



July 29, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
House Majority Leader
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Clyburn
House Majority Whip
H-329, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
House Judiciary Chair
2142 Rayburn
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Senate Judiciary Chair
224 Dirksen
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer, Whip Clyburn, Chair Nadler, Leader Schumer, Chair Durbin, and other members of Congress,

It has come to our attention that the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives are both considering several bills that would expand federal resources for recruiting, hiring, retaining, and otherwise amplifying the size and power of police departments nationwide. Inasmuch as these bills are designed to increase public safety, we understand the critical nature of this underlying goal. Our organizations are devoted to advancing evidence-based policy solutions that keep families and communities safe. However, as a result of this work, we know that the *Invest to Protect Act* and the *COPS on the Beat Program Reauthorization and Parity Act*, and other bills that would lay the groundwork for police expansion now being discussed in the Senate, serve to undermine these safety objectives. Consequently, **we urge you to decouple the bills that would increase COPS and other police funding from legislation that would invest in real alternatives.** These police expansion bills are counter to what civil and human rights advocates have long been calling for—limiting the role, scope, and responsibility of police while catalyzing community safety solutions that actually prevent harm. **We ask you to move only legislation that takes a non-carceral, evidence-based approach to keeping families and communities safe.**

Overwhelming evidence indicates that policing and incarceration are ineffective tools for increasing community safety. Studies show that, on average, police officers spend only about 4%¹ of their time handling violent crime. A Washington Post analysis found no correlation between spending on police and

¹ Asher, Jeff, and Ben Horwitz. “How Do the Police Actually Spend Their Time?” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 19 June 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/upshot/unrest-police-time-violent-crime.html?smid=tw-share.

crime rates.² And in the 1990s, when Congress took a similar approach to expanding police size and power, funding from the COPS program had “little to no effect on crime.”³ According to the Government Accountability Office, additional police officers from 1993 to 2000 drove only 5% (1.3 percentage points) of the overall crime rate decline.⁴

Despite this, far from being in need of additional federal funding, state and local police departments have received more than \$14 billion in COPS funding over the past 25 years. Even as the calls for a transformation of our criminal-legal system have grown louder, these massive expenditures and their corresponding expansion of the criminal-legal system have continued. Funding has steadily increased for the program since 2016. And in Fiscal Year 2022, \$512 million was appropriated for the program—more than double what it was a decade earlier.⁵

Still worse, expanded policing takes a devastating toll on our most vulnerable residents, especially in low-income Black and brown communities. Estimates suggest that police officers kill more than 1,000 people each year and seriously injure far more.⁶ Research indicates that hiring more police officers increases reports of police brutality, which often go overlooked.⁷ And jailing people, even for short periods, can make them more likely to commit crimes following their release.⁸

In the coming months and years, these negative effects are likely to grow. With *Roe v. Wade* no longer able to safeguard reproductive rights nationwide, police and prosecutors are poised to expand their footprint dramatically—not only to enforce laws that effectively criminalize poverty and race, but to enforce laws that explicitly criminalize choice itself. Already, police departments have spent years surveilling and blocking progressive social movements, including communities mobilizing for labor rights, racial justice, environmental preservation, and more. As people take to streets and squares nationwide, advocating for their fundamental civil rights, we cannot fuel the very entities now tear gassing and otherwise assaulting these democratic protesters.⁹ Now, more than ever, we must think critically about whose power we are entrenching and how.

² Bump, Philip. “Analysis | over the Past 60 Years, More Spending on Police Hasn't Necessarily Meant Less Crime.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 7 June 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/07/over-past-60-years-more-spending-police-hasnt-necessarily-meant-less-crime/.

³ Worrall, John L., and Tomislav V. Kovandzic. “Cops Grants and Crime Revisited*.” *Criminology*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2007, pp. 159–190., doi:10.1111/j.1745-9125.2007.00075.x.

⁴ Government Accountability Office. *Community Policing Grants: Cops Grants Were a Modest Contributor to Declines in Crime in the 1990s: Report to the Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives*, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005.

⁵ United States, Congress, Congressional Research Service, and Nathan James. *Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program*. crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10922.

⁶ “The Counted: People Killed by Police in the United States – Interactive.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database.

⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Hickman, Matthew. *Citizen Complaints about Police Use of Force*. bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccpuf.pdf.

⁸ Heaton, Paul, and Megan Stevenson. “The Downstream Consequences of Misdemeanor Pretrial Detention.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016, doi:10.2139/ssrn.2809840.

⁹ Francis, Matthew R. “Police Who Tear-Gas Abortion-Rights Protesters Could Induce Abortion.” *Scientific American*, Scientific American, 20 July 2022, www.scientificamerican.com/article/police-who-tear-gas-abortion-rights-protesters-could-induce-abortion/.

Against this backdrop, we have a wealth of evidence uplifting interventions that dramatically reduce violence and harm. Programs of violence prevention, such as Cure Violence¹⁰ and hospital-based peer intervention¹¹, have produced dramatic reductions in arrest and harm rates. School-based violence prevention models significantly reduce violent behavior at all grade levels.¹² Wraparound education services in high-risk areas reduce juvenile arrests¹³, as well as child abuse cases. Safe Passage to School programs may reduce violent crime by 14 percent.¹⁴ Increasing youth employment, such as through summer jobs programs, has reduced violent crime by as much as 43 percent.¹⁵ And the list goes on.¹⁶

We agree that Congress should pass a legislative package that makes bold, historic investments in community safety. **We believe, though, that this package should be grounded in evidence and community needs—not in interventions that misdirect much-needed safety resources and actually undermine safety goals.** To that end, this package should start by centering *The People’s Response Act*, which would create a new Division of Community Safety at the Department of Health and Human Services that would administer non-carceral safety grants. It should include bills like the *Counseling Not Criminalization Act* to meet student needs and embrace evidence-based, trauma-informed programs. It should include many of the other bills that leadership is considering, such as the *Break the Cycle of Violence Act* and bills to expand non-carceral crisis response. It should include strong police accountability measures that were previously stalled in Congress, namely around mandatory data collection and reporting. And it should include bold investments in the many holistic investments that thirty advocacy organizations, led by our organizations and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, uplifted in a FY23 appropriations letter¹⁷ to House leaders. *That* letter indicates our vision of what safety is. Moreover, that vision is one supported both by data and by lived experience.

We would wholeheartedly support a package that embraces holistic, evidence-based, high-impact, root cause-focused approaches to preventing violence and harm. But pushing police expansion bills—especially without any accountability measures and without a plan to advance legislation that addresses long-standing calls by civil rights, human rights, and racial justice groups around police violence and misconduct—undercuts this objective. **As a result, we urge you not to include these police expansion bills as you shape your legislative package, including and especially any legislation that would reauthorize the COPS program—a program that has, despite its many flaws, continued on**

¹⁰ Butts, Jeffrey A., et al. “Cure Violence: A Public Health Model to Reduce Gun Violence.” *Annual Review of Public Health*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, pp. 39–53., doi:10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122509.

¹¹ Becker, M, et al. “Caught in the Crossfire: The Effects of a Peer-Based Intervention Program for Violently Injured Youth.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2004, pp. 177–183., doi:10.1016/s1054-139x(03)00278-7.

¹² “School-Based Violence Prevention.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 22 June 2017, www.cdc.gov/policy/hst/hi5/violenceprevention/index.html.

¹³ See *Freedom to Thrive*. The Center for Popular Democracy, populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Freedom%20To%20Thrive%2C%20Higher%20Res%20Version.pdf.

¹⁴ McMillen, Daniel, et al. “Do More Eyes on the Street Reduce Crime? Evidence from Chicago’s Safe Passage Program.” *Journal of Urban Economics*, vol. 110, 2019, pp. 1–25., doi:10.1016/j.jue.2019.01.001.

¹⁵ Heller, Sara B. “Summer Jobs Reduce Violence among Disadvantaged Youth.” *Science*, vol. 346, no. 6214, 2014, pp. 1219–1223., doi:10.1126/science.1257809.

¹⁶ See Sebastian, Thea, et al. *Getting Smart on Safety*. Civil Rights Corps , 2022, civilrightscorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Getting-Smart-On-Safety.pdf.

¹⁷ *FY23 Appropriations for Community Safety Letter* . Civil Rights Corps and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights , 26 July 2022, civilrightscorps.org/.

autopilot without meaningful oversight or evaluation for decades¹⁸ and contributed to mass incarceration, criminalization, and structural disinvestment at the local level.¹⁹ Instead, we urge you to engage experts, advocates, and grassroots leaders in designing a visionary safety package that will make a positive difference in *all* of our communities.

If you have any questions or want to discuss any items uplifted here, please contact Thea Sebastian, Director of Policy, Civil Rights Corps (thea@civilrightscorps.org) or Sakira Cook, Co-Interim Vice President of Campaigns, Color of Change (sakira.cook@colorofchange.org).

Sincerely,

Thea Sebastian, Director of Policy, Civil Rights Corps

Sakira Cook, Co-Interim Vice President of Campaigns, Color of Change

Arielle Gingold, Deputy Washington Director, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action

Beatriz Beckford, National Director, MomsRising

Sirine Shebaya, Executive Director, National Immigration Project (NIPNLG)

Will Simpson, Director of Violence Reduction Initiatives, Equal Justice USA

Michael McBride, Executive Director, Live Free USA and Co-Chair, Black Church Action Fund

Mary Small, National Policy Director, Indivisible

Alex Lawson, Executive Director, Social Security Works

Christian S. Watkins, Government Relations Advocate, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Tralonne Shorter, Director, Legislative Affairs, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Sara Kugler, Senior Legislative Manager, MoveOn

Rahwa Ghirmatzion, Executive Director, PUSH Buffalo

Judy Greene, Policy Analyst, Justice Strategies

¹⁸ *Leadership Conference Letter for the Record on COPS House Appropriations*. The Leader Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 20 Oct. 2021, civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/policy/letters/2021/20211020%20Leadership%20Conference%20Letter%20for%20the%20Record%20on%20COPS%20House%20Appropriations.pdf.

¹⁹ Ofer, Udi. "How the 1994 Crime Bill Fed the Mass Incarceration Crisis." *American Civil Liberties Union*, American Civil Liberties Union, 4 June 2019, www.aclu.org/blog/smart-justice/mass-incarceration/how-1994-crime-bill-fed-mass-incarceration-crisis.

Erica Ford, CEO, LIFE Camp, Inc

Nelini Stamp, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Working Families Party

Monifa Bandele, Policy Table Lead, Movement for Black Lives

Megan Essaheb, Director of Federal Affairs, People's Action