



**National
Urban League**

**Written Statement of
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National Urban League**

**The Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
*Reimagining Public Safety in the COVID-19 Era***

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Chairwoman Jackson Lee, Ranking Member Biggs, and Members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on *Reimagining Public Safety in the COVID-19 Era*. My name is Jerika Richardson, and I join you in my capacity as the Senior Vice President for Equitable Justice and Strategic Initiatives at the National Urban League, where I lead the organization's advocacy and strategic work on civic engagement, police reform, criminal justice reform, and other justice-related work. I bring you greetings on behalf of our President and CEO Marc Morial.

I come before you as a former journalist, reporting the stories of communities and families affected by the criminal justice system; as a former senior spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Southern District of New York; as a former Chief of Staff for the Office of the Counsel to the Mayor of New York City, and as the former Deputy Executive Director and Senior Advisor and Secretary to the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board – the nation's largest independent police oversight agency.

I have witnessed the testimony of people on the ground as well as the law enforcement community, municipal executives, and those entrusted with executing the law in pursuit of a just society. And now, as a member of a historic legacy civil rights organization, my previous roles converge on the pressing issues we are here to discuss today.

Founded in 1910, the National Urban League has long worked to lift barriers to opportunity for Black people and People of Color in this country and find solutions to keep our communities safe by advocating for a more just criminal justice system.

In the face of a pandemic and the second wave of the Civil Rights Movement, it was clear to us that a new framework was needed to rethink the way we handle public safety. In response to this need, the National Urban League released its 21 Pillars for Redefining Public Safety and Restoring Community Trust. Our 21 Pillars presents a plan to transform policing and move us closer to a more equitable and just system.

In developing the pillars, we consulted with policing experts and activists, conducted research on evidence-based practices, and, most importantly, incorporated direct feedback from our 91 grassroots affiliates by conducting a comprehensive survey which covered all aspects of policing and captured critical information about what is happening in our communities.

Our 21 Pillars are focused by 5 themes that redefine public safety from the ground up. Our first theme recognizes that, first and foremost, community trust must be restored for true change to occur through truth, reconciliation, and empowerment. Theme 2 acknowledges that community trust goes hand-in-hand with holding those accountable who have been entrusted with the authority to protect and serve.

Our third theme emphasizes that we must work from the inside out to redesign public safety by uprooting divisive policing policies. While we recognize that change takes time, we also recognize that we cannot afford to wait. Therefore, we advocate for urgency in transparency, reporting standards, and data collection in our fourth theme.

Finally, we highlight that standards for hiring, evaluation, and promotions in public safety must be improved in theme 5.

Our nation is now facing a critical moment when political divisiveness has stalled the conversion of the social justice activism of 2020 to legislative and policy change. Community-police relations continue to sour as the volume of guns in circulation has increased. These issues must be addressed together, and this plan sets a roadmap for how we can address them today.

In order to break the cycle of violence we must: support well-established community-based gun violence intervention programs with federal, state, and local funding; break the "Iron Pipeline"; repeal federal restrictions that prevent tracing "crime guns" to help solve crime; and fund programs addressing the root causes of violence in the community, including healthcare and mental health intervention, survivor and victim's services, family trauma services, intimate partner violence prevention, and community justice action funds.

The National Urban League will do everything it can to break the cycle of harm in our communities. We will be hosting convenings in the next year with stakeholders from every background to discuss what else communities can do to address these pressing issues.

Thank you - I look forward to this discussion and your questions on our 21 Pillars and work to curb violence in our communities.