSING SECURITY

Financial and housing security are similarly critical for safety — not only because these investments significantly reduce violent crime, but also because they address a major risk to both personal safety and flourishing. These benefits accrue to the entire community, but especially to our most vulnerable community members, including those who are homeless, houseless, facing situations of domestic violence or abuse, or otherwise struggling to survive or make ends meet.

To begin addressing these basic needs, we strongly champion bills that address youth employment, create pathways to high-quality jobs, expand affordable housing, allocate more capital and operating support for public housing, fund homelessness prevention, and provide supportive housing to our most marginalized communities. Over this coming cycle, specific priorities include:

- **Channeling major investments into supportive and emergency housing.** We back legislation — such as the [Housing for All Act](#) — which would make significant investments in the National Housing Trust Fund, supportive housing for people who have disabilities and older people, and an emergency solutions grant that funds programs like rapid rehousing, unhoused crisis intervention teams, and eviction protection programs.
- **Expanding targeted investments to prevent homelessness.** We support preventative programs — such as the [Eviction Crisis Act / Stable Families Act](#) — which would establish a permanent program that provides emergency rental assistance to help families facing a financial shock avoid eviction and homelessness.
- **Building a new contract for providing rental assistance and affordable housing.** We support ambitious measures — such as the [Ending Homelessness Act](#) — which would establish a universal voucher program, ban “source of income” housing discrimination, and invest in building more homes that are affordable to those households possessing the greatest needs.
- **Providing robust support for summer jobs, apprenticeship programs, and other forms of youth employment.** Following the robust link between youth employment and violence reduction, we also support proposals — such as the [Creating Pathways for Youth Employment Act](#), the [Connecting Youth to Jobs Act](#), and the [National](#)

[Apprenticeship Act](#) — which would help states, local governments, Indian tribes, and community organizations provide apprenticeship programs, subsidized programs of summer jobs, and other employment opportunities to at-risk youth.

3. YOUTH, FAMILIES & COMMUNITY SPACES

Investing in youth and families is another evidence-informed tool for making communities safer, more equitable, and more stable, while helping to end a school-to-prison pipeline that has destroyed the futures of far too many young people. Meanwhile, [research has long shown](#) that basic investments in community spaces, third spaces, and the built design of our surroundings — in streetlights, parks, road design, public transportation, and addressing vacant lots — has significant implications for community safety.³

Based on this evidence, our organizations support policies that invest in high-quality early childhood and K-12 education, Title I and other educational investments in low-income schools, wraparound school-based supports, youth enrichment programs, neighborhood improvement projects, family supports, park redevelopment, streetlights, environmental-clean up, and other community-led solutions. Over this coming cycle, specific priorities include:

- **Investments in school resources that support youth physical, mental, and emotional health.** We support legislation — such as the [Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act](#) and the [Ending PUSHOUT Act](#) — which would invest in school districts that wish to ban discriminatory discipline and other practices, as well as hire personnel like counselors, social workers, nurses, and other trauma-informed personnel as an alternative to school police.
- **Enhanced support for enrichment programming & full-service community schools.** We support bills — such as the [Full-Service Community School Expansion Act](#) — which would expand much-needed resources for wraparound services that holistically meet student needs. We would also support policies that invest more deeply in enrichment programming, including access to art, music, drama, sports, civic engagement, and other enrichment activities.
- **Financial support for families & children.** We back policies that would make permanent a bold expansion of the Child Tax Credit or a child benefit, thereby

³ Culyba, A. J., Jacoby, S. F., Richmond, T. S., Fein, J. A., Hohl, B. C., & Branas, C. C. (2016). Modifiable neighborhood features associated with adolescent homicide. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 170(5), 473.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.4697>

guaranteeing all young people and families the resources to have a safe, healthy, and equitable start.

- **Safety-focused investments into the built environment.** Finally, we would support

policies that help neighborhoods bolster community infrastructure so as to further safety goals, such as through grants that would fund participatory processes for building parks, sidewalks, streetlights, and other infrastructure for community safety.

This agenda is only a downpayment on the safety investments that our communities urgently need. Moreover, not every signatory listed has formally endorsed every bill here. However, this agenda shows the type of policies that could move us toward our ultimate safety goals. It also represents an acknowledgment that, where safety is concerned, the stakes are too high *not* to follow what research, evidence, and our frontline communities say is required.

It is time for a safety agenda that finally puts people and communities first — and these policies are a critical step toward making this broadly shared vision a reality.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of our budget priorities. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the appropriate staff to discuss these issues at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, or would like to schedule a meeting to discuss any issue mentioned here, please contact Thea Sebastian, Policy Director, Civil Rights Corps, at thea@civilrightscorps.org, and Sakira Cook, Vice President of Campaigns, Policy & Government Affairs, at sakira.cook@colorofchange.org.

Signed,

Action St. Louis
Advancement Project
American Friends Service Committee
Arkansas Justice Reform Coalition
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Benevolence Farm
Big Cities Health Coalition
Black Liberation Party
Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation
Black Lives Matter Grassroots
BLM Long Beach - Grassroots
Center for American Progress
Center for Policing Equity (CPE)
Civil Rights Corps
Color of Change
Community Defense of East Tennessee
Death Penalty Action
Death Penalty Alternatives for Arizona
Death Penalty Focus
Drug Policy Alliance
El Sol Neighborhood Educational Center

Elephant Circle
Epicenter of Worship
Equal Justice USA Evangelical Network
Equity and Transformation (EAT)
Faith and Works Statewide Collective
Florida Rising
Freedom, Inc.
Future Coalition
Human Impact Partners (HIP)
Human Rights Watch
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
JMACforFamilies
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Local Progress
March for Our Lives
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Mass Liberation Arizona
MomsRising
Movement for Black Lives
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Council of Churches
National Employment Law Project
National Immigration Project (NIPNLG)
National Juvenile Justice Network
National Perinatal Association
National Urban League, Inc.
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
One Love Global Inc.
Partners In Health
People's Coalition for Safety and Freedom
Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative
Policing and Social Justice Project
Pregnancy Justice
Pretrial Justice Institute
Prevention Institute
Public Justice Center
Reale Justice Network
School's Out Washington
Supermajority
The Bail Project
The Consortium
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
UltraViolet Action

Unitarian Universalist Association
Vera Institute of Justice
Washington Defender Association
WAVE Educational Fund
Witness to Innocence