

Testimony of Nancy La Vigne, PhD
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Judiciary
Subcommittee on Oversight
Hearing on “Restoring Law and Order to High-Crime U.S. Cities”
November 19, 2025

Chairman Van Drew, Ranking Member Crockett, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Let me begin by acknowledging the profound pain of those who have lost loved ones to violence, including the mother of the fallen officer who will speak today. Every life lost is a tragedy. Public safety is paramount, and despite what divides us, I believe we all share a common goal: safer communities for everyone.

Violent crime rates remain higher than any of us would like. But it’s also true that in most cities, violent crime has declined dramatically over the past three years after spiking during the pandemic. According to the nonpartisan Council on Criminal Justice analysis of a sample of three dozen cities that post their incident-level data online in a timely manner, homicides were 14% lower in the first half of 2025 compared to the first half of 2019, the year before the COVID pandemic. Reported carjacking and motor vehicle theft, which spiked from 2020 to 2023 have also fallen back below or near pre-pandemic levels. Reported incidents of shoplifting—another offense that has captured attention in Congress—increased during the pandemic but then fell in the first half of 2025 below the 2019 level.ⁱ

These declines build on historic drops nationwide in both violent crime and homicide. The violent crime rate as reported to law enforcement was 53% lower in 2024 than at its peak in 1991, and the reported property crime rate was 67% lower than its peak in 1980.ⁱⁱ Are there cities that buck this downward trend? Absolutely. And even among those with a positive trajectory there is more we could and should be doing.

I speak to you as someone who has spent more than three decades studying crime and evaluating criminal justice interventions, including as Director of the National Institute of Justice. I’ve worked in close partnership with dozens of law enforcement agencies and corrections departments to evaluate technologies and programs designed to prevent crime and improve safety. My guiding principle has always been simple: invest in what works - and avoid or discontinue what doesn’t.

In terms of the administration’s tactic to deploy the National Guard and other federal law enforcement in select U.S. cities, it’s very likely that it will suppress crime in the short term. In fact, the research is clear that increasing the number of officers on the street can deter crime. But much depends on who the officers are, how they are trained, how they are deployed and used in each city, how they interact with community members. And let’s be honest about why crime drops owing to a massive influx of armed officers. When cities are portrayed as “under siege,” residents stay home, businesses close, and visitors stay away. Fewer people on the streets means fewer opportunities for crime. The creation of what is essentially a police state in targeted cities

is not a sustainable solution, undermines the credibility of local law enforcement, and it comes with grave unintended consequences for traditional American values and freedoms.

First, imported officers lack local knowledge: who the key players are, which community leaders can help, and what partnerships already exist – all essential ingredients for successful community policing. Second, bringing in outsiders who don't know community norms erodes trust. When trust breaks down, law-abiding residents are less likely to report crimes, serve as witnesses, or collaborate on crime prevention.ⁱⁱⁱ This can be particularly harmful for local police-community relations, as residents don't distinguish between local law enforcement and those who have parachuted in. Third, with all due respect to the National Guard, they are not trained for civilian policing. Police in most U.S. cities are trained in how to interact with people who are behaving disruptively and how to safely subdue uncooperative subjects, including identifying and de-escalating those who may appear threatening because they are experiencing a mental health crisis. This includes training programs like the Police Executive Research Forum's Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) training, which is designed to help officers de-escalate volatile situations. Evaluators found that ICAT reduced use-of-force incidents by 28%, citizen complaints by 26%, and officer injuries by 36%. That kind of specialized training matters.^{iv}

To be clear, there are many ways that federal law enforcement can help partner with cities to reduce crime. Federal partnerships between DEA, FBI, ATF and local law enforcement are essential. They can aid in disrupting the trafficking of firearms, drugs, and humans; support the investigation and prosecution of those committing federal offenses; support the tracing of weapons; and partner on anti-terrorism task forces. These are all important partnerships that should be valued and supported by local leadership in cities throughout the country.

One example of a federal-local crime reduction partnership is [Project Safe Neighborhoods](#), which was established by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2001 and supports U.S. Attorneys' Offices to work in partnership with local law enforcement and other community partners to reduce violent crime. PSN has three pillars: (1) community engagement; (2) prevention and intervention; and (3) focused and strategic enforcement to hold perpetrators accountable. A systematic review of twelve independent PSN evaluations found that all but two detected meaningful reductions in violent crime.^v PSN is a prime example of federal prosecutors working with local law enforcement and stakeholders to assess problems and work together on solutions. Sadly, this administration has directed US Attorneys to divert from this evidence-based program to fund immigration-based prosecutions.^{vi}

We should ask ourselves: do we want taxpayer dollars spent on strategies that research shows are counterproductive? Or do we want to invest in approaches proven to work? During my tenure at NIJ, we learned that the most effective interventions are those developed and implemented in partnership with local stakeholders: law enforcement, business owners, service providers, and community members. This same strategy is embodied in the nonpartisan Council on Criminal Justice's Violent Crime Working Group's *Ten Essential Actions to Reduce Violence*, developed by a mix of law enforcement, community leaders, and researchers.^{vii} The strategy prescribes a collaborative approach focused on high-risk people in high-crime neighborhoods with a comprehensive blend of accountability, enforcement and prevention. Such "focused deterrence" efforts are well established as effective means of violence reduction.^{viii}

In my own city of Newark, initiatives like the Newark Community Street Team (NCST) have helped drive violent crime down dramatically by disrupting relationship-based disputes from turning violent through coordination with community partners, city agencies, service providers, and policy organizations in partnership with law enforcement. From the launch of NCST activities in 2015 to the present, homicides in Newark have plummeted from 106 to 37 in 2024, a 65% decrease.^{ix} Unfortunately, in April of this year, this administration cut federal funding for the Newark Community Street Team, along with funding for dozens of similar community violence interrupter programs throughout the country.

Federal partnerships and funding can go a long way to reducing violence in America's communities. And here's something equally important: we can't know what works without research—and we can't scale what works without sharing that knowledge with practitioners. Federal investments in research and evaluation are critical. Platforms like CrimeSolutions.gov, which rates the effectiveness of programs based on rigorous evidence, give police chiefs, mayors, and community leaders the tools they need to make informed decisions. DOJ has ceased funding for this valuable resource, hanging state and local law enforcement out to dry. Cutting research funding means flying blind - and potentially wasting taxpayer dollars when interventions fail.

Finally, if we truly care about victims, we must fund programs that support them and prevent re-victimization. Yet this administration has terminated grants for victim services and prevention programs, canceling over 550 grants worth at least about \$820 million, including close to \$72 million specifically for victim support.^x These grant terminations have stunned the victim services field and have created widespread concern about the future of victim services. Programs that were eliminated include hospital-based victim services where victim advocates are embedded in emergency rooms so they can be there for victims of gun violence and connect them with resources for support and healing. Another program that was canceled funded community organizations struggling to meet the most basic needs of survivors, including food, shelter, safety, and transportation. These cuts undermine decades of bipartisan progress and leave survivors without critical resources.

In closing, let me return to where I began: we all want safer communities. Even one victim is too many. But the path forward is not through fear or federal takeovers. It is through evidence, partnership, and respect for local expertise. If this Congress truly cares about public safety, it will invest in strategies that work, in support for victims and their families, and in the research that tells us what works.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

ⁱ <https://counciloncj.org/crime-trends-in-u-s-cities-mid-year-2025-update/>

ⁱⁱ <https://counciloncj.foleon.com/the-footprint-trends-in-crime-arrests-and-the-total-correctional-population/the-footprint/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Kruger, D. J., Crichlow, V. J., McGarrell, E., Hollis, M., Jefferson, B. M., Reischl, T. M., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2016). Perceptions of Procedural Justice Mediate the Relationship Between Local Violent Crime Density and Crime Reporting Intentions. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 44(6), 807–812; Tyler, Tom R., with Jeffrey Fagan. 2008. "Legitimacy and Cooperation: Why Do People Help the Police Fight Crime in Their Communities?" *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 6: 231–75; Tyler, Tom R., and Jonathan Jackson. 2014. "Popular Legitimacy and the Exercise of Legal Authority: Motivating Compliance, Cooperation, and Engagement." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 20 (1): 78–95.

^{iv} Engel, Robin S., Nicholas Corsaro, Hannah D. McManus, and Gabrielle T. Isaza. 2020. "Examining the Impact of Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) De-escalation Training for the Louisville Metro Police Department: Initial Findings." Report. International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) / University of Cincinnati (UC) Center for Police Research and Policy.

^v Shelfer, D., Gullion, C. L., Guerra, C., Zhang, Y., & Ingram, J. R. (2022). A Systematic Review of Project Safe Neighborhoods Effects. *Justice Evaluation Journal*, 6(1), 32–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24751979.2022.2109190>

^{vi} <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25501043-memorandum-from-the-acting-deputy-attorney-general-01/>

^{vii} <https://counciloncj.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/VCWG-Final-Report.pdf>

^{viii} Braga, Anthony A., David Weisburd, and Brandon Turchan. "Focused deterrence strategies and crime control: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical evidence." *Criminology & Public Policy* 17.1 (2018): 205-250.

^{ix} Newark Police Division data analyzed by the Newark Public Safety Collaborative, Rutgers School of Criminal Justice.

^x <https://counciloncj.org/doj-funding-update-a-deeper-look-at-the-cuts/>