
POLICING REIMAGINED

A Special Report from the
JUSTICE & SAFETY ALLIANCE

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- Policing does not prevent crime and the origins of law enforcement organizations demonstrate that they were never intended to reduce or deter crime.
- Policing can actually have negative impacts on communities of color.
- Alternatives to policing that address socioeconomic disparities are the only way to effectively and sustainably prevent, reduce, and deter crime.

Introduction

The national and global outrage in 2020 in response to the police murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many others represented a watershed moment in the fight for safer communities and racial justice. Among other things, these conversations fostered a long-overdue reckoning with police engagement of Black and other marginalized communities. From local activists to the White House, demands are being made to “fix” policing and end the excessive surveillance, brutality, and death that have come at the hands of law enforcement.

In recent US discourse on race relations and policing, two broad paradigms have emerged as solutions: reform vs. replacement. “Reform” approaches aim to augment existing law enforcement structures by implementing minimal-force policies and imposing stricter measures of accountability (e.g., the proliferation of body cameras in the wake of the 2014 uprising in Ferguson). “Replacement”¹ approaches, on the other hand, are rooted in a deep sense of despair about the American justice system, viewing it as largely irredeemable and aiming to supplant it with community-based solutions and resources that:

- 1) promote healthy communities and self-determining neighborhoods, and
- 2) reject the punitive measures endemic to traditional law enforcement.²

Advocates of this approach seek to reimagine and redefine public safety in ways that do not center around police, thereby ending the subjugation of Black and brown people to cyclical harms and repeated patterns of distrust.

Nevertheless, local governments (including city administrators and police departments) consistently

respond to calls for justice with proposals that *increase* police budgets. And, despite significant data to the contrary, some local leaders continue to assert that the only way to address crime is with more police officers and increased training. At his first State of the Union address, President Biden drew rare bipartisan applause for his comments on policing: “We should all agree: The answer is not to defund the police. The answer is to fund the police. Fund them. Fund them. Fund them with resources and training they need to protect our communities.”³ At a local level, Michael Rallings, the recently-retired Memphis Police Director, contended that an increase to the Memphis Police Department (MPD) budget was necessary to hire more officers to allow for the type of community policing that, he claims, residents want and need. This demand for more funding is especially warranted, Rallings asserted, given recent increases in crime in Memphis.

To be clear, the concern about crime in Memphis is not unfounded. Although overall crime is on a downward trajectory, in 2020 there were significant increases in major violent crime (up 24.2%), gun-related violent crime (up 24.4%), and aggravated assaults (up 35%) when compared to 2019. In 2021, 346 homicides were committed in Memphis, an average of just under one homicide per day and a new record for the city.⁴

Nevertheless, the demand for increased police funding and hiring in Memphis is misplaced and stems from:

- 1) a fundamental misconception of the relationship between policing and crime, and
- 2) the paucity of innovative approaches to public safety that—if implemented—would actually reduce crime and heal communities.

Because law enforcement is incapable of forming and fostering healthier communities, any proposal that results in increased police budgets or the maintenance of inflated ones should be rejected.

1 The term “Replacement” may be an alternative to the commonly-used yet misunderstood phrase “defund/abolish the police.” The latter terms, though accurate insofar as they represent an insistence upon the divestiture of funds from law enforcement, focus on *absence* instead of the more substantive emphasis on the *presence* of community resources aimed at crime prevention.

2 In 2020, activists and community leaders in Minneapolis released a report evaluating the Minneapolis Police Department on the occasion of its sesquicentennial. The report, “MPD 150,” was a scathing indictment of the city’s police force and contains a wealth of practical alternatives to policing. See <https://www.mpd150.com>.

3 President Joseph R. Biden, “State of the Union Address,” Washington, DC, March 1, 2022.

4 Micaela A. Watts, “Following 346 homicides in Memphis in 2021, officials consider what’s driving the violence,” *The Commercial Appeal*, January 3, 2022, <https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/news/2022/01/04/homicide-levels-memphis-2021-and-why-there-so-much-death/9054169002/>.

The True Nature of Policing

The History of Policing

One reason why proposals that promote the enlargement of the police state should be rejected is that policing was never intended to reduce or deter crime. The origin of law enforcement is important to this discussion because it provides insight into the true nature of policing and its historical role as a violent enforcement mechanism that has frustrated progress for stigmatized communities. The result of this historical reality is a pervasive distrust of police in underserved communities today.

Police forces have always functioned to maintain and perpetuate the interests of the White, wealthy and politically powerful, while suppressing the interests of Black, brown, poor, and working class communities. For example, the Boston Police Department, founded in 1838, is considered to be the first formal civilian-led police department in the United States of America. Drawing upon a model of policing established in London a decade earlier, the Boston force was primarily organized to quell uprisings by the working class (largely comprised of immigrant factory workers). Protests against the brutal conditions stemming from rampant industrialization can further be seen in the subsequent formation of police departments in northern cities, including New York (1844) and Chicago (1855). In fact, by the end of the 19th century, all major U.S. cities had police forces. What many of these forces had in common is that they were *not* created as innovations to deal with crime, but as enforcement mechanisms to contain mass protests in response to unfair labor conditions.

In the South, the origin of police forces took on a different hue. The precursor to modern police forces in the South were slave patrols: groups of White males (largely drawn from the military) who surveilled,

intimidated, and brutalized enslaved persons. First formed in South Carolina in 1704, these patrols were meant to prevent escape and frustrate organized resistance. Slave patrols operated with the authority of their local government and were sometimes granted tax-exempt status because of their service.

Due to the increased urbanization of southern cities, slaves often ran errands or held jobs in the city center (i.e., away from slave patrols that tended to operate in proximity to plantations). In some cases, Black slaves were allowed to live in their own homes and form communities in neighborhoods alongside free Black residents. Given the fear of slave uprisings held by Whites, some form of control was deemed necessary to monitor their movements and ensure their subordination outside of the watchful eye of the plantation owner or slave patrols. Thus, in 1783, the Charleston City Guard and Watch was formed. This group existed largely to harass Black communities and violently ensure their compliance with the laws and racial norms of the era. Similar organizations, created largely to terrorize and suppress Black citizens, eventually morphed into the professional civilian police forces that exist today. David Whitehouse, a historian of US policing, sums it up as follows:

The specific history of police forces varied from one American city to another, but they all tended to converge on similar institutional solutions. The nature of the police comes from the nature of the “problem”: an urban working population that has developed some economic autonomy as wage workers and artisans and has thus been able to create a self-assertive, collective life of its own. The Southern experience also reinforces the point that was already clear in the North: Anti-Black racism was built into American police work from the very first day.⁵

Hence, although the contemporary function of police is believed to be to “protect and serve,” police were traditionally intended to maintain the status quo and enforce (not resolve) social inequities.⁶

5 David Whitehouse, “Origins of the Police,” <https://libcom.org/history/origins-police-david-whitehouse>. For more information on the history of policing, see Alex Vitale’s *The End of Policing* (Verso, 2017).

6 The motto “To Protect and To Serve,” far from being the original function of policing, was a much later addition. In 1955, *BEAT* Magazine, an internal publication of the Los Angeles Police Department, held a contest to determine the motto for its police academy. LAPD Officer Joseph S. Dorobek submitted the winning entry (allegedly written by his 17-year-old daughter) and the motto would eventually come to be emblazoned on LAPD patrol cars in the 1960s. Given the widespread influence of the LAPD on police departments nationwide, “To Protect and To Serve” has been adopted by numerous law enforcement organizations.

The evolution of the Memphis Police Department has been no different. The Memphis Police Department was founded in 1827, shortly after the town of Memphis was incorporated in December 1826.⁷ Over forty years later in 1867, William Cook and John F. Harris became the first Black citizens to serve on the force, working as turnkeys at two precincts. In 1940, Edward Hull “Boss” Crump, a powerful politician who ran the city of Memphis for decades, inaugurated what the *Chicago Defender* deemed a “reign of terror” in which the Memphis police force was violently used to suppress Black residents, labor activists, and migrants. During this time, “black Memphians were subjected to an extensive campaign of police harassment that included searches, seizures, mass arrests, and violence.”⁸ For years, Crump had exerted significant influence over Memphis’ Black population by leveraging political access in exchange for unquestioned fealty.

In response to the increasing activism among Black citizens challenging the Jim Crow policies and practices of the era, Crump and Mayor Walter Chandler used the police force to ensure that any organized rebellion was quickly quashed. Jason Jordan writes:

The police occupation of Beale Street and the surrounding black neighborhoods lasted from October to December 1940. During this time, hundreds of black Memphians were stopped, searched, arrested, and often roughed up under the pretense of “cleaning up” Memphis. Such actions, however, had less to do with reducing crime than they did with sending a message to those who opposed the political machine.⁹

In the mid-1960s, the Memphis Police Department formed the Domestic Intelligence Unit (DIU) to “covertly investigate and maintain secret files of citizens engaged in non-criminal, constitutionally protected activities that are considered ‘subversive’ or politically controversial, a violation of the First,

Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments.”¹⁰ In 1968, Mayor Loeb commissioned surveillance on the organizing efforts of the sanitation workers. Following Martin Luther King’s assassination, the DIU started targeting “Civil Rights, Union, and Negro Coalition activities,” including, but not limited to: “the ACLU, NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, City of Memphis Hospital workers, Memphis State University Black Students’ Organization, Memphis Public Schools principals and teachers, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).”¹¹ Eric Carter, a student at Memphis State (which became the University of Memphis in 1994), was an activist, student council president, and spokesperson for Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Carter found out that his former roommate was a police spy and that the Domestic Intelligence Unit had a file on him. He requested access to the file, but was denied. Hearing word that the city was planning to get rid of evidence, ACLU attorney Bruce Kramer and others got a temporary restraining order on Friday, September 10, 1976.

The Domestic Intelligence Unit was ordered by Mayor J. Wyeth Chandler—against the advice of the Police Legal Adviser—to burn the files “by noon.” Officers then took nine years’ worth of files out of ten cabinets, placed them in 105 black garbage bags, took them in several vehicles to the Scott Street incinerator, doused them with fuel, and burned them. The DIU was also shut down. Nevertheless, with an official complaint in hand, the ACLU of Western Tennessee filed a lawsuit, *Kendrick v. Chandler*, on September 14, 1976.

A two-year investigation resulted in the securing of a consent decree, the first of its kind in the nation, to prohibit surveillance and the maintenance of files on peaceful protesters. The consent decree also restricted law enforcement in criminal investigations that impacted First Amendment rights and mandated the erasure of identifying information from previously-collected public

7 For further information, see “The History of the Memphis Police Department” by Eddie M. Ashmore and Joseph E. Walk, <https://memphispolice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Memphis-PD-History.pdf>.

8 Jason Jordan, “We’ll Have No Race Trouble Here: Racial Politics and Memphis’s Reign of Terror” in *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee* edited by Aram Goudsouzian and Charles W. McKinney Jr., 130.

9 Jordan, 131.

10 “BLACKLISTED: Memphis Police Surveillance and Kendrick v. Chandler – A Timeline,” ACLU Tennessee, <https://www.aclu-tn.org/blacklisted-memphis-police-surveillance-and-kendrick-v-chandler-a-timeline/>.

11 “BLACKLISTED: Memphis Police Surveillance and Kendrick v. Chandler – A Timeline,” ACLU Tennessee, <https://www.aclu-tn.org/blacklisted-memphis-police-surveillance-and-kendrick-v-chandler-a-timeline/>.

documents. The decree, in full force and effect since 1978, remains active to this day. However, over time, the enforcement of the decree fell by the wayside and the Memphis Police Department resumed its practice of unlawful surveillance and harassment.

For example, in recent years, the MPD has routinely surveilled and tracked peaceful protesters. Former Police Director Michael Rallings claimed at one point that he had only a “vague knowledge” of the mandate despite decree requirements that all officers be trained on its provisions. In 2017 it was revealed that the Memphis Police Department, in conjunction with the City of Memphis, other law enforcement agencies, and private organizations (e.g., Shelby County Schools, FedEx, and AutoZone), was engaging in illegal surveillance of protests, even to the point of creating a list of individuals who supposedly had to be escorted when visiting City Hall. This list “included names of individuals who had participated in protests, rallies, or other free speech activities in the city. Many of those listed had no criminal record or history of causing disturbances at City Hall.”¹² This led to the *Blanchard et al. v. City of Memphis* lawsuit, which resulted in an October 2018 ruling that the 1978 consent decree (in both letter and spirit) had been violated seven different ways. The City of Memphis was sanctioned and a federal independent monitor was assigned to oversee the City’s compliance.¹³

Modern Policing Purposes

The nature of most police work, historically and today, is not the prevention of crime (especially major crime). Most police officers engage in routine patrol work and issue citations or make arrests for minor offenses (e.g., speeding), work that relies on officers covering a designated geographical territory from their vehicle and responding to incidents in the area.

The effectiveness of patrol policing has long been challenged. According to the Vera Institute for Justice:

- In 2016, police made 10.6 million arrests (approximately 1 every 3 seconds)
- 5% of these arrests were for violent offenses, 80% of these arrests were for low-level offenses (primarily “disorderly conduct” and a general “all other offenses” category)
- Between 1980 and 2016, arrests for drug-related offenses increased 171%
- Only 40% of victims report crimes to the police and less than 25% of reported crimes result in the arrest of the perpetrator¹⁴

In fact, in 2006, just 2% of serious crimes led to a conviction of the guilty party.¹⁵

Additionally, there are countless examples of patrol-style policing resulting in unnecessary and excessive/improper use of force against civilians. Police officers are not trained to manage a variety of crises in a non-violent manner. SWAT (Special Weapons And Tactics) teams are deployed 50,000 times per year, mostly to execute search warrants for drugs. These heavily armed, paramilitary squads are often utilized to manage non-violent offenders and minor crimes, needlessly using tanks and other excessively-violent tools to brutalize civilians. Often, many of the “criminals” who are locked into the criminal legal system and receive the brunt of police abuse are individuals who are struggling to survive, among them the houseless and those with mental health, behavioral health, and substance use disorders.

12 “Blanchard et al. v. City of Memphis,” ACLU Tennessee, <https://www.aclu-tn.org/blanchard-et-al-v-city-of-memphis/>.

13 See the Memphis Police Department Independent Monitoring Team, <https://www.memphisdpdmonitor.com/>.

14 Vera Institute of Justice, <https://arresttrends.vera.org/>.

15 Shima Baughman, “Police solve just 2% of all major crimes,” *The Conversation*, August 20, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/police-solve-just-2-of-all-major-crimes-143878>.

Alternatives to Increased Police Funding

In lieu of increasing funding for police forces that do not minimize crime and that often bring harm to already-marginalized communities, what alternatives should be considered as worthy of increased funding? In considering potential alternative funding options, the following criteria were used:

- the alternative should demonstrate a capacity to address the necessary issue with positive, empirical results
- the alternative should focus on social harm reduction, not criminal investigation, arrests, prosecution, and incarceration
- the alternative should lessen or eliminate dependence upon law enforcement

Although not exhaustive, the discussion below addresses alternatives to traditional policing by looking at three major areas that drive local crime trends: mental health, gun violence, and youth criminal activity. Examining these areas will assist community stakeholders in imagining tangible alternatives that can produce significantly positive outcomes, while minimizing the risks associated with excessive engagement with law enforcement.

An oft-repeated justification for “tough on crime” policies is their alleged support by Black communities. For example, when the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (commonly known as the “Clinton Crime Bill”) was introduced, a Gallup poll that year showed that the bill had 49% support from White citizens and 58% support from non-White citizens. However, Black citizens have a less favorable view of local police when compared to White citizens. In a 2015 YouGov/Huffington Post poll, 74% of Black respondents indicated that they warned their children

to be careful when dealing with the police, compared with 32% of White respondents. In addition, most Black respondents (54%) felt that police treated Black citizens more harshly compared to only 19% of White respondents who felt this way.¹⁶

Thus, the support for more police indicated by Black communities should be interpreted as a legitimate concern about the disproportionate harm done to their neighborhoods filtered through the void created by a lack of meaningful alternatives.

Crisis Intervention

Police officers are called upon to engage individuals with mental illnesses thousands of times per year. According to the Treatment Advocacy Center, individuals with mental health challenges are 16 times as likely to be killed by police than other civilians. A November 2016 study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* estimated that 20–50% of fatal encounters with law enforcement involved an individual with a mental illness. This does not account for the many police encounters with the mentally ill that do not end in a fatality but do expose individuals, including bystanders, to unnecessary trauma involving law enforcement.

In 1988, in response to the shooting death of a man with a history of substance abuse and mental illness by a Memphis police officer, a community task force created the Memphis Crisis Intervention Team (the “Memphis Model”). This model recommended 40 hours of specialized training for Memphis police officers who would then be dispatched to calls where mental health training was deemed appropriate. This model is an innovative attempt to effectively manage mental health crises and minimize the need for those in mental distress to be incarcerated. Nevertheless, there are still some points of concern, including:

- the program is limited to those who volunteer for it
- the model is still police-centered (although it promotes partnerships with groups that understand crisis response)¹⁷

16 YouGov, “Police Favorability,” July 23-27, 2015, https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/5dztg9atv1c/tabs_HP_Police_20150727.pdf.

17 In 2014, Correct Crisis Intervention Today-NYC (CCIT-NYC), an advocacy group comprised of “activists, community and non-profit members” (<https://www.ccitnyc.org/>) was formed to assist law enforcement agencies in responding to the 200,000 mental health crises calls received annually by the New York Police Department. However, when law enforcement officers still engaged violently with those they were tasked to help, the coalition changed its focus to removing law enforcement officers from the process entirely. See <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-tried-to-remove-nypd-from-911-mental-health-emergenciesbut-its-had-little-success>.

- the model is best-suited to communities with strong mental health services—services that don't exist widely in Memphis
- 40 hours of crisis intervention training is no substitute for trained mental health professionals responding to those in crisis

A better model tends to be outreach teams consisting of social-service workers and mental health practitioners. These teams have demonstrated greater effectiveness at trust-building with community members without the symbolic threat of punishment and violence that police officers bring to an already emotionally-charged encounter. In 2018, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse provided funding to create the CARE Program, an innovative collaboration between Alliance Healthcare Services (the largest comprehensive behavioral health provider in Shelby County), the Memphis Fire Department, and the Memphis Police Department. Teams comprised of a behavioral specialist, a paramedic/EMT, and a law enforcement officer respond to individuals experiencing mental health and/or substance abuse crises without immediately resorting to arrest and incarceration.

An exemplary model for this type of approach is the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) program in Eugene, Oregon. This clinic-based program assists the city with non-criminal crises involving people who are homeless, disoriented, intoxicated, in mental distress, or enmeshed in an escalating dispute. CAHOOTS workers are not trained in law enforcement and do not have the same authority as police. They are a mobile crisis intervention team conceived as an alternative to police-centered response for non-violent crises and interventions. The CAHOOTS program is wired into the 911 system and responds to most calls without police. Dispatchers are trained to recognize non-violent situations that have a behavioral health component and route those calls to CAHOOTS. A response team assesses the situation, provides immediate stabilization in case of urgent medical need or psychological crisis, and, when warranted, arranges transportation to the next step in treatment.

The cost reductions are considerable, saving the city of Eugene an estimated \$8.5 million in public safety spending annually. In 2017, the CAHOOTS teams answered 17% of the Eugene Police Department's overall call volume.

Programs like CAHOOTS recognize that untreated mental health issues make up a significant proportion of local crime. By treating these issues from a public health perspective, crisis intervention teams are able to deal with the root causes of public disorder without resorting to punitive measures. Last year, out of a total of roughly 24,000 CAHOOTS calls, police backup was requested only 150 times. "In contrast to police officers who typically seek to project authority at all times, CAHOOTS employees dress in black sweatshirts, listen to their police radios via earbuds, and speak in calm tones with inviting body language."¹⁸ The CAHOOTS model also demonstrates that fatal encounters with police are not inevitable.

CAHOOTS has been around for over 30 years and has gained more attention recently. In fact, the recently-passed COVID relief bill included a provision to fund the development and implementation of community-based mobile crisis services in 20 states for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Gun Violence Prevention

The City of Memphis saw a worrisome increase in gun violence and crimes in 2021. In the first quarter of 2021:

- There were 1,576 incidents involving guns, an increase of 30% compared to Q1 2020.
- According to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, there were 3,546 gun-crime incidents, an increase of 53% compared to Q1 2020.
- Police responded to 4,405 shots fired incidents, an increase of 13% compared to Q1 2020.
- Police responded to 530 reports of someone hit by gunfire, an increase of 24% compared to Q1 2020.

18 Zusha Elinson, "When Mental-Health Experts, Not Police, Are the First Responders," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/when-mental-health-experts-not-police-are-the-first-responders-1543071600>.

- 357 guns were reported stolen from cars, an increase of 117% compared to Q1 2020.¹⁹

These trends exemplify national concerns about gun violence. In 2017, the United States (with a population of 325.1 million citizens, 4% of the world's population) had 393.3 million guns (46% of the world's non-military guns). For every 100 citizens, there are 120 guns.²⁰

One innovative approach to gun violence is the model created by Dr. Gary Slutkin in 1995. Known as Cure Violence Global (originally CeaseFire), Cure Violence applies the principles of epidemiology to violence, reframing it as a public health crisis. In particular, this methodology focuses on three interventions:

- Detect and interrupt potentially violent conflicts
- Identify and treat high-risk communities and individuals
- Mobilize the community to change norms

Local chapters of Cure Violence Global partner with local hospitals and healthcare centers to provide holistic services to victims and their families and to interrupt the violence-retaliation cycle. The idea is to prevent lethal violence by interrupting potential violence before it occurs and by modifying individual and community patterns of violence. This model has been replicated in cities across the United States, including Save Our Streets (Brooklyn, NY), Safe Streets (Baltimore, MD), the Newark Community Street Team (Newark, NJ), and the TRUCE Program (Phoenix, AZ).

Despite being inconsistently deployed (primarily due to three funding lapses between 2007 and 2016), the US Department of Justice reported that Cure Violence Global was responsible for significant reductions in

gun violence and killings. In Chicago, for example, shootings dropped between 41% and 73% in target communities. In the Cherry Hill neighborhood of South Baltimore, there was a 56% reduction in homicides and a 34% reduction in non-fatal shooting incidents.²¹

Youth Justice

In recent years, even when there was a decline in violent crime in Memphis, youth crime statistics arose at an alarming rate. During the period of January through September of 2019, there were 671 incidents of violent crime charged to youth—a 58% increase compared to the same period the previous year. Much of this increase is attributed to the rise of gang activity in Memphis, including the presence of gangs in Memphis' public schools. In 2020, 28% of homicides were gang-related. According to the Memphis Police Department's Multi-Agency Gang Unit, traditional street gangs (e.g., Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings) are splintering off, leading to local gangs whose identity is based upon their neighborhood and whose composition transcends the boundaries of traditional gang affiliation. And, these gangs are increasingly constituted by younger members.

However, the tough-on-crime approach to youth violence and gang affiliation has not shown significant results. Reforms such as the “focused deterrence” approach (e.g., Thomas Abt's *Bleeding Out*) focus on individuals most likely to engage in violent crime and, utilizing law enforcement officers, community leaders, and other stakeholders, attempt to dissuade would-be offenders by offering social services and threatening them if they continue a path of violence. Part of the failure of these programs is that they tend to ignore the larger social dynamics that lead to crime, and they treat possibly isolated illegal actions and gang associations as enduring realities.

19 David Royer and Peter Fleischer, “2021 brings more gun violence, shots fired, guns stolen in Memphis area, data shows,” *WREG News*, April 21, 2021, <https://wreg.com/news/2021-brings-more-gun-violence-shots-fired-guns-stolen-in-memphis-area-data-shows/>.

20 Aaron Karp, “Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers,” *Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper*, June 2018, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf>.

21 Cure Violence Global, “The Evidence of Effectiveness,” August 2021, <https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Cure-Violence-Evidence-Summary.pdf>.

One alternative is the community school model that has been implemented by the American Federation of Teachers.²² Community schools provide wraparound services to students, that address the wide variety of challenges that students face. These services include academic assistance, medical treatment, mental health counseling, and family support. Community schools focus on being a neighborhood hub that houses local resources in a centralized setting that serves families. Cities such as Baltimore, Washington, DC, and Salt Lake City are among those who have implemented these programs, and initial results are encouraging. In addition to improved academic achievement, these programs have also reduced absenteeism along with high-risk behavior. This approach focuses on the *causes* of youth delinquency in an attempt to prevent it, as opposed to treating criminalizing youth and perpetuating a militarized police presence in schools.

Community Policing Is Not an Alternative

In police reform discussions, “community policing” programs are often raised as a solution. However, such discussions suffer from the lack of a clear conception of what community policing entails. Memphis’ community policing measures involve more positive interaction between community and law enforcement, community outreach by police representatives, and civilian training. As well-intentioned as these efforts are, however, they fail to address the critical socioeconomic needs of Memphians.

The reason for including community policing in this discussion is twofold. First, to assert that any emphasis on community policing without a corresponding commitment to address the structural inequities that plague Memphis residents is an unacceptable path forward. Increasing police accountability and improving community relations with police are certainly desirable outcomes. Police *should* have a level of familiarity and cultural sensitivity with the communities they serve, which

is why there is considerable energy surrounding the debate around a police residency requirement. However, these initiatives do not address the fundamental drivers of crime in Memphis and Shelby County. Second, the desired outcomes of community policing are more likely to be accomplished by alternative models that have a proven track record of crime reduction and community uplift:

- *Community Trust-Building:* Community policing advocates often emphasize the need for trust-building. However, past and present practices of brutality have eroded any meaningful possibility of trust, a trust that crisis response professionals have already earned by virtue of their work in communities.
- *Rethinking Reporting:* Community policing models highlight the need for communities to feel comfortable partnering with law enforcement to resolve crimes in their neighborhoods (e.g., police tip lines). However, the long-standing tension between some communities and law enforcement hampers these efforts, requiring an alternative model for crime reporting.
- *Accountability/Transparency:* Accountability from law enforcement agencies for the harm inflicted by officers is crucial to strengthening relationships with communities. However, law enforcement departments are often reluctant to hold officers accountable for transgressions, a reluctance mirrored by district attorneys, juries, and judiciaries. Furthermore, transparent reporting on civilian complaints and law enforcement malfeasance is vital to accountability and public trust.

The Insufficiency of the Memphis CIT

Memphis has a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program in which officers are trained to route calls dealing with severe mental health crises to appropriate mental health facilities. There is little information available about this program’s efficacy, the number of calls received, or the number of teams dispatched. Essentially, this program is

²² See <https://www.aft.org/position/community-schools>.

run by law enforcement—a contrast to both community needs and established best practices regarding non-punitive interventions for mental health crises.

Mayor Strickland’s Advisory Council’s *Reimagining Police Report* acknowledges the need for a crisis response model.²³ Nevertheless, this report, like the already existing Memphis CIT model and the aforementioned CARE Program, conceives of crisis response as a *police* function that would leverage partnerships with groups that understand crisis response.²⁴ Instead, the JSA recommends that these functions operate outside the domain of law enforcement. At a minimum, models should be implemented that minimize the role that law enforcement officers perform when dispatched (e.g., the CAHOOTS program). Although the two models are not mutually exclusive, the law enforcement-independent approach has potential to serve the Memphis community in more holistic and fundamental ways, build public trust, and promote accountability.

Community Investment as Public Safety

This report represents a challenge to increased expenditures for the Memphis Police Department. As cities continue to respond to civilian calls for a more accountable system with public safety alternatives, watching how cities like Minneapolis grapple with this issue head-on can be instructive. Following a number of highly controversial police encounters making national news, the Minneapolis City Council voted to shift almost \$8 million in police funding to expand other services, including violence prevention and mental health crisis response teams.

Many Black residents of Memphis have never trusted the police department that is supposed to protect and serve them, and that distrust is well-founded. From

the terror inflicted upon innocent Black civilians during the Memphis Massacre of 1866 (a tragedy instigated by White police officers) to the present-day over-surveillance and brutality inflicted upon Black communities at the hands of law enforcement, the relationship between Black Memphians and the police department has always been antagonistic.

Given this reality, the solution to the rampant crime and poverty that Memphis is experiencing *cannot* be an increased investment in the very institution that has abused its power for centuries and has resisted even the most benign calls for reform. Instead, what is needed is a radical investment in self-governing communities and social programs with a proven track record of transforming neighborhoods and producing positive outcomes. An example of this approach can be found in the BREATHE Act, a project overseen by the Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives. This bill “offers a radical reimagining of public safety, community care, and how we spend money as a society” summarized in four broad proposals:

- Divest federal resources from incarceration and policing.
- Invest in new, non-punitive, non-carceral approaches to community safety that lead states to shrink their criminal-legal systems and center the protection of Black lives—including Black mothers, Black trans people, and Black women.
- Allocate new money to build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities.
- Hold political leaders to their promises and enhance the self-determination of all Black communities.²⁵

Municipalities across the United States have taken steps to redirect funding earmarked for police departments to initiatives that work to address poverty. In 2021, Memphis advocates worked to advance a “moral budget” that proposed maintaining the FY2020 tax rate for the city and county to generate additional revenue (approximating \$140 million) to invest in resources for marginalized neighborhoods to increase access to transportation, healthcare, childcare, and

23 “Mayor Strickland’s Advisory Council Reimagining Policing: Report of Findings,” 2021, https://reimagine.memphistn.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/2021/03/Reimagining_Police_Findings_Book_Final.pdf.

24 “Departments must also prioritize and create alternative response training programs for officers and develop plans that enable alternative first responders for situations that don’t require a police presence. . . .” (“Reimagining Policing,” 13).

25 The Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives, “The BREATHE Act,” <https://breatheact.org/>.

other necessary conditions for flourishing. Opting for a moral budget versus one that continuously expands police presence in underserved communities at the expense of critical programs and infrastructure in those communities seems like a natural first step in establishing some level of community trust in local government. Unfortunately, these recommendations fell largely on resistant ears, with the City Council refusing to hear from community members on the issue and passing a budget that once again ratified the status quo. However some progress was made with the County Commission approving some Moral Budget recommendations, including:

- \$1.3 million allocated for public transportation
- \$2.3 million for Youth & Adult Mental Health
- \$175,000 for the Homeless Flexibility Fund
- \$170,000 for targeted direct outreach to connect residents with community programs like rental and utility assistance through the Community Services Agency

In addition to this, the County has begun to take steps toward engaging the public in a more participatory budgeting process for FY2023. Time will tell if the Memphis City Council will follow suit.

Ultimately, what we know to be true is that without a substantial shift of investments to fund initiatives and services that directly address poverty, cities like Memphis will never see a significant decrease in the crime and violence that elected officials continue to rely on policing to address. Safe communities are not those with the most police, but those in which people have equitable access to the things they need.