

COMMUNITY SAFETY AGENDA

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa De Lauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 16, 2024

Dear Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Members of the House Appropriations Committee, and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

On behalf of the Community Safety Working Group and the more than 80 undersigned organizations, we urge you to advance a Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations package that prioritizes genuine safety in our communities — a package that adopts a public health approach to safety, while strengthening opportunities for individuals, families, and communities.¹

Adopting a public health approach to safety means treating violence as preventable, not inevitable, and addressing root issues through comprehensive, evidence-informed¹ interventions that invest in tailored community priorities and needs. These investments include prioritizing access to food and clean water, healthcare, affordable housing, economic security, quality education, social connection, and other necessities. **To that end, we urge Congress to support robust, multi-faceted investments across many areas and sectors that holistically increase safety overall while having a proven connection to reducing and preventing violence.**

¹ The Community Safety Working Group is a collection of more than 70 civil rights, public health, racial justice, housing, violence prevention, economic justice, and allied organizations nationwide dedicated to building safety that works for all communities. Since releasing our first agenda in 2022, our goal has been to advance a new paradigm that invests in people and communities, not police and prisons, to keep people safe. We pursue this mission through federal appropriations, federal legislation, and support to grassroots organizations that are advancing this work at the state and local levels. For more information, please see www.communitysafety.us.

Our country is at a pivotal moment regarding how we approach safety. We can reinforce the failed policies of the past *or* we can chart a path forward that embraces evidence, the lived experiences and leadership of communities, and the needs of those who have been most impacted by criminal-legal violence and systemic disinvestment. This Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations agenda embraces a comprehensive vision of safety — one that our community of criminal-legal advocates, public health advocates, grassroots organizations, and allies believe would create real safety in all our communities. In particular, we would like to underscore five priorities that are especially critical to advancing safety goals.

FY2025 APPROPRIATIONS SPOTLIGHTS

“Division on Community Safety” at HHS

Report language to move toward establishing a “Division on Community Safety” within HHS, as well as grant language to fund community safety programming

Mobile Crisis Response Teams

Increased HHS funding for grant programs that encourage and expand mobile crisis response teams

Community Violence Intervention

Robust funding for CDC grant programs focused on violence intervention and prevention

Positive School Climate Investments

Money within School Safety National Activities for a “School Climate and Safety Pilot” to fund school climate and safety plans

Youth BUILD & Workforce Pathways for Youth

Robust funding to programs like YouthBUILD, Reentry Employment Opportunities, and Workforce Pathways for Youth

Community Health, Violence Prevention & Crisis Response

When it comes to breaking cycles of violence and preventing harm *before* it occurs, [community violence intervention](#), [non-carceral crisis response](#), and investments in [community health](#) are some of our most effective tools. Over the years, evidence has shown that programs of violence prevention and non-carceral crisis response — along with other public health approaches to

community safety² — dramatically improve safety outcomes, even though they have received far less funding than traditional criminal-legal approaches.

The following priorities represent much-needed investments in community-centered, public health approaches to safety, while creating the institutional infrastructure to make these investments sustainable, equitable, and community-driven moving forward.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITIES

- We urge Congress to prioritize **robust funding for CDC grant programs** focused on [violence intervention and prevention](#), neighborhood mediation programs, and safe passage to school programs.
- We urge increased funding to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to fund **grant programs that encourage and expand [mobile crisis response teams](#)** that serve as community-based alternatives to armed police interventions, as well as programs that support community safety initiatives.
- We urge Congress to **eliminate the use of federal funds that incentivize law enforcement to engage in [traffic enforcement](#)**.
- We request report language to **move toward establishing a “Division on Community Safety” within the Department of Health and Human Services**— a key innovation within *The People’s Response Act*, as well as grant funding that would help communities begin implementing the evidence-informed safety programs that the Division would ultimately run.
- We request **pilot grant funding to help communities make evidence-informed built design improvements** — including park redevelopment, green spaces, streetlights, and community centers — that would enhance community safety.
- We request **robust funding to the CDC’s Community Health Worker (CHW) Grant Program**.

² A public health approach to community safety includes several defining features, beginning with an acknowledgment that certain communities disproportionately experience violence, and that this inequality is [rooted in racism, economic disparity, and other forms of structural oppression](#). This means that investments should be prioritized first in communities that experience the greatest burdens of violence, structural disinvestment, racism, and oppression. Informed by local data and context, a [public health approach](#) acts on the root causes of violence across communities by developing [comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that increase community protective factors and decrease the risk of violence](#). Importantly, a public health approach is deeply collaborative and community-driven, extending beyond the purview of governmental public health. It brings together [community members most impacted by violence](#) with representatives of different sectors — including healthcare, public health, schools, parks, housing, education, social services, youth development, faith-based institutions, local businesses, and others — to collectively implement strategies based on the priorities and needs of their community.

- Finally, we request a set aside of **10% of the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant funding for prevention activities.**

Economic Opportunity & Housing Security

Stable, high-quality, affordable housing is a cornerstone of safety. Increasing access to affordable housing by building more low-income housing units [has significantly reduced violent crime](#) while more specialized housing supports — such as [supportive housing](#) upon re-entry — have been found to reduce re-arrest and re-incarceration rates.

Economic stability is similarly effective at enhancing safety goals. Not only is this stability necessary for individuals to meet their physical and psychological needs, [research](#) has shown how vital it is for preventing violence. In particular, summer jobs for youth have [been found](#) to reduce violent crime by as much as 43 percent — with long-lasting, positive effects.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITIES

- We **oppose any cuts to federal investments in affordable housing and homelessness programs**, and we **oppose any policies to limit access to these programs.**
- We request **full funding to renew and expand Housing Choice Vouchers** to reach at least an additional 200,000 people, along with full funding to support public housing capital repairs.
- In addition, we advocate robust funding to programs like **Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) Youth, Workforce Pathways for Youth, Youthbuild, Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), apprenticeships, and increased funding for Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) (and an increase to \$40 million for the set-aside for competitive grants to national and regional intermediaries [and maintaining the FY 23 report language prioritizing recognized expertise, employer partnerships, and wraparound services])**, which provide necessary investments in the economic success of future generation — and opportunities for successful reintegration and stability to people who have returned home after incarceration. We further recommend ensuring that these dollars particularly target youth who are most at risk of criminal-legal involvement or other potential harms.

Youth, Families & Community Spaces

Investing in children, youth, education, and community spaces, especially by robustly funding schools, afterschool programs, and education opportunities in under-resourced areas, is essential for both boosting the economy and making communities safer and more stable. Increasing educational attainment [decreases](#) the likelihood that a youth will become ensnared in

the criminal-legal system. Improving [school quality](#) reduces the probability youth will become involved in serious crimes or experience incarceration. Investments to [reduce school socioeconomic segregation](#) and to diversify the educator workforce are important components as socioeconomic school segregation may increase crime while a more [diverse educator workforce](#) may reduce the disproportionate disciplinary referrals of students of color. And increasing investments in counselors, [social and emotional learning](#), and [wraparound services](#) — while reducing the use of school police — will help end the school-to-prison pipeline while helping every child thrive inside *and* outside the classroom.

APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITIES

- We request increased funding for early care and education, including **Head Start & Early Head Start and Preschool Development Grants** to help ensure families' access to early childhood services.
- We request increased funding for **Title I, Part A** to provide more resources to provide youth better education opportunities in under-resourced communities.
- We urge increased funding to foster diversity in schools and in the educator workforce through the **Fostering Diverse Schools Program and the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program**.
- We urge increased funding for programs that will improve school and community supports for youth safety and well-being, including **Project Prevent, Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grants, School-Based Mental Health Services Grants, and non-law enforcement initiatives under Project AWARE**.
- We request increased funding for **Full-Service Community Schools, Promise Neighborhoods, and 21st Century Learning Centers** to ensure students and their families have access to services that support well-being and reduce barriers to learning.

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 follow up, please contact Tara Stutsman, Senior Campaign Strategist, ACLU Justice Division (tstutsman@aclu.org) or Thea Sebastian, Executive Director, The Futures Institute (thea@futures-institute.org).

Sincerely,

**THE
FUTURES
INSTITUTE**

**MARCH
FOR OUR
LIVES** 

M4BL

**COLOR
OF
CHANGE**

ACLU

BEND THE ARC
jewish action



 The Leadership
Conference

 National
Urban League

 **Committee
for Children**

A Bella LaFemme Society
Advancement Project
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Friends Service Committee
ArchCity Defenders
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Black Leadership Action Coalition of Kentucky (BLACK)
Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Civil Rights Corps
Coalition on Human Needs
Color Of Change
Committee for Children
Community Defense of East Tennessee
Death Penalty Alternatives for Arizona
EJUSA Evangelical Network
Equal Justice USA
EqualHealth's Campaign Against Racism
Essie Justice Group
Faith and Works
Florida Rising
FREE Arizona
Freedom to Thrive
Frey Evaluation, LLC
The Futures Institute
Grammy's Place
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Hudson/Catskill Housing Coalition
IamNegrx

Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice
Imagine Black
In Defense of Black Lives
InnovateEDU
Institute for Civic Education in Vietnam (ICEVN)
Japanese American Citizens League
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Local Progress
Louisiana Center for Health Equity
March For Our Lives
Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
Metcalfe Park Community Bridges, Inc
MomsRising
Movement for Black Lives
Movement for Family Power
Muslims for Just Futures
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Black Women's Justice Institute
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Council of Churches
National Immigration Project
National Urban League
National Youth Justice Network
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Parable of the Sower Intentional Community Cooperative
Partners In Health
People's Advocacy Institute
People's Justice Council
Pittsburgh Black Worker Center
Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative
Pretrial Justice Institute
Prevention Institute
Prison Policy Initiative
Protest Organize Participate (POP)
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Public Justice Center
Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) at the University of MD, Baltimore
Safer Together
Saratoga Black Lives Matter
Showing Up for Racial Justice
Southern Center for Human Rights
The Forum for Youth Investment

Tribe of Eli Mentors
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ
United Women of Color
University of Illinois at Chicago
Washington Defender Association
WAVE Educational Fund
We Are Revolutionary
Women Watch Afrika
Women with Broken Heals
Zelma Friends of North Houston