

Written Testimony

Submitted by

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Before the

United States House of Representatives
House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security

Regarding

“Reimagining Criminal Justice in the Covid-19 Era”

March 8, 2022

Chairwoman Jackson Lee, Ranking member Biggs, and members of the Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security Subcommittee, I am Thomas Abt, Senior Fellow at the Council on Criminal Justice¹ and Chair of its Violent Crime Working Group². Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today on “Reimagining Criminal Justice in the Covid-19 Era.”

During the coronavirus pandemic, violent crime has surged. In 2020³, homicides rose by 29 percent to a total of nearly 18,000 souls lost. That was the largest one-year increase in at least 50 years. Violent crime generally increased by 5 percent, while property and drug crime declined. In 2021⁴, homicide and other violent crime rates continued to rise, but the pace of the homicide increase slowed to 5 percent, while property and drug declined again. As economists Phillip Cook and Jens Ludwig recently noted⁵, while the total number of reported serious crimes may have fallen during the pandemic, the social harms resulting from those crimes increased significantly because of the rise in violence, especially murder.

As my colleague Adam Gelb has noted⁶, increased homicide will also lead to increases in our prison populations. From 2019 to 2021, according to his updated calculations, just the increase in people sent to prison for murder will occupy a prison bed for 13.4 million days, or compressed into a single year, enough to fill 74 500-bed prisons.

¹ Council on Criminal Justice. “Council on Criminal Justice.” Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://counciloncj.org/>.

² Council on Criminal Justice. “Violent Crime Working Group.” Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://counciloncj.org/violent-crime-working-group/>.

³ Federal Bureau of Investigation National Press Office. “FBI Releases 2020 Crime Statistics.” Press release, September 27, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2020-crime-statistics>.

⁴ Rosenfeld, R. & Lopez, E. “Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2021 Update.” Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice, 2021. <https://counciloncj.org/crime-trends-yearend-2021-update/>.

⁵ Cook, P. & Ludwig, J. “Gun violence, and the fear of gun violence, distort the lives of millions of Americans.” N.d. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/gun-violence-is-the-crime-problem>.

⁶ Gelb, A. “America’s surge in violence: Why we must reduce violent crime for prison reform to work.” Editorial. *USA Today*. March 9, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/09/why-reducing-violence-essential-prison-reform-work-column/4626310001/>.

These numbers, and the suffering behind them, are deeply troubling. At the same time, it is important to note that violent crime rates, including murder, remain well below the peaks they reached in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We must respond urgently to this epidemic of violence, but we need not panic.

The rise in violence has occurred in cities all around the country. Violence surged in large cities and small ones. It went up in cities led by Democratic mayors, and also those led by Republicans. It rose in blue states, and also in red ones. The effect appears to be national and not driven by local circumstances, at least not primarily. That does not mean that local leaders have no agency when it comes to controlling crime and violence – far from it – but those efforts mitigate these broader forces and cannot eliminate them entirely.

It is also important to observe what type of violence that is rising. By all accounts, it is community gun violence, that is violence perpetrated with firearms in public settings. This type of violence has always concentrated in our poorest, most marginalized communities, and it continued to do so over the past two years. To be clear, other forms of violence are present and may even be increasing modestly, but it is community gun violence, committed by and against young men of color, that is driving this surge in serious violence.

Understanding Recent Increases in Community Gun Violence

It is difficult to know for certain why community gun violence spiked during the pandemic, but most experts have settled on three likely factors. The first is the pandemic itself, which disproportionately impacted the marginalized communities where gun violence concentrates. At the same time, the pandemic strained the institutions charged with keeping the peace, such as police, courts, treatment agencies, and community-based groups. Controlling violence depends in large part on proactively engaging those at the highest risk for violence, and such outreach was interrupted by the ongoing risk of infection.

While COVID-19 has presented major challenges, violence actually started increasing in the United States in 2015. Further, violence did not increase⁷ in most other high-income nations during the pandemic. This means that the pandemic is not the only explanation for why violence has increased.

A second factor is the social unrest caused by high-profile incidents of police force against unarmed civilians. In the weeks immediately after George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, community gun violence spiked precipitously in poor communities of color around the country. The same thing happened in 2014, when Michael Brown was killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri. This violence was not associated with protests or protesters, but instead concentrated among the small sets of individuals and groups already at high risk for crime and violence.

⁷ Nivette, A., Zahnow, R., Aguilar, R., Ahven, A., Amram, S., Ariel, B., Burbano, M., et al. 2021. "A Global Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Restrictions on Crime." *Nature Human Behaviour* 5 (7): 868–77. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01139-z>.

Such incidents, and the controversy that follows, drive a wedge between law enforcement and the communities they are supposed to serve. When this happens, violence flourishes, both because police refrain from proactively preventing and investigating crime⁸, and because community members cooperate less⁹ with law enforcement.

The third factor is a substantial increase in legal gun purchases that began with the pandemic and continued throughout. In 2020, Americans purchased approximately 23 million guns – a 64 percent increase¹⁰ from the year before. While the vast majority of these weapons are owned and operated lawfully, recent data¹¹ from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives suggests that number of guns whose “time to crime” – the time from when a firearm was legally purchased to when it was recovered after a crime – was six months or less increased by 90 percent. In short, during the pandemic, there were more guns, more of which fell into the wrong hands, and they did so more quickly.

Evidence-Informed Strategies for Reducing Community Gun Violence

While a large body of rigorous research and public opinion polling supports additional commonsense requirements for owning and carrying a deadly firearm, that is not the focus of my testimony today. My focus here is on nonpartisan, fact- and evidence-informed solutions to community gun violence that Congress can authorize and appropriate to give cities relief right now. These solutions reflect the consensus reached by the Council’s Violent Crime Working Group, a diverse body of law enforcement officials, community violence and public health experts, advocates and activists, and leading researchers.

Study after study^{12,13,14} finds that crime, and especially violence, concentrates among small networks of people and places. This is true for every city in the United States. In Oakland¹⁵, for instance, 60 percent of murders occur within a social network of approximately 1,000 to 2,000 individuals—about 0.3 percent of the city’s population. In Boston¹⁶, 70 percent of all shootings over three decades concentrated in areas covering five percent of the city.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the strategies associated with the most immediate, measurable, and concrete anti-violence outcomes have one thing in common: they focus on these small numbers of

⁸ Cassell, P. 2020. “Explaining the Recent Homicide Spikes in U.S. Cities: The ‘Minneapolis Effect’ and the Decline in Proactive Policing.” SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3690473. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3690473>.

⁹ Ang, D., Bencsik, P., Bruhn, J., & Derenoncourt, E.. 2021. “Police Violence Reduces Civilian Cooperation and Engagement with Law Enforcement.” SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3920493. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3920493>.

¹⁰ Fisher, M., Burman, M., Spolar, C., Rozsa, L. & Tran, A. “America on Edge: Covid Lockdowns, Protests and Election Strife Led to Record Gun Sales.” *Washington Post*. Accessed March 4, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/record-gun-sales-us-2020/2021/01/18/d25e8616-55a9-11eb-a931-5b162d0d033d_story.html.

¹¹ Arthur, J. & Asher, R. 2022. “The Data Are Pointing to One Major Driver of America’s Murder Spike.” *The Atlantic*. January 10, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/gun-sales-murder-spike/621196/>.

¹² Green, B., Horel, T., & Papachristos, A. 2017. “Modeling Contagion Through Social Networks to Explain and Predict Gunshot Violence in Chicago, 2006 to 2014.” *JAMA Intern Med.*, 177 (3): 326–333. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2016.8245.

¹³ Sherman, L. 2007. “The Power Few: Experimental Criminology and the Reduction of Harm.” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 3 (4): 299–321. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-007-9044-y>.

¹⁴ Weisburd, D. 2015. “The Law of Crime Concentration and the Criminology of Place.” *Criminology* 53 (2): 133–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12070>.

¹⁵ Corsaro, N., & Engel, R. 2015. “Most Challenging of Contexts.” *Criminology & Public Policy* 14 (3): 471–505. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12142>.

¹⁶ Braga, A., Papachristos, A., & Hureau, D. 2010. “The Concentration and Stability of Gun Violence at Micro Places in Boston, 1980–2008.” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 26 (1): 33–53.

people and places. Any strategy, or set of strategies, intended to curb community gun violence in the short run must adopt these principles of concentration and focus.

Some of these focused strategies involve law enforcement. Most researchers give improved policing some credit for the long declines in violent and other crime that occurred in the 1990s and 2000s. In systematic reviews of hot spots¹⁷ and problem-oriented¹⁸ policing, researchers examined dozens of rigorous evaluations and found these approaches to be effective. In New York City, for instance, targeted “gang takedowns”¹⁹ recently reduced gun violence in and around public housing communities by one third.

These police-based strategies work best when focused on specific crime problems, in partnership with community and other stakeholders. Strong police oversight and management is necessary in order to limit these approaches to only the highest-risk people and places. Overly broad and aggressive policing strategies are not particularly effective, trigger community resistance, and have too many negative collateral consequences.

Other strategies prevent crime and violence without law enforcement. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can teach high-risk individuals to manage emotions, address conflicts constructively, and think carefully in order to avoid criminal and violent behavior. A systematic review²⁰ found that such programs reduced criminal recidivism by 25 percent, with one of five programs cutting recidivism by more than half. In Chicago, randomized controlled trials have demonstrated that one CBT program²¹ reduced arrests for violent crimes among youth by half, while another²² reduced shooting and homicide arrests among high-risk individuals by 80 percent.

Place-based crime prevention strategies that address blight, add streetlights, and change foot and car traffic patterns, among other tactics, can prevent crime and violence by altering the physical environment of crime-prone locations. In Philadelphia²³, the removal of trash, the grading and seeding of land, and the planting of trees in vacant lots to create park-like settings was associated with a 17 percent decrease in violent crime and a nine percent decrease in crime overall. In New York City²⁴, installing temporary street lights corresponded with a 36 percent reduction in nighttime index crimes – a finding reinforced by systematic reviews²⁵ of the strategy.

¹⁷ Braga, A., Turchan, B., Papachristos, A., & Hureau, D. 2019. “Hot Spots Policing of Small Geographic Areas Effects on Crime.” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 15 (3): e1046. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1046>.

¹⁸ Hinkle, J., Weisburd, D., Telep, C., & Petersen, K. 2020. “Problem-Oriented Policing for Reducing Crime and Disorder: An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 16 (2): e1089. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1089>.

¹⁹ Chalfin, A., LaForest, M., & Kaplan, J. 2021. “Can Precision Policing Reduce Gun Violence? Evidence from ‘Gang Takedowns’ in New York City.” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 40 (4): 1047-1082. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22323>.

²⁰ Lipsey, M., Landenberger, N., & Wilson, S. 2007. “Effects of Cognitive-Behavioral Programs for Criminal Offenders.” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 3 (1): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2007.6>.

²¹ Heller, S., Shah, A., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mullainathan, S., & Pollack, H. 2017. Thinking, Fast and Slow? Some Field Experiments to Reduce Crime and Dropout in Chicago. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132(1):1-54. doi: 10.1093/qje/qjw033.

²² READI Chicago: A Heartland Alliance Program. (2021). *READI Chicago Evaluation Finds Reductions in Shootings and Homicides*. Heartland Alliance. <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/READI-Chicago-Mid-Study-Analysis-May-2021-FV.pdf>.

²³ Branas, C. South, E., Kondo, M, Hohl, B., Bourgois, P., Wiebe, D., & MacDonald, J. 2018. Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear. *PNAS* 115 (12). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1718503115>.

²⁴ Chalfin, A., Hansen, B., Lerner, J., & Parker, L. 2019. “Reducing Crime Through Environmental Design: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of Street Lighting in New York City.” Working Paper 25798. Working Paper Series. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w25798>.

²⁵ Welsh, B. & Farrington, D. 2008. Effects of improved street lighting on crime. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 4 (1): 1-51. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2008.13>.

Outreach by “credible messengers” to individuals at the highest risk for violence is an important component of many models for reducing community gun violence. Also described as violence intervention or interruption, frontline workers mediate disputes, connect individuals to much-needed supports and services, and use community events and media campaigns to promote nonviolent cultural norms. The evidence concerning street outreach is promising but mixed - neighborhoods in Chicago²⁶, New York City²⁷, Los Angeles²⁸, and Philadelphia²⁹ experienced significant reductions in shootings after implementing such programs, while communities in Baltimore³⁰ and Pittsburgh³¹ reported increases in gun violence. A chronic lack of consistent funding has hampered the development of this important strategy, and additional funding, if properly directed, should further professionalize this field and improve results.

Tellingly, the intervention associated with the strongest effects on gun violence does not focus exclusively on police or non-police solutions; instead it brings cops and communities together to prevent gun violence. Focused deterrence, also known as the Gun Violence Intervention or Ceasefire, creates partnerships among community residents, service providers, and law enforcement officials. These partnerships identify high-risk people and social networks, communicate directly their commitment to stop the violence, provide specialized supports and services, and deploy targeted law enforcement sanctions as a last resort. In Boston³², the strategy reduced youth homicide by 63 percent. In Oakland³³, it cut gun homicides by 31 percent and group-involved shootings by 43 percent. A systematic review³⁴ of the strategy reported favorable results in 22 of 24 studies.

It is important to reiterate that effective violence reduction includes law enforcement but does not stop there. Cities cannot simply arrest their way out of increasing gun violence. Instead, cities must complement policing and other enforcement strategies with strong community-based ones as well, giving voice to residents of the most impacted neighborhoods.

It is also important to acknowledge that no single intervention, whether led by police or community members, can stop violence all by itself. In many cities, specific anti-violence programs succeed in isolation, while violence citywide remains high. For broad and sustained declines in violence, cities need collaborative efforts that leverage multiple strategies at once. Such collaboration is

²⁶ Skogan, W., Hartnett, S., Bump, N., & Dubois, J. 2009. Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago. Retrieved from: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/227181.pdf>.

²⁷ Delgado, S., Alsabahi, L., Wolff, J., Alexander, N., Cobar, P., & Butts, J. 2017. The effects of Cure Violence in the South Bronx and East New York, Brooklyn. In *Denormalizing Violence: A Series of Reports From the John Jay College Evaluation of Cure Violence Programs in New York City*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

²⁸ Brantingham, P., Sundback, N., Yuan, B., & Chan, K. 2017. GYRD Intervention Incident Response and Gang Crime 2017 Evaluation Report. Retrieved from: https://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/sites/default/files/2020-08/GRYD%20IR%20and%20Gang%20Crime%20Report_FINALv3.pdf.

²⁹ Roman, C., Klein, H., Wolff, K., Bellamy, M., & Reeves, K. 2017. Philadelphia CeaseFire: Findings from the Impact Evaluation. *Temple University*. Retrieved from: https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SummaryofPhilaCeaseFireFindingsFormatted_Jan2017.pdf.

³⁰ Buggs S., Webster D., & Crifasi C. 2022. Using synthetic control methodology to estimate effects of a *Cure Violence* intervention in Baltimore, Maryland. *Injury Prevention* 28: 61-67.

³¹ Wilson, J. & Chermak, S. 2011. “Community-Driven Violence Reduction Programs.” *Criminology & Public Policy* 10 (4): 993-1027. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2011.00763.x>.

³² Braga, A., Kennedy, D., Waring, E., & Piehl, A. 2001. Problem-Oriented Policing, Deterrence, and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of Boston’s CeaseFire Operation. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38 (3): 195-225.

³³ Giffords Law Center. A Case Study in Hope: Lessons from Oakland’s Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence. 2019. <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/a-case-study-in-hope-lessons-from-oaklands-remarkable-reduction-in-gun-violence/>.

³⁴ Braga, A., Weisburd, D., & Turchan, B. 2019. “Focused Deterrence Strategies Effects on Crime: A Systematic Review.” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 15 (3): e1051. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1051>.

difficult under normal circumstances, but appears especially hard to achieve in the current hyperpolarized political environment.

A Roadmap for Reducing Community Gun Violence Now

Articulating and then translating a city's anti-violence vision into action requires clear and consistent leadership to put all the pieces together in a coherent way. Last summer, the Council created a Violent Crime Working Group to help cities do just that. Members brought different perspectives to the table but shared an intense commitment to saving lives by stopping violence. In January, we released our final report³⁵, which outlines ten essential actions every city should take to reduce gun violence now. Here, I will describe just a few.

First, for any city facing high rates of crime, preserving life by preventing lethal or near-lethal violence must be at the top of the policymaking agenda. Local leaders must avoid the devastating human and economic costs of such violence. Every lost soul is priceless, and a single gun homicide costs as much as \$17 million³⁶ in direct and indirect costs. Progress should be measured in clear, concrete terms: fewer homicides and non-fatal shootings. Annual reductions of 10% are an impactful yet realistic goal.

To achieve this, law enforcement agencies must keep a consistent focus on preventing violence, not just making arrests. Effective management means rewarding officers for outcomes like reduced victimization, rather than outputs like the number of pedestrian or car stops. Similarly, non-law enforcement partners such as community-based service providers and their funders should maintain a focus on anti-violence outcomes, not outputs such as services delivered.

Next, as noted above, city leaders should acknowledge that community gun violence concentrates among small sets of key people and places and focus their engagement on them. They should begin with a rigorous problem analysis using police and hospital data to map out the locations and social networks where violence clusters. Analyses like these are critical to creating a shared understanding of a city's violence challenge and guiding collaborative efforts.

Based upon these analyses, city leaders should create strategic plans for engaging key individuals and addressing key locations. Supports and services must be offered so disconnected, at-risk community members have something better to say "yes" to, but it must also be made clear that further violence will not be tolerated. Police can disrupt cycles of violence to cool identifiable "hot spots," but such short-term actions must be supplemented by investments to change the nature of these violent locations and the communities in which they are located.

In communities impacted by gun violence, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can be more common³⁷ among residents than among veterans of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Vietnam. Because of this, it is crucial for city leaders to emphasize healing with trauma-informed

³⁵ Violent Crime Working Group. 2022. "Saving Lives: Ten Essential Actions Cities Can Take to Reduce Violence Now." Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice. <https://counciloncj.org/10-essential-actions/>.

³⁶ DeLisi, M., Kosloski, A., Sween, M., Hachmeister, E., Moore, M. & Drury, A. (2010). Murder by numbers: monetary costs imposed by a sample of homicide offenders. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 21 (4): 501-513, DOI: 10.1080/14789940903564388.

³⁷ Beckett, L. 2014. "Americans in Violent Neighborhoods Are Developing PTSD at Rates Similar to Combat Veterans." *Mother Jones* (blog). <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/02/ptsd-among-wounded-americans-in-violent-neighborhoods/>.

approaches³⁸. Agencies working with victims and survivors should be careful to deliver services in ways that do not retraumatize their clients. Law enforcement officers also experience trauma and can benefit from such approaches as well.

Also, without clear and consistent buy-in from city leaders, plans tend to stay on the shelf. To avoid this, cities suffering from high rates of violent crime should have permanent offices dedicated to violence reduction operating inside the mayor’s office, with senior leadership reporting directly to the mayor. These units, such as the Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD)³⁹ in Los Angeles, should act as the hub for a city’s anti-violence efforts.

Finally, cities must hold themselves fully accountable using rigorous research and reliable data. Whatever strategies are chosen, they should be backed up by evidence of effectiveness. Then, those strategies must be monitored and evaluated to see if they actually stop violence and save lives. Leaders must embrace a learning culture that is able to recognize when strategies are not working and shift course—without starting over from scratch.

Recommendations for States and the Federal Government

In addition to guidance for cities, the Working Group provided recommendations for states and the federal government, who can play strong supporting roles through legislation and regulation, messaging and convening, executive action, and especially grantmaking. There are currently several proposals being considered in Congress to increase investment in anti-violence strategies that work, including \$5 billion for evidence-informed community violence intervention strategies included in the Build Back Better Act. The Working Group’s recommendations include the following.

First, most federal taxpayer dollars invested in anti-violence strategies should be spent on those that are informed by rigorous research and evidence. At the same time, some resources must be made available for localities to pursue or enhance “promising” or “emerging” strategies and to experiment with new approaches for effectively reducing violence. Relatedly, while sound grant management is essential, many smaller organizations struggle to meet strict federal grant requirements. New funding arrangements – such as mini-grants, intermediary or pass-through arrangements, and fiscal sponsorship – should be made to ensure these applicants have an opportunity to participate.

Second, the federal government should also build local capacity by funding an increased array of training and technical assistance to advance the implementation of evidence-informed strategies. Localities should be encouraged to refrain from “going it alone” – launching major initiatives without consulting outside experts on best practices. Peer-to-peer learning is another important means of sharing best practices, and the federal government should encourage such learning through the establishment of information-sharing networks.

³⁸ University of California San Francisco Division of Trauma Recovery Services. “Trauma Recovery Center.” Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://divisionoftraumarecovery.org/trauma-recovery-center/>.

³⁹ Tremblay, A., Herz, D., Zachery, R., & Kraus, M. 2020. “The City of Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Comprehensive Strategy.” GRYD Research and Evaluation Briefs, no. 1. https://www.juvenilejusticeresearch.com/sites/default/files/2020-08/GRYD%20Brief%201_GRYD%20Comprehensive%20Strategy_6.2020.pdf.

Third, many local efforts to reduce violence are stymied by a lack of available, reliable, and shareable data. Similarly, many important research questions relevant to violence reduction remain unanswered. With local resources devoted to addressing immediate needs, the federal government should make long-term investments in improving the quality and quantity of both data and research related to violence reduction, which ultimately will accelerate progress at the local level.

Conclusion

I want to conclude with some general observations about politics along with one concrete proposal that puts such politics aside.

The public conversation about criminal justice in America is hyperpolarized, with the public being presented with a false choice between absolutes: it is all about tough policing and prosecution, or it is the police and prosecutors who are the problem. It is #BlackLivesMatter versus #BlueLivesMatter. Some leaders push back on this frame, but this either/or construct shapes the dominant criminal justice narratives in our country. This “us versus them” dynamic is profoundly destructive to sound anti-violence efforts because everything we know about violence reduction tells us that we need law enforcement, but we need community and other partners as well. And most importantly, we know that a single approach will not work – we need everybody to work together. Unfortunately, the current conversation makes these collaborative partnerships nearly impossible.

The fact is, we can have safety and justice at the same time. We can reduce violence and promote reform simultaneously. We can be tough when the circumstances call for it and be empathetic and supportive to achieve our goals as well. We have to reject either/or choices and insist on both/and options, as the Council’s Task Force on Policing⁴⁰ did last year in forging common ground between police and civil rights leaders on a comprehensive set of law enforcement reforms. We have to remember that it is about solving a deadly serious problem, not winning an abstract argument. It is about bringing people back together, not pulling them apart.

Polling indicates that most Americans oppose⁴¹ “defunding” the police, but support⁴² reasonable reforms. More than 60 percent of those surveyed believe “violent crime is a big problem today.” Both the science and the public are saying the same thing, we must improve our justice systems while controlling violence.

Our cities need relief right now. I urge Congress to take the \$5 billion in funding for evidence-informed community violence intervention strategies that was included in the Build Back Better Act, supplement that funding with \$1 billion in support for highly focused, evidence-informed law enforcement anti-violence strategies, and pass these measures in a standalone bill immediately. I believe this nonpartisan proposal would be embraced by both violence intervention organizations,

⁴⁰ Council on Criminal Justice. “Task Force on Policing.” Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://counciloncj.org/TFP/>.

⁴¹ Parker, K. & Hurst, K. 2021. “Growing share of Americans say they want more spending on police in their area.” Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/10/26/growing-share-of-americans-say-they-want-more-spending-on-police-in-their-area/>.

⁴² Zhou, L. 2021. “A majority of voters see an urgent need for police reform following the Chauvin verdict.” *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2021/5/3/22406099/police-reform-chauvin-congress>.

law enforcement agencies, and the public at large. It would also signal a new era of cooperation around the crucial issue of public safety in America.

Thank you.

About the Council on Criminal Justice

The Council on Criminal Justice works to advance understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and build consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all. Independent and nonpartisan, the Council is an invitational membership organization and think tank, serving as a center of gravity and incubator of policy and leadership for the criminal justice field. The Council is a catalyst for progress based on facts, evidence and fundamental principles of justice. Above all, the Council is founded on the belief that a fair and effective criminal justice system is essential to democracy and a core measure of our nation's well-being. For more information, visit <https://counciloncj.org/>.

About the Violent Crime Working Group

Composed of a diverse range of leaders representing community organizations, law enforcement, the public health sector, and academia, the Violent Crime Working Group is dedicated to addressing the most pressing and challenging issues concerning crime, violence, and justice. The Group was launched in July 2021 and issued its final report, “Saving Lives: Ten Essential Actions Cities Can Take to Reduce Violence Now,”⁴³ in January 2022. Before releasing the report, the Group met 11 times, consulted with dozens of leading experts in the field, produced three reports on national crime trends, held three live public web events, and issued seven bulletins highlighting key policy findings. For more information, visit <https://counciloncj.org/violent-crime-working-group/>.

About the Task Force on Policing

The Task Force on Policing was launched in November 2020 by the Council on Criminal Justice. Its mission was to identify the policies and practices most likely to reduce violent encounters between officers and the public and improve the fairness and effectiveness of American policing. In May 2021, the Task Force released its final report, “The Path to Progress: Five Priorities for Police Reform”⁴⁴, urging jurisdictions to adopt key reforms in order to reduce racially biased policing, limit use of force, and restore trust between law enforcement and communities. The Task Force also assessed over two dozen policies and developed 16 assessment briefs, ranging from de-escalation and procedural justice training to duty-to-intervene policies and internal police functions. For more information, visit <https://counciloncj.org/tfp/>.

⁴³ Violent Crime Working Group. 2022. “Saving Lives: Ten Essential Actions Cities Can Take to Reduce Violence Now.” Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice. <https://counciloncj.org/10-essential-actions/>.

⁴⁴ Task Force on Policing. 2021. “The Path to Progress: Five Priorities for Police Reform.” Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice. <https://counciloncj.foleon.com/policing/assessing-the-evidence/five-priorities/>.