

Crime-Prevention Efforts Face Setbacks After Federal Cuts

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The Trump administration's recently passed budget bill [massively increases](#) money for immigration enforcement, based in part on the myth that immigrants are responsible for increases in violent crime. This is misguided on two fronts: There is no evidence that immigrants are responsible for trends in crime. And [violent crime](#) has been falling since [around 2022](#).

But even as the administration defends its immigration crackdown in the name of public safety, the Department of Justice has quietly ceased funding real solutions that make communities safer, such as community violence prevention initiatives and partnerships between law enforcement and nonprofit organizations. It's a retreat from longtime law enforcement priorities that upends proven, vital strategies that reduce crime.

The DOJ in April [canceled](#) \$820 million in [grants](#) supporting more than 550 organizations across 48 states and territories working on issues such as violence prevention, victims' services, and criminal justice research. These cuts were [unexpected](#) and unprecedented, marking a shocking break from the department's long-standing support for state and local criminal justice work. Many of the cuts set back work on bipartisan policy priorities, such as assisting victims of crime,

enhancing treatment for substance use and mental health, and improving reentry outcomes. These consequences are difficult to reconcile with the administration's claim that it is prioritizing public safety.

DOJ provided grantees with cryptic information about why their grants were terminated and whether they could be restored — and some have been, with little explanation. The lack of transparency has prompted confusion and instability. Indeed, earlier this month, a federal judge [rebuked](#) the grant terminations as “unquestionably arbitrary” and “shameful,” and he lamented his lack of legal authority to reverse them. The cuts, the court concluded, are “likely to harm communities and individuals vulnerable to crime and violence. No federal agency, especially the Department of Justice, should conduct itself in such manner.”

Over many years, DOJ grantmaking has played a crucial role in protecting public safety at the state and local levels. It is a key but underappreciated part of the nation's public safety infrastructure. This analysis is part of a series exploring how federal cuts have hampered promising crime-prevention strategies — harms that could be exacerbated by other planned cuts to the DOJ's grant programs.

The United States does not have a single criminal justice system. Instead, thousands of local, state, and federal agencies pursue their own missions on behalf of communities with unique challenges. Most arrests, prosecutions, and incarcerations occur at the state and local levels. State prisons, for example, incarcerate more than [five times as many people](#) as the [federal prison system](#).

Federal grant programs help coordinate and support this diverse landscape. Many stem from the Office of Justice Programs, the DOJ's largest grantmaking office. Since 2021, the office has made 14,686 [grant awards](#) to local law enforcement agencies, totaling \$15.5 billion.

For the past [40 years](#), spanning Republican and Democratic presidential administrations, the Office of Justice Programs has incubated justice system improvements, connected public safety and justice practitioners within and across jurisdictions, and served as a valued partner to state, local, and tribal jurisdictions. Its grants help to fill gaps in local infrastructure and surge resources and expertise to communities with the greatest need. They support knowledge sharing and peer-learning networks for local governments. They also offer opportunities to pilot promising programs and incentivize national replication of successful local justice efforts in a manner that respects — and advances — federalism and the role of state justice systems.

The DOJ's April funding cuts decimated this work. According to a [series](#) of [analyses](#) by the nonpartisan Council on Criminal Justice, most of the cuts targeted nonprofit organizations, including many that work in partnership with law enforcement to enhance public safety by interrupting and preventing crime, responding to calls for service involving mental health or substance use issues, assisting crime victims, providing appropriate treatment and services to individuals in community or correctional settings, and facilitating post-prison reentry into society.

Some of the most troubling cuts were to programs specifically designed to prevent violent crime. This includes the defunding of successful initiatives to develop plans for reducing violent crime and bolster partnerships among law enforcement agencies, community groups, and researchers. These programs have historically enjoyed strong bipartisan support from politicians, community leaders, and law enforcement.

Law Enforcement Partnerships

For example, the Justice Department cut \$3.5 million from [Project Safe Neighborhood](#), a [successful](#) national crime-reduction initiative launched in 2001 under President George W. Bush. The program [brings together](#) law enforcement officials, community stakeholders, and researchers to develop effective crime-reduction strategies customized to address the most urgent violent crime problems in each federal judicial district. It has been frequently touted as a signature crime-reduction strategy (including by the [first Trump administration](#)). April's cuts targeted training and technical assistance for Project Safe Neighborhood, which helps implement programs and share expertise across jurisdictions. The DOJ now plans to reshape the initiative to [focus on immigration enforcement](#) and combating human and drug trafficking, doubling down on [debunked myths](#) incorrectly linking immigration and crime.

The department also reduced funding for the [Public Safety Partnership](#), piloted just over a decade ago and endorsed by the first Trump administration. This initiative provides department-wide training, technical assistance, and other resources to support specialized, data-driven plans to address the unique factors driving violent crime in more than [67 local jurisdictions](#). Participating jurisdictions have reported impressive progress in crime reduction: Indianapolis saw a [30 percent increase](#) in homicide clearance rates. Oxford, Alabama, reported a [61 percent drop](#) in violent crime.

Rural Communities

Communities of [all types](#), from big cities to suburbs to rural areas, saw crime increase in the early 2020s. Yet the [Rural Violent Crime Reduction Initiative](#) lost more than \$13 million in this round of cuts. It was launched in 2021 in response to the violent crime challenges facing rural communities, often amidst budget and staffing constraints in geographically dispersed areas. The initiative assists rural law enforcement agencies in expanding victim services and developing, implementing, and measuring strategies to reduce violent crime. It also provides subsidiary grants directly to local law enforcement.

The stark decline in federal funding threatens programs in rural communities already strapped for resources. For example, the Union County, Oregon, district attorney's office relied on [funds](#) from the initiative to hire an investigator focused on sexual assault, intimate partner violence, child abuse, and violent crimes involving seniors and adults with disabilities. The investigator also

worked with government agencies and social services entities to enhance services for victims. The Lyons Police Department in Kansas lost [funding](#) for a recently opened county child advocacy center that conducted specialized interviews with child sex abuse victims.

The Shawano, Wisconsin, police department [funded](#) a detective position dedicated exclusively to investigating violent crime and narcotics. The additional capacity to enhance crime-prevention efforts, patrols, and community partnerships resulted in increased narcotics seizures that removed dangerous illegal substances from the community.

Similarly, Vernon County, Wisconsin, used [funding](#) from the Rural Violent Crime Reduction Initiative to support its Help End Abuse Response Team program that promotes coordination between community volunteers and law enforcement in responding to domestic violence incidents. The funding also provided support for victim services, training for local sexual assault nurse examiners so victims would no longer need to travel for examinations, and resources for local clinicians to run batterers groups to reduce cycles of violence.

Community-Based Strategies

Massive cuts totaling [\\$169 million](#) targeted community-based safety grants, the majority of which supported [community violence intervention programs](#). Such initiatives are a [relatively new](#) but promising way to reduce violence, relying on community leaders to identify, respond to, and de-escalate scenarios that might otherwise turn violent. Examples include “violence interrupters,” in which outreach workers intervene to personally defuse conflicts, and hospital-based programs that support victims while breaking cycles of retribution. They have also benefited from significant government investment. Aside from DOJ grantmaking, the Biden administration used the [American Rescue Plan](#) to direct funds to build and scale new local-level responses to crime. The [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#) contributed further funding.

The DOJ’s cuts reverse that process while undermining the economies of scale that community violence intervention groups need to survive. For one, federal funding helps build the capacity of the community violence prevention field, facilitating knowledge sharing and the dissemination of best practices and professional expertise. Some small but promising organizations, for example, may lack the staffing or resources to apply for federal money. Grants to intermediary organizations can [bridge that gap](#), as they can identify and sub-grant to grassroots community organizations. In other cases, umbrella groups can coordinate research evaluations, trainings, and technical assistance. Chicago’s Metropolitan Family Services, which operates a “training center” for professionals involved in community violence intervention, is an example of an organization that provides both direct services and hands-on assistance to the field. The current administration writes off these umbrella groups as inefficient go-betweens — a misunderstanding that ignores how the field benefits from networked, complementary organizations.

In another case, Newark, New Jersey, now faces cuts to its network of nonprofits, [researchers](#), and [government partners](#) focused on building safer communities. The Newark Community Street team employs people with deep knowledge of neighborhood-level relationships to respond to and break up potentially dangerous interactions and counsel people at risk of violence. Federal funding totaling \$5 million across four grants allowed the team to expand its work into different parts of the city, follow key networks of people, and embed outreach workers in local schools to counsel at-risk young people.

April's cuts forced Newark Community Street to lay off roughly a dozen people, functionally ending those expansions. Fewer staff means fewer response teams, degrading the group's ability to safely respond to as many high-risk incidents as may call for its expertise. It also means the remaining staff lost access to departed staffers' [personal networks](#). While it's hard to predict how these cuts might affect public safety, violence-prevention initiatives supported by the Office of Justice Programs formed a major part of the federal response to the post-pandemic [surges](#) in violent crime. And there's good reason to believe they worked.

After spiking in the first years of the decade, murder and violent crime have been [falling](#) since roughly 2022. Today, murder and violent crime rates are likely [near or below record lows](#). The reasons for this sudden reversal are hotly debated and will remain so for years. But one early theory points to a [surge in government investment](#) in community-based safety strategies, reversing the [disinvestment](#) many communities saw [during the pandemic](#). Research has in fact [shown](#) that violence-prevention programs can reduce crime, lending credence to this theory. One evaluation of the gun violence reduction initiative READI Chicago, for example, showed [reductions](#) in some key metrics tied to serious forms of violence.

To be sure, research into these subjects is ongoing, and further study will be needed in the coming years. But what we do know underscores the value of government support for community safety strategies to [supplement or complement policing](#). A sudden withdrawal of federal support risks unraveling these programs even as research is beginning to document their value. Worse, many of these investments went to communities that have [long struggled with violence](#) and other forms of disadvantage, and they are especially in need of continued investment.

Unfortunately, the DOJ's April cuts may not be the last or most dramatic ones. The administration's proposed [budget](#) for the 2026 fiscal year eliminates funding for many critical public safety and justice programs. This includes the elimination of community violence intervention and reduced funding for community policing, domestic violence and sexual assault services, and other violence-prevention programs. The budget does propose additional funding for some of the programs whose grants were recently terminated, including the Rural Violent Crime Reduction Initiative, but even that underscores the arbitrary nature of these cuts.

Lawmakers should think seriously about the likely consequences of withdrawing this funding. Delaying or reducing new federal public safety and justice grant funding has immediate and lasting harms for communities across the country, especially on the heels of the deep cuts to

existing grants. They should also inquire into the DOJ's plans for distributing the funds Congress has already allocated for the 2025 fiscal year and ensure that they are used consistent with congressional intent. The department normally posts solicitations for grant programs early in the fiscal year. As of the date of publication, however, the Office of Justice Programs has posted almost no solicitations for 2025.

Given the broad, bipartisan support for many of the slashed public safety and justice grants, legislators of both major parties, as well as partners in law enforcement, affected community organizations, and state and local government, should advocate directly for their reversal and restoration. These partnerships should also help make the case for continued investments in these core public safety and justice programs through the ongoing DOJ budget appropriations process and beyond.