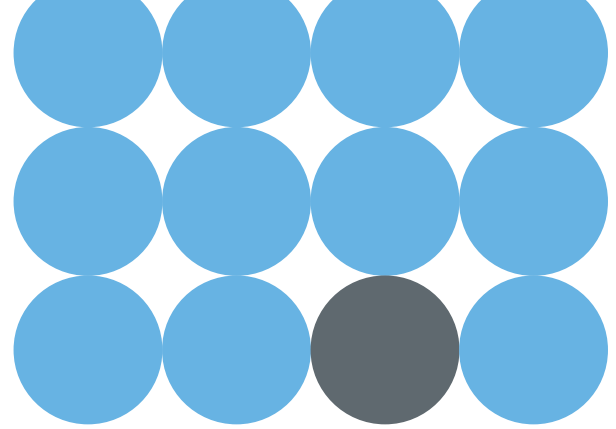


# Social Justice Brief

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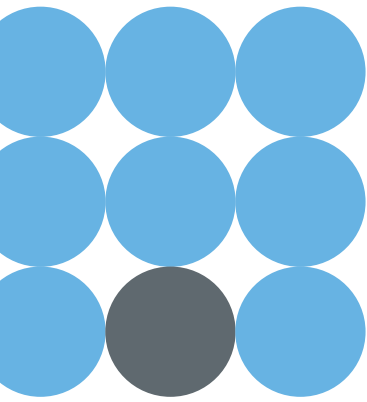
## Reimagining Policing: Strategies for Community Reinvestment Pre-Arrest Diversion; and Innovative Approaches to 911 Emergency Responses

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.



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The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the United States. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.



# Reimagining Policing: Strategies for Community Reinvestment

## Pre-Arrest Diversion; and Innovative Approaches to 911 Emergency Responses

The tragic and unjust murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, Tony McDade, Eric Garner, and so many other Black and Brown Americans by police officers has led our nation to reexamine the systems that we look to for safety and justice. Policing in America has a long history of preserving the violent legacy of slavery and upholding white supremacy.

This country's law enforcement administrations were first used to hunt runaway slaves and prevent slave revolts to maintain so-called order and public safety. More recently, police departments' policies and practices continue to reflect the same distorted sense of law and order. Many police departments have and continue to perpetuate racial profiling, racially biased policing, oversurveillance of communities of color, and criminalization of behaviors that pose no threat to public safety—to the detriment of Black, Brown, and immigrant communities in particular.

The tragic circumstances of the recent arrest of George Floyd outside of a convenience store for allegedly paying with a counterfeit \$20 bill is an example of the centuries-old culture of police bias. His murder at the hands of a heartless police officer started a national call for comprehensive police reforms that keep communities safe and put an end to systemic racism in law enforcement agencies.

It is because of the outrage at the killing of Mr. Floyd that the nation has demanded an immediate review and overhaul of the role of law enforcement in maintaining public safety. Simply stated, the purview of policing can no longer be all-encompassing—certain functions currently carried out by the police should be assumed by other professionals.

The overarching purpose of this social justice brief is to reinforce the fact that an undisputable culture of racism plagues law enforcement agencies throughout the country. This objective is strongly associated with the need to discuss, analyze, and make recommendations on police reform models that can have a mitigating impact on reducing police encounters that are disproportionately injurious and lethal to communities of color. This brief will also discuss effective models for reinvesting part of law enforcement budgets in community-based psychosocial programs. The objective of redirecting and reinvesting budget dollars is aimed at reducing the frequency of police encounters in the course of preventing low-level crimes.

In addition, the social justice brief makes note of the growing police abolition movement. This movement represents a school of thought that says the law enforcement system is so broken the notion “police reform” and “reimagining policing” is seen as an exercise in futility. Therefore, the significance of the idea of police abolition—which many social workers embrace—is recognized in this brief as a worthwhile point of view for consideration.

## Background

In the current atmosphere of demanding comprehensive police reforms, it is almost a cliché to say that police officers handle many tasks associated with social work. In many jurisdictions, police are first responders to domestic disputes and interventions with the homeless, mentally ill, or those with substance use disorders. Yet, the police do not receive the training as social workers to respond to safety and health concerns of vulnerable individuals and families impacted by a range of life-threatening and life-altering issues that result in crisis situations. Police reform efforts could benefit from a collaborative relationship between law enforcement and social work that would lead to a greatly enhanced public safety and psychosocial safety net. Such a collaboration would most certainly reduce instances of inappropriate and insensitive interventions that widens the gulf between law enforcement and communities of color.

On average police respond to 240 million 911 calls made each year. Conservative estimates show that at least 10 percent of those calls involve people with serious mental illness (SMI), and a third to a half involve those with some type of disability. Data continue to show that a significant number of individuals who have been arrested have

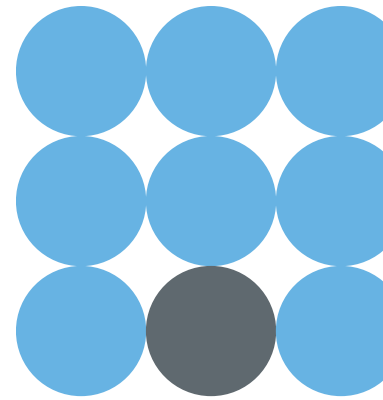
some form of SMI—bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depressive disorder—or other cognitive disorders.

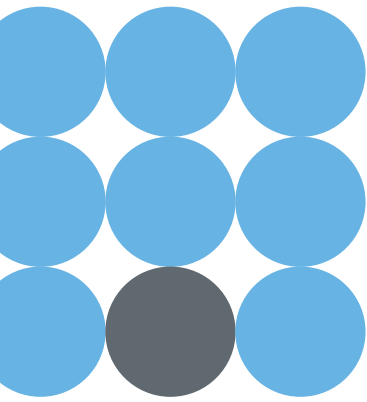
Police are not social workers. Yet they continue to be the de facto response to situations that call for social work intervention. Issues of drug use, homelessness, mental illness, and domestic violence disputes all too frequently lead to police responses. Tragically, we have seen over and over how these calls lead to harmful escalation instead of peaceful resolution, particularly when people of color are involved.

People who are Black or Brown and poor, with behavioral health disorders—particularly mental illness—tend to find themselves in pre-trial detention or jail as a result of 911 calls, because police are the primary responders to these calls. Instead, many of these people should be redirected to an appropriately trained emergency crisis responder.

Many communities cannot attest to safety and order, despite robust spending on local police. Spending across large cities have grown from 1.2 percent of their overall budgets since the late 1970s, to their current level of 7.8 percent. In recent years, it costs each resident in an average sized city over \$300 annually to support their police department’s budget. Cities such as Baltimore spend \$840 annually per resident on policing. In Columbus, Ohio, 37 percent of the budget is allocated to policing.

As cities allocated more of their scarce resources to local police, federal aid to cities for anti-poverty programs shrank and an unjust and inequitable system was created—producing a lack of funding for community support and social services. This lack of





funding resulted in police having to respond to various social issues—such as substance misuse, housing crises, intimate partner violence, and much more. Creating safe communities with proper social supports is possible, but it requires a shift in funding and community input.

Several states have been looking for ways to find solutions to policing and reducing pretrial incarceration that also results in local and state savings, including Michigan, New Jersey, and Colorado. Given the financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as a lack of revenue, high unemployment rates, and less flexible funding—states and municipalities are looking for ways to best utilize their scarce resources over the coming years. This crisis presents an opportunity to provide better training to law enforcement that increases community engagement, reestablish trust, and reallocate scarce funding away from law enforcement to holistic services.

Reallocating funding provides an opportunity for local governments to work with communities, particularly communities of color, to better meet their needs and enact effective solutions that address the disproportionality of police brutality and misconduct. Best practices have shown that implementing mobile crisis lines for those experiencing a behavioral health crisis, having a co-responder to police encounters, and providing additional training—such as crisis intervention training and de-escalation training—can help better prepare police to divert those with mental illness from our jails.

Given that most arrests are for minor offenses that should not require any police response and only 5 percent of arrests are for serious violent offenses, we need to implement an

effective solution across the United States to address policing. Social workers can play a pivotal role in developing and implementing an effective solution by assisting in reduction of police responding to social issues and assisting in rebuilding community trust. Across the country social workers already work in some capacity with police departments to provide a variety of services, such as work with victim crime units.

If social workers develop collaborative partnerships—working with, not for law enforcement agencies—in crisis response systems, social workers share in coordinating can deflection and diversion programs. In such a collaborative arrangement, social workers can have a role in:

- » responding to calls for service with a focus on mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness; they also refer individuals to treatment, housing, and other social services as appropriate through mobile crisis units
- » counseling crime victims and referring to social services agencies as needed
- » assisting with county-level reentry efforts
- » addressing law enforcement officers' trauma and mental health needs, and making referrals as needed

### Systemic Change Models for Police Departments

In Michigan, Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) has focused on how they could change the agency culture first to promote a service-oriented and community-focused organization in which trust of and with the community was foundational. The outcomes focused on the several key points of Internal Change to begin to create a culture shift within the organization:

**1. Leadership:** At the highest level of the organization, leadership needs to understand and be committed to making the changes. It is not easy to change the culture of an organization, and it is even more difficult to do so without the support of leadership at every step of the way. Mission drives strategy, which drives structure, and leadership must be willing to set the mission, develop the strategy, and enact the structure to allow change to happen.

**2. Hiring Practices:** A major component of agency change is setting a system in place that identifies potential recruits who demonstrate the specific competencies that align with the values and mission of the WCSO. Once hired, an employee is with the office for 25+ years, so being intentional in the recruitment and hiring of staff is important for the long-term impact of this work.

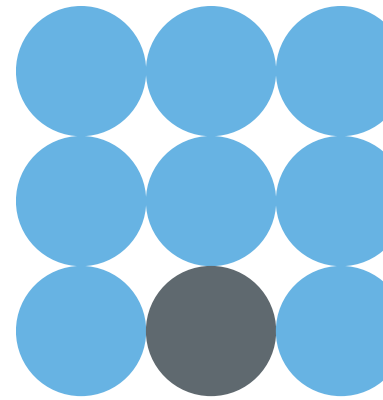
**3. Five-Part Internal Office Training:** In addition to Police Training Officer field training, all officers at the WCSO are required to participate in a five-part training curriculum that focuses on developing tools needed for managing interpersonal interactions (MII). The MII series was developed in-house with several experts from across the country. One important additional component that cannot be understated is staff within the agency instructing their peers in the various topic areas. These internal teachers become content experts throughout the agency. In that role, they offer a peer-to-peer perspective that has proven to be invaluable to the overall cultural change and staff commitment to this work. These trainings include the following:

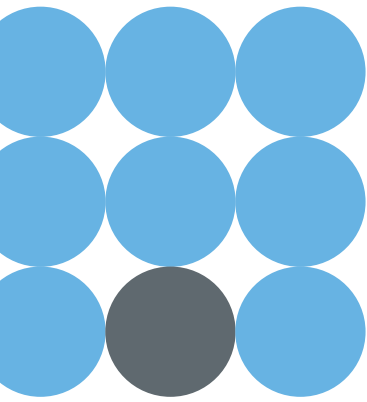
» **Procedural Justice:** Officers have the legal authority to act, but procedural justice

also asks them to consider whether action is morally appropriate. Concepts within this course demonstrate the relationship between building police legitimacy, developing and sustaining a trusting relationship, and the successful delivery of police services in any community. In addition, officers are instructed on the concept of LEED:

- a. Listening when involved in interactions with residents
- b. Explaining your actions
- c. Equality in your actions no matter who you deal with
- d. Dignity and respect for all you interact with

- » **Developing Cultural Competence:** The goal is to provide an understanding and application of principles and techniques to help an officer while on the job. Officers work on acknowledging the value of developing cultural competence and work to identify strategies to improve their own cultural awareness.
- » **Understanding Implicit Bias:** Recognizing that people have biases and, more important, that we can change our biases and therefore how we interact with people. Officers work to understand the science behind implicit bias and the possible impacts it has on decision making, communication, and interpersonal relationships. Then, deputies work to identify strategies designed to mitigate their own implicit bias.
- » **Managing Mental Health Crisis:** This training is an intensive two-day course focused on mental illness, substance use disorder, neurodevelopmental and neurocognitive disorders, de-escalation, and reasoning exercises. Because law





enforcement officers are often the first responders in a mental health crisis, it is important to provide them the tools to intervene appropriately.

- » **Crisis De-escalation:** This training is to provide officers with another tool in their tool belt for dealing with residents. It is based on the nationally recognized crisis intervention team (CIT) model and is intended to provide deputies with an in-depth understanding of crisis de-escalation skills and techniques, with the goal of reducing incidents of preventable use of force. By doing so they are providing staff with one more tool in place of physical force.
- » **Discipline (Quality Assurance):** Quality assurance is a process of randomly and consistently working with staff on how they interact with the community. At the WCSO, the commander of road patrol will randomly select and observe police car dashcam recordings and assess interactions between citizens and police. The commander will then provide the appropriate feedback to staff, whether positive or negative. The goal is not about micromanaging, but rather to coach, mentor, and set clear expectations of behavior, ensuring that the officers' behavior is in alignment with the mission of the Sheriff's Office. The commander may ask officers why they interacted in such a manner, what made them say a particular phrase, or give kudos for great service. This process is also implemented at the lieutenant level so that patrol leadership, coaching, and mentoring is taking place regularly.

This process demonstrates a level of commitment among the command to play

a vital role in setting behavioral expectations and serves as a way to intervene with minor issues before they ever develop into major behavior concerns.

- » **Promotions:** Promotions within a law enforcement agency are an important tool in cultural change. Those who are promoted and the behaviors and values they represent within the organization are a clear indicator to staff of what the agency values. Promotion of an officer who values problem-based approaches and who has demonstrated those values lets others know what is important. It also affords those newly promoted the authority and support needed to further push problem-based approaches.

In addition to creating internal change through hiring and training, WCSO hired a full-time social worker as their director of community engagement to achieve better police–community relations. By employing a social worker in an administrative role, WCSO was able to take a systematic approach to engaging the community, which gave them the opportunity to grow a variety of education, outreach, and engagement programs. As a result, they were able to learn and teach the community they served.

### Community Reinvestment Model

Police and social work collaborations beyond victim crime units and transforming community safety are possible—however, this requires funding and utilizing various different mechanisms of savings for sustainable change.

A comprehensive assessment of each municipality and state government should be done as a first step in determining what the

level of funding should be for police departments. Some states can look to utilizing savings from prison reduction, drug forfeiture dollars, or even jail reform initiatives to help put funding back into communities disproportionately impacted by crime and incarceration.

A percentage of savings each year from the various reforms can be placed into transforming safety initiatives, or states could set aside specific funding to create a community safety reinvestment fund. A portion of the amount saved could be used to hire social workers in administrative roles—such as community engagement positions within local law enforcement agencies and as first responders from local community mental health agencies collaborating with law enforcement agencies. Funding, however, must not stop at shifting of budgets as it can still create difficulty for sustainability and smaller agencies. Matching funding with county drug forfeiture and jail reforms can help in creating long-term social work positions internally and externally to assist in systemic change.

Additional savings should go toward investment into communities to reimagine safety and promote economic justice. The remaining portion of unspent dollars from various budget initiatives can be reprogrammed to cover new community-based services ideally funded through competitive state grants. The grants should be given to local communities with high incarceration rates and high crime.

As an oversight standard, states can set up a community advisory board with fiduciary responsibilities. Advisory board members should include individuals with relevant lived experience; individuals in education, workforce

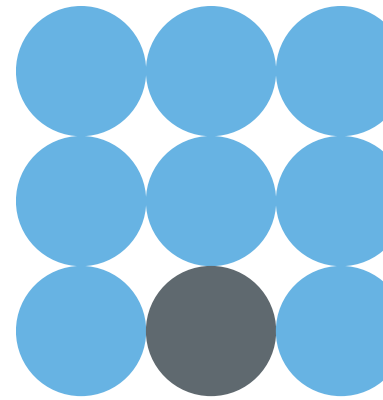
development, and law enforcement; and youths and families impacted by crime and incarceration (collateral consequences).

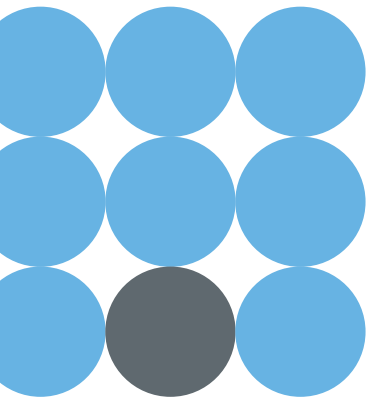
Grant funding can be used to help provide zero- or low-interest loans to small businesses and grants to nonprofits that are doing crime prevention or reentry work—projects, programming, direct services that include youths, education, neighborhood, job training/workforce development, strengthening families, and other areas.

As we look toward ways to reinvest into communities by deflecting, diverting, and reducing jail detention, funding must also be allocated for data and evaluation to consider factors such as decrease in number of arrests, decrease in jail admissions, and decrease in repeat arrests.

### Colorado Reinvestment Model

One reinvestment model that pre-dates the present “defund the police” plans is the Colorado reinvestment approach. In 2017, Colorado passed the Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Initiative that has transformed the approach to public safety. This innovative model invests initiatives designed to strengthen communities with an objective of crime prevention in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by crime and incarceration. The initiative began as a pilot project targeting Southeast Colorado Springs and North Aurora, Colorado. The model is one of the few that aligns with the original intent of justice reinvestment. It and other replications of this model have a primary purpose of reducing the causes of crimes and demonstrating effective alternatives to heavy-handed law enforcement.





The funding is in the form of state-backed small business loans managed by financial institutions, and through a grant program administered by a community foundation. The funding priorities are set by local planning teams. The money (initially \$6,628,401 per year) to cover the cost of the Justice Reinvestment Crime Prevention Initiative came from the Colorado Department of Corrections budget. The innovative aspects of this reinvestment strategy was relatively straightforward. The State of Colorado moved savings produced by parole reforms and reinvested it for crime prevention. Perhaps more important, the decision to develop a pilot reinvestment program was a collaborative effort between the state and local criminal justice advocacy groups such as the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition.

### COVID-19-Related Reinvestment

The coronavirus pandemic has engulfed the nation's jails and prisons at extremely high levels. As of this writing, 48,764 individuals in the nation's prisons and jails have tested positive for COVID-19. The spread of coronavirus had grown unabated since the onset of the pandemic in January 2020. As correctional officials; state, local, and federal legislators; and the advocacy community responded to this public health emergency, one of the first preventive policy measures to be introduced—and widely accepted—was the early release of vulnerable inmates at high risk for contracting the virus and low-level nonviolent offenders.

Relatedly, a second policy that gained some measure of acceptance was to divert nonviolent misdemeanor arrestees from being “booked,” thereby circumventing being detained in jail. For example, the number of people in the

state of Washington jails has plummeted in recent weeks, ending virtually overnight an overcrowding problem that plagued many facilities for years. Today, a few of the state's smallest jails have inmate populations in the single digits.

In reaction to a court order, Jails in Riverside (California) County are required to reduce the overall capacity in three facilities by 10 percent. This reduction is necessary to accommodate physical distancing required to ensure inmates and staff are protected from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. This COVID-19 related lowering of the county's jail census is coupled with an earlier another 16% inmate reduction that occurred before the spread of the coronavirus. Those jail census reductions assuredly resulted in major budget savings that could be reinvested by the county sheriff for jail and pre-arrest diversion programs.

However, the Sheriff Department plans to maintain the 1,000 beds -now vacant - with the anticipation social distancing policies will no longer be required once the pandemic is over. Also, at that point, COVID-19 jail diversions and alternative sentences will no longer applies- and bookings will go back to pre-COVID levels. This decision seems to be ill-advised and not in keeping with reimagining law enforcement and criminal justice.

Other examples of how the COVID-19 pandemic can have a direct impact on reinvestments include:

- » The Jacksonville, Florida, Sheriff's Office has been pressured by advocates to reinvest a significant part of its budget to enhance services as a part of law enforcement reforms. They proposed that



the city make a 25 percent reduction in the Sheriff Department's FY 2021 budget. (The Sheriff has requested a \$6.2 million increase in next fiscal year's budget.) Local police reform advocates want to reinvest those funds in redevelopment involving health, education, and welfare.

Given that Florida has one of the country's highest COVID-19 infection rates, Jacksonville will assuredly free up budgeted dollars to shift from jail to services that reduce police encounters and redirect arrestees from incarceration to community mental health and related services.

Phoenix, Arizona, is a good example of how COVID-19 impacts budget decisions. Recently, the city was confronted with the dilemma of having to find funds to cover the costs of raises and increases in the number of police officers. This was at a time of tensions between the public and the city over law enforcement policies and tactics.

Ironically, Phoenix had recently approved \$3 million for the newly created Office of Accountability and Transparency (OAT). The new agency had a mandate to administer a civilian review board that would have Police Department oversight. However, there were not sufficient funds to cover OAT's \$3 million budget. In the end, the city was able to fund both police-related budget items because of significant savings related to reduced jail costs in part due COVID-19 early releases.

Although lowered jail and prison census due to COVID-19 early release policies will likely result in budget surpluses in correctional budgets, there is no guarantee that those cost savings will translate into reinvestments into

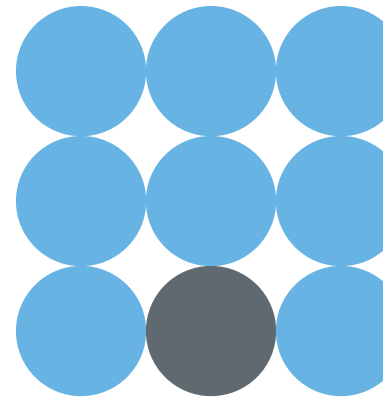
new or expanded psychosocial programs. The budget crunch experienced by states because of coronavirus has created interagency competitions for surplus dollars to avoid cuts in their budgets. Therefore, advocates have to work with other stakeholders to build a consensus for reinvestment as a priority for attaining rethinking policing goals.

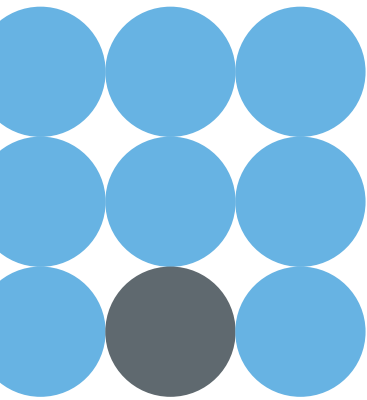
### **Pre-Arrest Diversion Models and Services Interventions**

The outcry for comprehensive police reforms is essentially two-fold. The first and foremost demand is for an end to systemic racism in law enforcement agencies, mostly directed at Black and Brown people. The second demand is to end incidents of excessive and lethal force during police encounters with unarmed and compliant individuals—who are disproportionately Black or Brown. The focus of this section is on strategies, policies, and programs that will reduce the number of police encounters that involve incidents of emotional stress, domestic conflicts, and nonviolent incidents that do not pose a threat to public safety.

### **Over Criminalization**

It is important to interject here that directly associated with the huge number of encounters between police and citizens is the crisis of overcriminalization in the United States. That there are over 4,500 laws and 300,000 regulations in the United States can lead to imprisonment is telling. Furthermore, the nation's law enforcement officers are being asked to enforce and intervene in minor violations that could be better handled by non-law enforcement professionals. Overcriminalization and overreliance on law enforcement both lead to far too many police encounters that lead to use of excessive force.





Perhaps the one main factor in the overcriminalization discussion that increases police encounters between police and Black and Brown communities is the criminalization of poverty. As most criminal justice and police reform advocates will tell you, the number of young Black and Brown men (and women) who are in jail for the inability to pay court-related fees and fines is astonishing. For those who may be unaware, missing a court ordered fee or fine is a jailable offense regardless if the fee or fine for minor criminal violation. Several of the more common examples of criminalizing poverty include:

- » **Criminal Justice Debt:** Excessive imposition of fees and fines, and harsh practices to enforce those debts, can lead to widespread abuse.
- » **Cash Bail:** Cash bail does not serve the purposes of pretrial justice: it is a poor tool for protecting the integrity of criminal proceedings or ensuring public safety. Yet it can have devastating consequences for individuals detained before trial simply because they cannot afford a cash bond.
- » **Private Probation:** In many jurisdictions around the country, probation supervision is outsourced to private companies. Individuals on probation are required to pay a monthly fee to the private probation company.

### Pre-Arrest and Diversion Programs to Mitigate Police Encounters and Arrests

Clearly, it is important to seek alternative programs and policies that lessen unnecessary encounters with police. One solution could be to expand existing pre-arrest diversion programs, crisis intervention responses, and behavioral health interventions that are not law enforcement -centric. Such a step would

also encourage innovations such as reorganizing 911 services to include non-law enforcement. For instance,

The Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) pre-arrest diversion program is a collaborative community program that offers law enforcement a credible alternative to jailing people for criminal activity that stems from unmet behavioral health needs or poverty.

LEAD diverts individuals who are engaged in low-level drug crime, prostitution, and crimes of poverty away from the criminal legal system—bypassing prosecution and jail time. LEAD also connects them with intensive case managers who can provide crisis response, immediate psychosocial assessment, and long-term wraparound services including substance use disorder treatment and housing.

By working with law enforcement to intercept individuals and channel them into community-based interventions at the point of arrest or pre-arrest, LEAD effectively disrupts the cycling of individuals with behavioral health issues through our criminal legal system and uses a low-barrier, harm reduction-based model of care to help participants work toward achieving stability in the community.

### Pre-Arrest Diversion: Part of the Solution

- » Reduced burden on criminal justice to solve public health and social challenges
- » Reduced crime
- » Reduced drug use
- » Better outcomes during crisis encounters
- » Lives saved; lives restored
- » Building police–community relation
- » Building (more) police–public health/behavioral health relations
- » Correct movement of citizens into/away

- from the justice system
- » Cost savings
- » Keeping families intact
- » Addressing racial disparity

## Montgomery County Deflection Model

Montgomery County (Maryland) deflection model is a pre-booking deflection (diversion) model focused on the substance use disorder populations, which have a high likelihood of repeated contact with police due to their untreated addictions. The model—an evidence-based practice that has been applied in other sectors of the criminal justice system—has been incorporated into policing as a “front-end” arrest and incarceration diversion/deflection approach. Criminal justice deflection is a relatively new area of policing, but it is receiving more attention daily. The model contains both prevention and intervention practices. The core premises are:

- » If no criminal charges are present, the focus is on prevention, which diverts from future police encounters by referring individuals to case managers and peer mentors and access substance use disorder treatment that will reduce criminal behavior.
- » If individuals are charged with a criminal offense, the focus turns to intervention, with the objective of seeking alternatives to proceeding with criminal adjudication. In the intervention phase the deflection plan leads referrals to case management and substance use disorder treatment services.

The Montgomery County Deflection Model begins with the police officers who may observe that an individual’s behavior suggests possible drug use (with or without criminal

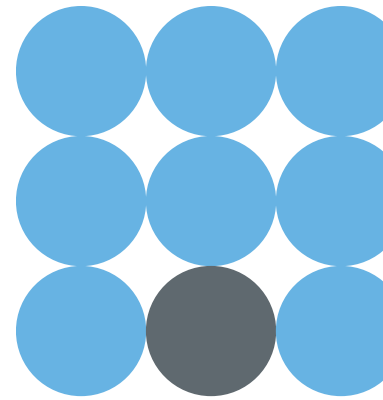
activity being present). Following this, the police officer screens the individual to determine that person’s criminogenic risk (these assessments are controversial) and treatment needs. Certain individuals would be deflected to community-based behavioral health services for possible referral to substance use disorder treatment and related biopsychosocial services. The model has potential for providing solutions for reducing police encounters that result in use of force.

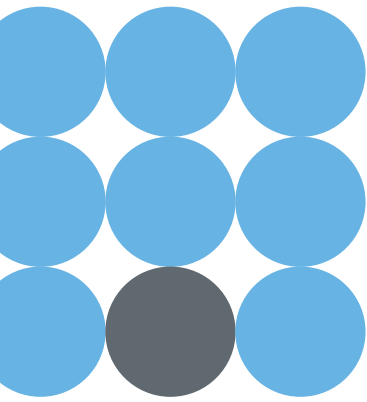
## Sequential Intercept Model

One best practice for intervening with people with mental health and substance use disorders pre-arrest is the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM). The model was developed in the early 2000s as a tool to provide a template for community stakeholders to respond to the needs of people with mental and substance use disorders who become justice involved.

The model is structured as a strategic planning tool to evaluate available biopsychosocial resources, determine gaps in services, and plan for community intervention. SIM is much more effective when it is employed by an interdisciplinary team of stakeholders including mental health, substance use, law enforcement, pretrial services, courts, jails, community corrections, housing, health, and social services.

SIM’s overarching objective is to link individuals with behavioral health issues to appropriate services as a diversion from further involvement in the criminal justice system. The model seeks to determine where to intercept such individuals as they move through the criminal justice system. It is especially designed to divert the individual pre-arrest, thereby avoiding police encounters, which often turn violent.





SIM identifies five key points for intercepting individuals with behavioral health issues:

Intercept 1: Community and law enforcement

Intercept 2: Arrest and initial detention/court hearings

Intercept 3: Jails/specialty courts (mental health courts, drug courts)

Intercept 4: Re-entry from jails and prisons into the community

Intercept 5: Community corrections and community support services

### Police Social Work

#### Issues in Implementing Police Social Work within Police Departments

Although some within the social work community are uncomfortable with social workers being employed as direct employees in police departments from an ethics perspective, the practice of police social work has existed for a number of years. Therefore, it is important to include this area of social work practice in this discussion on police reform.

Employing police social workers within police departments raises numerous issues that need to be considered. These issues include but are not limited to:

- » securing and maintaining funding for sustainability
- » the influence of civil service regulations that direct local government agencies such as police departments to require an MSW/BSW or an academic degree in a related field in addition to relevant experience
- » the influence of police unions and perceptions that police officers are being replaced by social workers or that social workers are performing police functions
- » police social work training and appropriate supervision

- » the use of equipment such as police radios and unmarked police departmental vehicles by civilians
- » where to position police social workers within the various police department units

Possibilities exist for developing new and exciting areas of police social work practice, and numerous initiatives are underway that have contributed toward resolving a number of issues related to police overinvolvement and escalation. Although more outcome studies are needed to assess the efficacy of police social work interventions, working through these issues can enhance police social work practice.

### Social Work Practice Within Police Departments

Despite the fact that many social support services that law enforcement agencies use are derived from social work practice, few of the nation's police departments directly employ social workers. For example, the New York City Police Department, the nation's largest police department, does not employ civilian police social workers.

There is an emerging trend of expanding social workers' roles in a variety of agencies. However, it appears that police departments are not a part of that trend even though they often provide services similar to those of social workers, such as crisis intervention. A study is being conducted in the state of Minnesota to research this issue. The two objectives of the research are to (1) explore whether police departments in Minnesota provide social services to crime victims and witnesses, and to residents seeking social service assistance in non-crime situations, and (2) explore strategies for hiring social workers within police

departments and increase the effective collaboration with the new hires during specific types of responses to interventions, including reviewing areas of community policing, problem solving approaches, law enforcement agencies, the welfare of police officers collaboration, social service provision, and general police social work.

### Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) Program

The current controversy over police serving as first responders for mental health crisis has focused attention on expanding the CIT model, which is a community-based approach to improve the outcomes of police-involved encounters. CITs exist in over 2,700 communities across the country. The relevance of these programs to this discussion is that they help to form a collaboration between law enforcement, mental health providers, hospital emergency services, and individuals with mental illness and their families. The importance of such collaborations cannot be overstated. CIT community partnerships and training improve communication between police and community providers and enhance community safety.

Not only can CIT programs bring community leaders together, they can also help keep people with mental illness out of jail and in treatment, on the road to recovery, because diversion programs like CIT reduce arrests of people with mental illness while simultaneously increasing the likelihood that individuals will receive mental health services. CIT programs also accomplish the following:

- » **Keep law enforcement's focus on crime.** Some communities have found that CIT has reduced the time officers spend responding to a mental health call. This puts officers back into the community

more quickly to address violent crime.

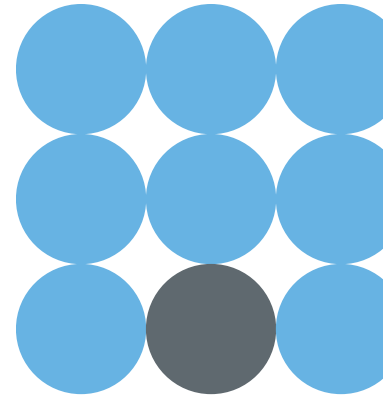
- » **Produce cost savings** that could be reinvested in related community-based services that reduce police encounters and arrests. The cost of Incarceration is often more expensive than treatment. For example, in Detroit a jail inmate with mental illness costs \$31,000 a year, whereas community-based mental health treatment costs only \$10,000 a year.

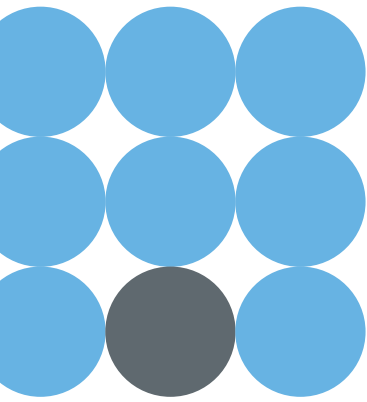
### Rethinking 911 Emergency Response—988 Suicide Crisis Line

“If we were going to design a public safety system from scratch, very few people would say that the appropriate and necessary response to mental health crises, traffic collisions, or reports of loud parties should be armed agents with the authority to use deadly force” (Bonin, 2020). However, that is essentially what we have with our national 911.

The purpose of highlighting models discussed in this section is to move toward a more comprehensive and robust crisis response system. If communities have an alternative system where they can find support, then our hope is that they will reduce their dependence on 911 and the police.

To that point, the mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico, announced that unarmed social workers—not police officers—would now respond to certain 911 calls. The decision came in reaction to the “defund police” advocacy in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. The city’s mayor announced that Albuquerque would create a “first of its kind” cabinet-level department, Albuquerque Community Safety, that would respond to calls on inebriation, homelessness, addiction, and behaviors triggered by mental health





issues. It would be another option beside dispatching police or firefighters and paramedics whenever someone called 911. The department would be made up of social workers and other civilian professionals who would focus on violence prevention, mental health referrals, and issues related to homelessness. The department would include trained professionals (such as social workers) housing and homelessness specialists, and violence prevention and diversion program experts.

Similarly, [San Francisco police](#) will no longer respond to calls that pose no threat to public safety, according to a press release from the mayor's office. That means police will not answer calls on homeless people, neighbor disputes, school discipline calls, and other noncriminal issues. This policy is an expression of the city's position that law enforcement has to begin to pay attention to the African American community by embracing reforms in policing practices. San Francisco expanded the plan over the next year to replicate the Crisis Assistance Helping Out on The Streets (CAHOOTS) program (discussed next) in Eugene, Oregon. The plan is for mental health workers to respond to 911 calls that do not involve crimes.

### The CAHOOTS Model

As activists call to defund the police, mental-health advocates say that the time is now to rethink public safety. "In those situations where there's not a criminal issue, there's not an emergent threat to the safety of an individual or a neighborhood, why do we need the police to be the ones responding?" Tim Black, CAHOOTS' operations coordinator, told [MarketWatch](#). "Why can't it be folks from that community who are coming with unconditional

positive regard and empathy, instead of force?" CAHOOTS 911 emergency response model was developed in Eugene, Oregon, as a 48-person program that provides medical and behavioral health services as an official part of the city's public safety system. Portland provided additional funding to adapt CAHOOTS to cover a larger urban area. The impetus for organizing CAHOOTS was an investigation that found 52 percent of all arrests in Eugene were of homeless people—most arrests were for low-level crimes. Over its more than 10 years of existence, CAHOOTS has built relationships with the city's police and dispatch workers. More important, the [community has come to accept CAHOOTS as an important resource](#) to responding to emergencies. CAHOOTS responds mostly to drugs and mental health related calls and has become the frontline resource for the Eugene area's homeless population—about 60 percent of all the people CAHOOTS work with are homeless.

One of the reasons that Portland has replicated CAHOOTS is that officials realized that the majority of the city's 911 calls were associated with homelessness. By policy, when police receive such emergency calls, they are obligated to respond. Portland's data show that many of the follow-ups to the calls by police end in arrests—leading to a disproportionate number of homeless people in jail for low-level crimes.

The success of CAHOOTS helped officials to realize that police sometimes respond to life-or-death 911 [mental health situations](#) without the training "to talk someone off the ledge." They saw the value of assigning that responsibility to qualified professionals. This point was reinforced in a National Public Radio interview, "[CAHOOTS': How Social](#)

Workers and Police Share Responsibilities in Eugene, Oregon,” in which the host talked with social workers at CAHOOTS’ White Bird Clinic about their experiences as an alternative to police intervention.

### **Georgia Crisis and Access Line**

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is recommending the Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL) as a best practice for responding to mental health crisis. The GCAL is staffed by mental health professionals, social workers, and other social services providers. They offer direct support over the phone, help arrange same-day or next-day appointments with mental health providers, and dispatch mobile crisis services or CIT officers, circumventing the 911 system to minimize the likelihood that the initial crisis response is not the police.

### **Moving to a Suicide Prevention Three-Digit 988 Emergency Line**

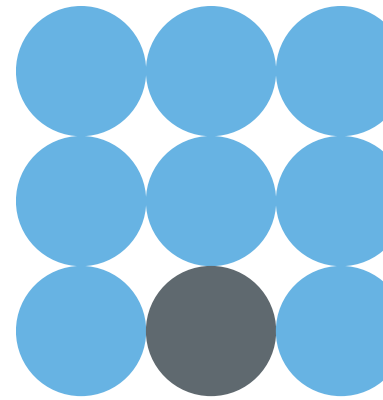
In July 2020, the Federal Communications Commission voted to designate 988 as the new three-digit nationwide number for the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. Lawmakers and advocates have long pushed for shortening the hotline’s 10-digit phone number to make it easier for those in a mental health crisis to seek help. Once approved, the nation’s telephone providers—including Internet calling services—will have two years to transition 988 calls to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline.

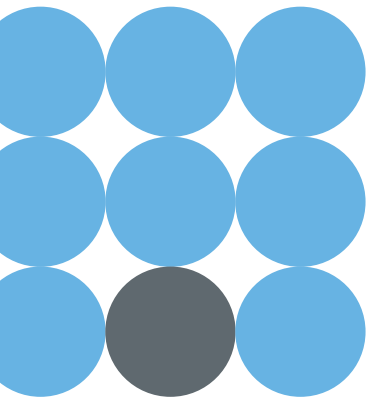
In its advocacy for the new 988 suicide prevention emergency line, the American Association of Suicidology uses a catchphrase: “When you’ve got a police, fire or rescue emergency, you call 911. When you have an urgent mental health need, you’ll call 988.”

This catchphrase is important to the discussion about how national emergency crisis lines are perceived. The tagline has an unintended implication that, once the 988 system is operationalized, the country’s 911 emergency crisis systems will no longer be inundated by suicide and mental health crisis calls. The truth is that there will not be a straightforward binary option of 911 or 988. There will be significant overlap. That is added justification for ensuring that jurisdictions retain plans to ensure that 911 systems continue to be supported by qualified mental health and suicide crisis counselors—even after the existence of the 988-suicide crisis line.

Whether the call comes through a 911 or a 988 system, it is important to recognize that in a mental health crisis, people are more likely to encounter police than a mental health professional. As a result, 2 million people with mental illness are locked up in jails each year. This translates to 15 percent of men and 30 percent of women booked into jails presenting with a serious mental health condition—and most were arrested for nonviolent low-level crimes. Crisis encounters involving people with mental illness place a burden on law enforcement. It is clear that such encounters, which may become violent, do not necessarily protect public safety.

There is an urgency to have clear guidelines about responding to suicide and mental health crises. It has been suggested that the country could possibly be entering into a period of mental health crisis triggered by high levels of emotional distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is likely more people will need help through emergency crisis lines—be it 911 or 988.





## Implicit Bias Concepts and Training Models

In response to broad concerns about racially motivated policing, implicit bias training is becoming a staple among police departments across the United States. Implicit bias training aims to increase fairness in officer decision making and to enhance the outcomes of police-citizen encounters.

Conceptually, implicit bias and trainings associated with it are derived from one basic proposition that unconscious biases—such as those related to mainly race/ethnicity, but also including socioeconomic status and gender—invariably stem from growing up in a society where stereotypes pervade one’s daily life. As a consequence, subconscious biases influence how people form preconceived impressions and interpret the motives of those with whom they interface. In recent years, this concept has increasingly become an accepted explanation for disproportionate encounters, arrests, and incidents of excessive force between police officers and Black and Brown people.

In discussing the phenomenon of implicit bias, an official from the Center for Policing Equity suggested three solutions for eliminating bias in law enforcement:

**1. “Raise awareness of implicit bias among police leaders and officers.”** Former police officer Tracie Keese’s position is that change can only begin with accepting that implicit bias exists, and we must learn how to recognize it in ourselves. While awareness training should begin at all levels of a police department, it is critical that awareness has to begin with police leadership.

**2. “Transform the conversation between police and the community.”** Police departments have to seek to develop a diverse workforce—with a preference of hiring from the community it serves. By so doing, it sends a message of equality to that community.

**3. “Put policies in place to limit the impact of bias.”** The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department evaluated their use-of-force data and identified a specific interaction that was resulting in excessive force: foot pursuits, especially with young men of color. They made a simple policy tweak that proved to be enormously effective: if you are the pursuing officer, you are not the same officer that puts the handcuffs on the suspect. In making this policy change, the department reduced use of force incidents that occurred following a pursuit by 23 percent.

## Police Abolition Movement

One of the primary objectives of this brief is to examine a variety of paradigms and models that strive to develop innovative approaches to law enforcement. These reimaged approaches put a premium on preventive policing, partnering with the communities they serve, and recognizing that the culture of policing that perpetuates racist practices and policies must change.

While it is important to recognize innovation and reforms, it is also important to recognize that - in this period of heightened awareness of historical human rights abuses by police - there are many who feel we are beyond the point where incremental reforms in policing can transform an irreparably corrupted system. A growing number of those who embrace this point of view are gravitating to the police abolition movement.



To a degree, the term abolish the police is a euphemism for advocating for an immediate and total overhaul the nation's approach to maintaining public safety as far as law enforcement is concerned. Adherents to this philosophy argue that it is only through a complete overhaul of existing law enforcement systems nationwide that we can reduce mass imprisonment, or decriminalize acts such as homelessness, mental illness and more (all of which are caused by social inequalities).

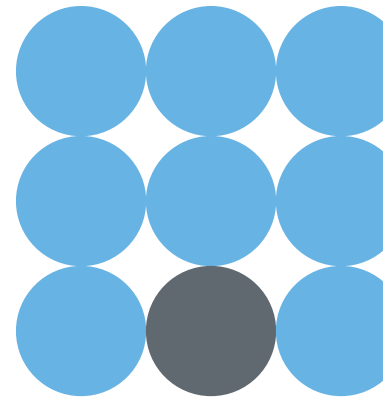
Rooted in police abolition thinking is that ending the violence caused by policing is historically rooted in the prison abolition movement. For example, prison abolitionists such as Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, understood that many state institutions reacted to violence with more violence. Administrators of these institutes believed that arrest and imprisonment – for even minor violation was the answer to maintaining public safety. Abolitionists insist that state legislators were singularly focused on a distorted notion of protecting public order – so they continued to sustain a racially biased systems of policing. Police abolitionist adamantly state that the primary priority for police reform is resolving inequities behind what caused crime. Abolitionists insist that the only way to ensure long-term reforms is to immediately install a new paradigm for policing.

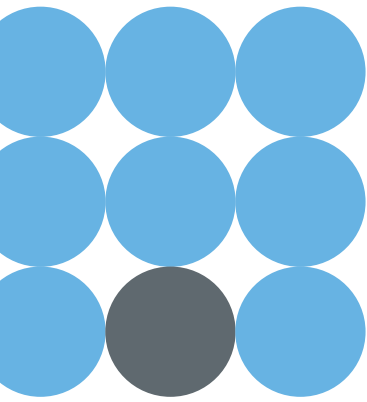
## Recommendations

Social workers can be agents of change toward advocating for the implementation of police reform models that can have a mitigating impact on reducing police encounters that are disproportionately injurious and lethal to communities of color. Social workers can be agents of change in redirecting and reinvesting state and local

funding aimed at policing encounters into more effective systems and community-based programs that promote community safety with resources for mental health, housing, education, and is inclusive of social workers, restorative justice and more.

- » **Police reforms must be systemic.** As social workers, we must recognize the connection of racism and implicit bias by police not only with excessive force but also in the following:
  - › Racial profiling
  - › Disproportionate police stops and arrests for non-violent crimes
  - › Overcriminalization (such as continuing to make marijuana a schedule I drug)
  - › Exacerbating poverty in Black and Brown communities due to criminal records and the collateral consequences of being justice involved
  - › Presenting a major barrier to improved and trustful law enforcement relations in Black and Brown communities
- » It is essential to establish a national database of officers terminated for misconduct and a decertification system that makes them ineligible to work elsewhere as police officers.
- » Every police killing of an unarmed suspect should be transferred to an independent investigator for review and a special prosecutor for charging. Jurisdictions like New York and Minnesota have policies that allow for special prosecutors in some cases.
- » Political and civic leaders at the state, county, and city levels must embrace the idea of changing their approach to police department funding in a way that reimagines public safety. Most public safety issues and community conflicts do not require the intervention of an armed officer.





- » Reinvestment of government funds from one social priority to another is not a new concept. We recommend that every effort be made by states, counties, and cities to reallocate funds from police budgets—and from savings from reduced jail populations due to COVID-19—to cover the costs of innovative biopsychosocial services that mitigate police involvement and encounters
- » Social Workers should join with the broader criminal justice reform communities to seek reforms in overcriminalization—especially the criminalization of poverty which leads to disproportionate police encounters in communities of color
- » Social Workers need to transition the national 911 and 988 emergency crisis systems into a bifurcated response process that allows for greater involvement of behavioral health and crisis intervention professionals as first responders.
- » Social Workers encourage replication of community-based pre-arrest diversion programs—such as the CAHOOTS program—that reduce unnecessary and potentially dangerous police encounters with homeless and seriously mentally ill individuals.
- » It is important to replicate the LEAD program, a pre-booking diversion program developed with the community to address low-level drug and prostitution crimes. This service allows law enforcement officers to redirect low-level offenders engaged in drugs to community-based services, instead of jail and prosecution.
- » Social Workers must encourage NASW and social workers in general to support the expansion of the CIT models.
- » The profession and academics should investigate the current viability (and ethical

implications) of police social work as a potential best practices model for reforms.

- » NASW and social workers in general must become integrally engaged with other stakeholders in bringing about systemic changes to law enforcement’s racist culture, policies, and practices.

## Summary

The firestorm created by the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other Black people due to excessive and lethal use of force by the police has exposed systemic racism as a national tragedy. Policing in America has a long history of preserving the violent legacy of slavery and upholding white supremacy. Many police departments continue to perpetuate racial profiling, racially and ethnic biased policing, excessive use of force and overly aggressive policing in communities of color. A compounding factor is that there are far too many laws that criminalize behaviors that pose no threat to the community or public safety. Such over-criminalization disproportionately impacts Black, Brown and indigenous communities.

The worldwide reaction to the reality of systemic racism in the law enforcement structures in America has resulted in a demand for police reform and reimagining the nation’s approach to policing. The stated purpose of this social justice brief was intended to identify and discuss national models and innovation ideas that can potentially spearhead the necessary reforms and systems changes needed to transform law enforcement to reflect the needs of racially diverse 21st Century America. The recommendations in this brief are to serve as a framework for the continued work that will be required of the social work profession and its partners to

move forward with concrete steps to ensure a reimagined system of policing that is no longer perceived as an enemy to Black, Brown and indigenous communities. The overarching goal of the social justice brief is describe a paradigm that reimagines policing from several viewpoints which include:

- » Identifying nationally recognized police reform models that emphasize innovative approaches to community policing.
- » Creative approaches by jurisdictions to funding social services, behavioral health services, and alternatives to arrests by way of reinvesting law enforcement funds for non-police functions; and
- » Looking at models for realigning the manner in which 911 crisis responses are handled – with the purpose of reducing the presence of police officers as the primary responders to mental health or non-violent domestic disputes.

It should be stressed that this brief reflects the fact that – in an atmosphere of systemic racism – the profession of social work recognizes that police reform is a national imperative. Therefore, we must step forward in advocating for comprehensive reforms in America’s approach to policing, with a special urgency of ending incidents of unwarranted excessive use of force that result in bodily harm and deaths.

As many are aware, the criminal justice reform community, which includes the social work profession, has long been active in pressing political and law enforcement officials to drastically change the historically antagonistic culture of policing. We welcome a reimagined law enforcement system that places equal value on maintaining public safety and

supporting funding for greatly expanded behavioral health and social services – which are also effective public safety tools.

We have learned that traditional police reforms are not sufficient. We must recognize that, as police themselves have been telling us for years, they are doing too much. We must look beyond policing and reimagine public safety to reallocate resources so that communities can have more of what they need to thrive. Reallocating funds and reimagining a future of public safety beyond the traditional institutions of policing is a natural evolution of police reform.

## Resources

### **The American University**

[Crisis Intervention Team \(CIT\)](#)

### **The Boston Review-Law and Justice**

[What Does Police Abolition Mean?](#)

### **Center for Health and Justice**

[Deflection and Pre-Arrest Diversion: A Newly Emerging Field in the United States A Public Health Solution to Public Safety](#)

### **CIT International**

[www.citinternational.org](http://www.citinternational.org)

### **Cogent Science**

[Police social work and community policing](#)

### **College at Brockport: State University of New York Digital Common @Brockport**

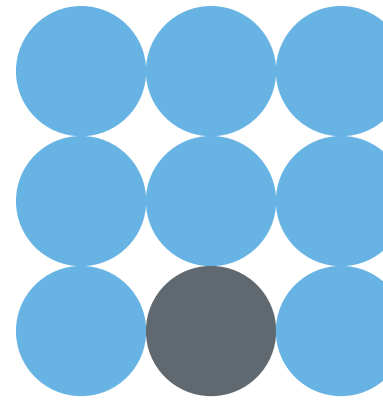
[Social work and police partnership: A summons to the village strategies and effective practices.](#)

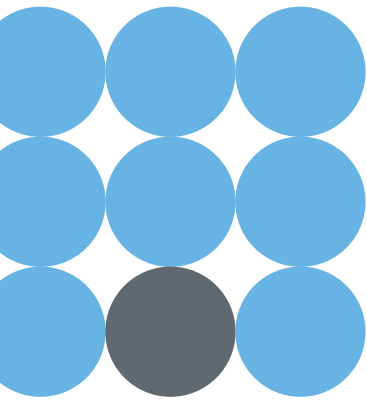
### **The Imprint: Youth and Family News**

[Abolishing Policing Also Means Abolishing Family Regulation](#)

### **International Business Times**

[Albuquerque to send unarmed social workers, not police officers, to 911 calls.](#)





**The Journal of Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law**  
[Effectiveness of Police Crisis Intervention Training Programs](#)

**Mother Jones Magazine**  
[What a World without Cops Would look Like](#)

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**  
[Jailing people with mental illness](#)

**New York Times**  
[Cities Grew Safer. Police Budgets Kept Growing](#)

**New York Times**  
[Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Gilmore Might Change your mind](#)

**Police Chief**  
[Deflection: A Powerful Crime-Fighting Tool That Improves Community Relations](#)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**  
[Tailoring Crisis Response and Pre-Arrest Diversion Models for Rural Communities](#)

**The Greater Good Magazine**  
[Can we Reduce Bias in Criminal Justice?](#)

**Up North News**  
[Replace cops with social workers and nurses? That's what these schools might do](#)

**Urban Institute**  
[Police and Corrections Expenditures](#)

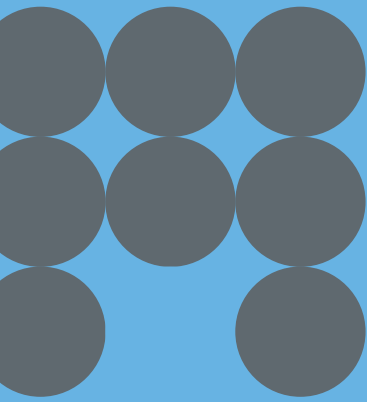
**Vera Institute of Justice**  
[How can we change a system set up to control Black people? By radically dismantling it](#)

**Vera Institute of Justice**  
[The national initiative to enhance policing for persons with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities](#)

**Vera Institute of Justice**  
[The 911 Call Processing System: A Review of Literature as it Relates to Policing](#)

**Voices- Jay Greene**  
[Mental health cuts in Detroit have increased law enforcement problems, flooded ERs and created general misery](#)

**Wayne State School of Social Work**  
[Mental Health Across the Criminal Legal Continuum: A Summary of Five Years of Research in Ten Counties](#)



# NASW Resources

**NASW** » [SocialWorkers.org](https://www.socialworkers.org)

**NASW Foundation** » [NASWFoundation.org](https://www.naswfoundation.org)

**NASW Press** » [NASWPress.org](https://www.naswpress.org)

**NASW Assurance Services, Inc.** » [NASWAssurance.org](https://www.naswassurance.org)

**Find A Social Worker** » [HelpStartsHere.org](https://www.helpstartsHere.org)

**Social Work Blog** » [SocialWorkBlog.org](https://www.socialworkblog.org)

**NASW Research and Data** » [SocialWorkers.org/News](https://www.socialworkers.org/news)

**Social Work Advocacy** » [SocialWorkers.org/Advocacy](https://www.socialworkers.org/advocacy)

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