



# Research Memo: Alternatives to Policing

## Community Resource Hub for Safety and Accountability

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### Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Key Recommendations.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Emerging Frameworks .....	4
Safety: Alternatives to Policing .....	10
Key Opportunities, Challenges, and Recommendations.....	13
Conclusion.....	16
Additional Resources .....	17

### Executive Summary

This memo assesses the current landscape of work surrounding police abolition and reviews alternatives to policing in the context of police abolitionist frameworks, offering insight and sharing successful strategies for advocates in the field. This memo also offers several recommendations for advocates, activists, and organizers working on alternatives to policing as well as a list of resources.

As communities develop strategies for keeping themselves safe from various threats and for managing various crises and emergencies, they also focus on harm from policing, including police violence and police harassment. Communities have approached this in several ways. Some advocates and organizations, such as Critical Resistance, argue that police and policing needs to be abolished altogether in order to recreate a model of public safety that is not centered on punishment and control. Some advocates argue for implementing a divest/invest framework that includes defunding of police and reinvestment of those funds in developing community infrastructure, such as community-based violence

intervention, hospitals, jobs, mental health programs, and schools. This approach targets the underlying causes of harm and builds out alternatives to existing models of public safety.

## **Key Recommendations**

- Support and conduct research on successful models for managing emergencies and crises outside of policing, such as failing schools, inadequate access to mental and physical health care, underemployment, and violence in homes and communities.
- Support and center research that de-centers police in conversations around public safety, and provide media and communications trainings on how to do this.
- Promote, implement, and support divest/invest campaigns at the local level.
- Develop community-level initiatives around violence and abuse outside of policing, including crisis intervention teams that do not contain police officers to support people who are experiencing mental health crises or emergencies.
- Expand government and foundation funding for organizations that work on building alternatives to policing.

## Introduction

Abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> While the abolition of prisons has been a topic of discussion for several decades, the discussion of police abolition is relatively new.

Over the last several years, the frameworks of police abolition and alternatives to policing have emerged as ways to help reduce our reliance on law enforcement and move us towards better systems of public safety. Police abolitionists argue that the abolition of the entire police system is the only way to deal with the over-reliance on punishment in society. Advocates and research studies have shown how policing harms communities in pervasive and lasting ways.<sup>2</sup> There is evidence to suggest that [police do not guarantee community safety from violence and harm](#), despite the fact that law enforcement is heavily relied on to manage crises and emergencies.<sup>3</sup> And even with police reform efforts, it's clear that the only way to stop police violence is through police abolition and by creating alternatives to policing<sup>4</sup>.

It is important to detail the specifics of police abolition and clarify its broader vision; police abolition is as much about creating alternatives to policing as it is about reducing and abolishing the police. While there has been much discussion about creating these alternatives, there is a need for more research, development, and implementation of best practices and models that help reduce our reliance on law enforcement and move us towards better systems of public safety. There is a limited amount of data, reports, and toolkits mapping out the specifics of what police abolition and alternatives to policing can look like.<sup>5</sup> And without widespread media attention, even those projects that are successful aren't as well

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<sup>1</sup> Critical Resistance, *What is the PIC? What is Abolition?* <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>

<sup>2</sup> Alex S. Vitale, *The end of policing*, (New York: Verso Books, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Derecka Purnell and Marbre Stahly-Butts, "The Police Can't Solve the Problem. They Are the Problem." *New York Times* September 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/26/opinion/the-police-cant-solve-the-problem-they-are-the-problem.html>

<sup>4</sup> Phillip V. McHarris and Thenjiwe McHarris, "No More Money for the Police," *New York Times* May 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/30/opinion/george-floyd-police-funding.html>

<sup>5</sup> Robin S. Engel, Hannah D. McManus, Gabrielle T. Isaza, "Moving Beyond 'Best Practice': Experiences in Police Reform and Call for Evidence to Reduce Officer-Involved Shootings," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 687, no. 1 (January 2020), 145-165.

known by other communities. Current efforts, as well as those organized in the recent past, are often under-funded or not funded at all, which limits those working on making this vision a reality. Both the research gap and the resource/funding gap for abolition work must be overcome in order to drastically reinvent the paradigm of public safety in the United States.

While the concept of police abolition may create polarization within communities and potentially intimidate funders or political leaders, the fundamental police abolition strategy of developing and implementing alternatives to policing has a greater possibility of gaining political and funding support.

### **Emerging Frameworks: Alternatives to Policing and Divest/Invest Initiatives**

- *Non-reformist reforms* Advocates and organizations have pushed for reductions in the scope of policing and police power in favor of paying attention to the underlying factors of violence, conflict, and harm and alternative safety interventions. A growing number of activists and organizers have argued for a framework of **non-reformist reforms**, or “measures that reduce the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system’s inability to solve the crises it creates.”<sup>6</sup> These efforts to change the criminal justice system that also reform and transform policing do not rely on making police more powerful and resourced. In addition, non-reformist reforms are theorized and crafted so that they can serve as a pathway to abolitionist policies and practices as opposed to being in conflict with them—as current reform models often do.

Mariame Kaba, a key organizer in the abolition space, has offered a list of guidelines to assess **non-reformist reforms** around policing that should always be opposed.<sup>7</sup> Kaba is clear: reforms that build the capacity of the police, either by allocating funds for more police or policing technology or that focus on strategies one police officer at a time, treat police violence as an individual issue rather than a structural issue. Reforms that support police transparency and accountability, support disarming police, and support legislation that shifts power to the people through civilian

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<sup>6</sup> Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein, “What Abolitionists Do,” *Jacobin* August 24, 2017, <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/08/prison-abolition-reform-mass-incarceration>

<sup>7</sup> Mariame Kaba, “Police Reforms You Should Always Oppose,” *truthout* December 7, 2014, <https://truthout.org/articles/police-reforms-you-should-always-oppose/>

accountability boards and reparations for victims of police violence and their families all lead to the goal of police abolition. The following reforms are examples of reforms that align with a framework that centers non-reformist reforms and alternatives to policing models.

- *Policies that reduce unnecessary contact with communities* As a result of mass criminalization and intense, frequent policing toward particular groups of people—namely marginalized communities of color—police come into **unnecessary contact** with individuals that could be avoided.<sup>8</sup> If the amount of necessary police contacts is reduced, there will be fewer places and opportunities for police violence and harm to occur.
- *Strict anti-profiling legislation and department policies on anti-profiling* Anti-profiling laws and policies can help curb unnecessary police contact that spirals into unnecessary arrest, and violence. The 2014 NAACP report, *Born Suspect*, discusses racial profiling, stop-and-frisk policies, and shares model anti-profiling policies, a model bill, and recommendations for advocates.<sup>9</sup>
- *Institutionalization of incentives for discretion and diversion instead of arrest* Instead of incentivizing arrests and citations, police departments should **incentivize how arrests and crises were averted** that could have ended in citations and individuals being charged.<sup>10</sup> While this is a radically different model than what currently exists, concrete institutional support for discretion and diversion has the potential to reduce arrest, jailing, and incarceration.
- *Decriminalizing crimes legislatively and issuing department policies to not police certain infractions* As a result of mass criminalization of activities that are largely associated with

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<sup>8</sup> Topher Sanders, Kate Rabinowitz, and Benjamin Conark, “Walking While Black,” *ProPublica* and *Florida Times Union* November 16, 2017, <https://features.propublica.org/walking-while-black/jacksonville-pedestrian-violations-racial-profiling>; Alice Speri, “NYPD’s Aggressive Policing Risks Spreading the Coronavirus,” *The Intercept* April 3, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/03/nypd-social-distancing-arrests-coronavirus/>

<sup>9</sup> Niaz Kasravi, *Born Suspect: Stop-and-Frisk Abuse & the Continued Fight to End Racial Profiling in America* (Baltimore, MD: NAACP, 2014), [https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Born\\_Suspect\\_Report\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Born_Suspect_Report_final_web.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> S. Rebecca Neusteter, Ram Subramanian, Jennifer Trone, Mawia Khogali, and Cindy Reed, *Gatekeepers: The Role of Police in Ending Mass Incarceration* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, August 2019), p.49–50, <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/gatekeepers-police-and-mass-incarceration.pdf>

poverty that have emerged in the last decades, police have the power to begin contact with individuals that does not enhance the safety or wellbeing of the community—and in many ways can be harmful. These contacts lead to increased arrests and incarceration.<sup>11</sup> Legislation, such as laws around drug use and possession, panhandling, fare evasion, sex work, and broken windows policing should decriminalize large swaths of actions that unnecessarily create space for contact with police and the criminal justice system. Police officials can immediately institute “do not enforce” [policies](#) around some areas that are currently criminalized.<sup>12</sup>

- *Diversion of funds from police toward community-based initiatives* [Divest/invest frameworks](#) have the ability to reduce the large growth in police spending by channeling resources away from law enforcement toward community-based institutions and alternatives, which can also help with the underlying causes of violence and harm.<sup>13</sup>

Within a similar framework of non-reformist reforms, [Critical Resistance](#) offers four abolitionist strategies for identifying and steps to reduce the overall impact of policing. These include: suspend the use of paid administrative leave for cops under investigation; withhold pensions and don't rehire cops involved in excessive force; cap overtime accrual and overtime for military exercises; withdraw participation in police militarization programs; prioritize spending on community health, education, and affordable housing; reduce the size of the police force. Critical Resistance argues that the following reforms should always be refused given they continue and expand the reach of policing: Body cameras; community policing; more training; civilian review / oversight boards; prosecuting and jailing police.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Shankar Vedantam, Chris Benderev, Tara Boyle, et al., “How a Theory of Crime and Policing was Born, and Went Terribly Wrong,” 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/11/01/500104506/broken-windows-policing-and-the-origins-of-stop-and-frisk-and-how-it-went-wrong>; Amy E. Lerman and Vesla M. Weaver, *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014);

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Every 25 Seconds,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 12, 2016; Tess Borden, *Every 25 Seconds: The Human Toll of Criminalizing Drug Use in the United States* (New York: HRW and ACLU, 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/10/12/every-25-seconds/human-toll-criminalizing-drug-use-united-states>

<sup>13</sup> Neighborhood Funders Group, “DIVEST/INVEST: From Criminalization to Thriving Communities,” September 17, 2018, <https://www.nfg.org/divestinvest>; Funders for Justice, *DIVEST/INVEST: From Criminalization to Thriving Communities*, <https://divest.nfg.org/>, <https://40ep0y39wiq61vsfuh7fnei1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FFJ-Divest-Invest-1.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Critical Resistance, “Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps in policing,” <http://criticalresistance.org/abolish-policing/>

Finally, #8toAbolition, an informal formation of abolitionists, emerged in response to the launch of Campaign Zero's #8CantWait, a reformist campaign based on faulty data science that put forth policy recommendations that do not reduce police power and scope.<sup>15</sup> The #8toAbolition campaign offered resources for policy frameworks, mutual aid projects, community-led models of care that not only reduce police power but for building safety and collective care without police or prisons. #8toAbolition argues that non-reformist reform strategies must include:

- Accessibility
- Broad regional application
- City and municipal implementation
- Shrink the policing and prison industrial complex
- Creates the conditions for a world without prisons or police

In that context, #8toAbolition recommends that all local organizing efforts around municipal, state, and federal policies envision and adopt the following demands: Defund Police; Demilitarize Communities; Remove Police from Schools; Free People from Jails and Prisons; Repeal Laws that Criminalize Survival; Invest in Community self-governance; Provide safe housing for everyone; and Invest in Care, not Cops.

### Divest/Invest Campaigns

Organizers across the United States are at work pushing for the diversion of police resources toward community-based alternatives. The divest/invest framework is a strategy that divests funding and resources from policing and other systems of punishment and reinvests the funds in community resources and institutions —such as community initiatives employment, health care, housing, schools as well as alternative emergency response models that do not rest on police and prisons. The framework challenges city, states, and the federal government to interrupt the dehumanization of Black people and Black

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<sup>15</sup> 8toAbolition: <https://www.8toabolition.com/>; Cherrell Brown and Philip V. McHarris, "Public Letter: #8cantwait is Based on Faulty Data Science," *Medium*, July 5, 2020. <https://medium.com/@8cantwait.faulty/8cantwait-is-based-on-faulty-data-science-a4e0b85fae40>

communities; by divesting from funding law enforcement, these funds can be diverted to invest in supporting and strengthening Black communities. There are currently several model initiatives that use divest/invest framework to support local and state-wide projects.

The Movement for Black Lives has outlined a policy platform on divest/invest initiatives, arguing for *investment* in safety for Black communities through access to education, health care, jobs, and domestic infrastructure such as housing and transportation and *divestment* from “exploitative forces including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations.”<sup>16</sup> In 2018, the Freedom to Thrive coalition released a report, *Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining Safety & Security in Our Communities*, comparing spending priorities in 12 cities and counties with those of community organizations and their members. Using a divest/invest framework, each profile highlights the ways that each current or prospective campaigns in each jurisdiction seeks to divest resources away from policing and prisons toward community needs and development.<sup>17</sup> The coalition has also been at work with planning Freedom Labs that train organizers across the country in strategies for successful invest/divest campaigning.

The divest/invest model has also had success in Wisconsin with [LiberateMKE](#) and in North Carolina through [Durham Beyond Policing](#).

LiberateMKE is a campaign of the African-American Roundtable (AART), a coalition of over four dozen organizations in Milwaukee.<sup>18</sup> In 2019, the coalition and 45 community partners conducted surveys of more than 1,100 people across Milwaukee and asked residents what they would like to see city funding go towards—the results suggested that residents wanted money for more social spending on affordable

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<sup>16</sup> Movement for Black Lives, “Policy Platforms: Invest-Divest,” <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/invest-divest/>; Movement for Black Lives, *A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demand for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice* (PolicyM4BL, August 2016), <https://neweconomy.net/sites/default/files/resources/20160726-m4bl-Vision-Booklet-V3.pdf>; Liza Bayless, “Divest for Prisons, Invest in People—What Justice for Black People Really Looks Like,” *Yes!* October 11, 2016, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2016/10/11/divest-from-prisons-invest-in-people-what-justice-for-black-lives-really-looks-like/>

<sup>17</sup> Freedom to Thrive: <https://freedomtothrive.org>; Kate Hamaji and Kumar Rao (CPD), Marbre Stahly-Butts (L4BL), and Jane Bonsu, Charlene Carruthers, Roselyn Berry, and Denzel McCampbell (BYP100), *Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining Safety & Security in Our Communities*, (New York and Oakland: Center for Popular Democracy, Law for Black Lives, and BYP100, 2018), <https://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Freedom%20To%20Thrive%2C%20Higher%20Res%20Version.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Liberate MKE: <https://www.liberatemke.com/>

housing and sustainable jobs, not policing. [The Liberate MKE campaign was launched to invest \\$25 million into the community programs that advance community safety and well-being, and to divest from the Milwaukee Police Department.](#) Through organizing efforts and strategic media communications, in 2020 Liberate MKE was able to reduce the Milwaukee police budget by \$900,000 and reduce police personnel by 60 officers. They were also able to increase funding for summer youth programs by \$72,000, emergency housing funds for residents by \$300,000, and increased funding for the Health Department by \$240,000.<sup>19</sup>

North Carolina’s grassroots coalition [Durham Beyond Policing](#) originally formed to resist the creation of a new police headquarters in Durham and eventually became a vehicle for resisting rising police budgets.<sup>20</sup> Through direct action and organizing, [Durham Beyond Policing halted the increase in funding for more police personnel and diverted it to community-based safety and wellness initiatives.](#)<sup>21</sup> In addition to town hall forums, rallies, and weekly pickets, a Safety and Wellness committee was created to research alternatives outside of policing that center safety and over-all community wellness. Highlighting alternatives to policing projects based in Durham as well as in other parts of the United States, drawing on research on failures of policing in Durham, and developing relationships with city and county staff through public hearings, in 2019 [the coalition presented a divest/invest proposal to the Durham City Council.](#)<sup>22</sup> Durham Beyond Policing currently plays a key role in shaping and directing the city-approved and funded Community Safety and Wellness Task Force.

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<sup>19</sup> Devin Anderson, *LiberateMKE Survey Results* (Milwaukee: AART. September 2019) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d016c1ea5666e00014ebcb3/t/5d892987856d7f4d7558f982/1569270156524/Liberatemke+Survey+Results.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Durham Beyond Policing: <http://durhambeyondpolicing.org/>

<sup>21</sup> Zaina Alsous, “‘Starve the Beast’: Southern campaigns to divest, decarcerate, and re-imagine public safety,” *Scalawag Magazine*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.scalawagmagazine.org/2019/11/close-jails-atlanta-durham-nashville/?fbclid=IwAR3e-ScFd4SvVfw6Lh9Lryd39nbHx9PYIG1sB26OVtMYxUZTSe63NmuQsNs>

<sup>22</sup> Durham Beyond Policing coalition, “Proposal for a Community-led Safety and Wellness Task Force,” July 2019, <http://durhambeyondpolicing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Durham-Beyond-Policing-Budget-Proposal-2019-2020.pdf>

## Safety: Alternatives to Policing

Divest/invest campaigns represent a key area where communities can channel funding from police and prisons toward community-based alternatives to safety. Moreover, divest/invest work is compatible with an abolitionist framework as it centers taking power and resources away from policing and punishment.

As communities divest from policing, there is a growing list of alternatives to policing that center safety and anti-violence work. For some organizations, there may be a need for companion organizing to build alternatives. The organization [Transform Harm](#) has developed strategies for [transformative justice](#) and alternative approaches to community violence and harm.<sup>23</sup> [Oakland POWER Projects](#) has several reports documenting their work on [alternatives to policing and emergency preparedness](#) and [decoupling healthcare from policing](#).<sup>24</sup> [The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention \(HAVI\)](#) supports hospital and community collaborations to advance equitable, trauma-informed care for violence intervention and prevention programs<sup>25</sup>, while [Violence Interrupters](#)—in [Washington, DC](#), part of a \$5.4 million investment in crime through the Washington, DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement<sup>26</sup> and in [New York](#), working for a network of about 50 violence prevention grassroots organization coordinated by the mayor’s office<sup>27</sup>—use personal outreach from community members to mediate and diffuse neighborhood conflict. And in California, the [Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective](#) deals with child sexual abuse without the police.

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<sup>23</sup> TransformHARM, “Transformative Justice,” <https://transformharm.org/transformative-justice/>

<sup>24</sup> Oakland POWER Projects: <https://oaklandpowerprojects.org>; Critical Resistance for Urban Shield Coalition, *People First! An Oakland POWER Projects Report on Policing and Emergencies* (Oakland: Critical Resistance, 2018), [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6aae790e2e72497ad09ffc/1533718146254/CR\\_OPP2\\_SUS\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6aae790e2e72497ad09ffc/1533718146254/CR_OPP2_SUS_report_final.pdf); Oakland POWER Projects, *Decoupling Policing from Health Services: Empowering Healthworkers as Anti-Policing Organizers* (Oakland: Critical Resistance, undated) [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6ab5f7352f535083505c5a/1533720057821/TheOakPowerProj\\_HEALTHreport.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6ab5f7352f535083505c5a/1533720057821/TheOakPowerProj_HEALTHreport.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI): <https://www.thehavi.org/>

<sup>26</sup> Peter Hermann, “He used to sell drugs on D.C. streets. Now he’s paid to make them safer,” *Washington Post* December 14, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/he-used-to-sell-drugs-on-dc-streets-now-hes-paid-to-make-them-safer/2018/12/13/eea91b66-e12e-11e8-ab2c-b31dcd53ca6b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/he-used-to-sell-drugs-on-dc-streets-now-hes-paid-to-make-them-safer/2018/12/13/eea91b66-e12e-11e8-ab2c-b31dcd53ca6b_story.html)

<sup>27</sup> Ashley Southall, “Police Face Backlash Over Virus Rules. Enter ‘Violence Interrupters.’” *New York Times* May 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/22/nyregion/Coronavirus-social-distancing-violence-interrupters.html>

The [Anti Police-Terror Project \(AFTP\)](#) has been engaged in a number of efforts to build community-based models of safety outside of systems of policing and punishment. One model example is AFTP's [MH First](#), a cutting-edge new model for non-police community first response to mental health crisis. The goal of MH First is to respond to mental health crises including, but not limited to, psychiatric emergencies, substance use support, and domestic violence situations that require victim extraction. Currently, MH First is operating in Oakland, CA and Sacramento, CA and is available through a hotline number that is entirely separate from police response. AFTP has also led a [Defund OPD](#) campaign for the past 5 years, where they are seeking resource reallocation into community resources and alternative models of public safety. Specifically, the campaign is calling to: Reduce OPD's allocation from the General Fund by 50% (roughly \$150 Million); Disallow unauthorized overtime by OPD; Invest in housing, jobs, youth programs, restorative justice, mental health workers and other services that actually keep the community safe. Importantly, AFTP [states](#), "50% is only the first step. Our ultimate goal is to disband and abolish OPD."

In July 2020, as part of the Discourse series, a collaboration between The Appeal, The Justice Collaborative Institute, and Data For Progress,<sup>28</sup> Alex S. Vitale reflected on collaborative research and analysis that outlined [10 concrete ways to reduce the reliance on policing](#)<sup>29</sup> that includes alternatives such as:

1. Mental health and social workers to respond to crises;
2. Violence interrupters to reduce gun violence;
3. Unarmed traffic patrols;
4. Civilian control of crime labs;
5. Fund better and safer transit service;

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<sup>28</sup> *The Appeal* (<https://theappeal.org/about/>); the Justice Collaborative (<https://thejusticecollaborative.com/about/>); and Data for Progress (<https://www.dataforprogress.org/>)

<sup>29</sup> Alex S. Vitale, "10 ways to reduce our reliance on policing and make our communities safer for everyone," *The Appeal.org* July 20, 2020, <https://theappeal.org/10-ways-to-reduce-our-reliance-on-policing-and-make-our-communities-safer-for-everyone/>

6. School wellness centers;
7. Dispute resolution experts for neighborhood and domestic disputes.
8. Support, not police, for people experiencing homelessness.
9. Integrated crisis centers.
10. 10. Trained civilians for property offenses.

These strategies, based on research studies, successful projects and programs, and public input and support, would begin to reduce reliance on policing and would make communities safer for everyone.

### Legislative Strategies

There are a number of legislative demands, campaigns, and initiatives that have emerged that center divest/invest work, reducing the scope of police power and developing alternatives to policing. Most recently, in July 2020 the [Electoral Justice Project of the Movement for Black Lives](#) released the [BREATHE Act](#), an omnibus bill that advances a divest/invest framework and would significantly reduce criminalization, institutionalized punishment, and police surveillance.<sup>30</sup>

The BREATHE Act is the most sweeping legislation offered to-date that would fundamentally reduce the size and power of police and the broader criminal-legal system. The BREATHE Act calls for eliminating federal programs and agencies used to finance and expand the US criminal legal system, such as the Department of Defense 1033 program, the Edward Byrne-Justice Assistance Grant Program, Community Oriented Policing Services, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The bill would ensure that non-punitive, non-carceral elements of these programs are identified so that they can be transferred to another funding source. The bill supports the divestment of taxpayer dollars policing and investing in a new vision of public safety by allocating the divested funds on social welfare, health care, education and environmental programs.

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<sup>30</sup> The BREATHE Act, <https://breatheact.org/>; Movement for Black Lives, Electoral Justice Project, *The BREATHE Act*, [https://breatheact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-BREATHE-Act-PDF\\_FINAL3-1.pdf](https://breatheact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-BREATHE-Act-PDF_FINAL3-1.pdf); N. Jamiyla Chisholm, “The Movement for Black Lives Introduces the BREATHE Act,” *Colorlines*, Jul 7, 2020 ;

An extension of the policy briefs of the Movement for Black Lives Vision for Black Lives [2020 Policy Platform](#), a collaboratively sourced document drawing on over 170 Black-led organizations, the four sections of the BREATHE Act integrates calls for social equity in communities, including equitable funding for all schools, promoting environmental justice, providing safe access to water, creating pilot programs for universal basic income, providing access to education for undocumented immigrants; reparations for those incarcerated including enfranchisement to vote among, in addition to divesting from police agencies like the DEA and ICE and banning surveillance technology.

Police decisions tend to happen outside the view of the public. All decisions and data—including those made available by the increasing use of body cameras—should be accessible in an un-edited format when requested by the public. A number of organizations have also put forth legislation and demands to curtail police power and technology. Organizations such as ACLU have shared model policy legislation, [Community Control Over Police Surveillance \(CCOPS\)](#), that communities and city councils can use “to promote transparency, the public’s welfare, civil rights, and civil liberties in all decisions regarding the funding, acquisition, and deployment of military and surveillance equipment by local police departments.” After launching in 2016, recent updates add guidance on banning the government use of facial recognition and strategies for adding transparency and approval mechanisms in regards to local acquisition of military equipment. CCOPS laws have now been adopted in 14 jurisdictions. In 2019, San Francisco became the first city to ban the use of facial recognition technology and in 2020, New York City—largest city and police force in the United States—adopted a CCOPS law.<sup>31</sup>

## Key Opportunities and Challenges

There is a great deal of momentum amongst organizers across the country around divest/invest initiatives.

We believe that:

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<sup>31</sup> American Civil Liberties Union, “Community Control Over Police Surveillance (CCOPS)”, *ACLU.org*, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/privacy-technology/surveillance-technologies/community-control-over-police-surveillance?redirect=feature/community-control-over-police-surveillance>; American Civil Liberties Union, “Community Control Over Police Surveillance + Militarization (CCOPS+M) Model Bill,” *ACLU.org*, October 2018, <https://www.aclu.org/other/community-control-over-police-surveillance-militarization-ccopsm-model-bill>; <https://www.aclu.org/other/instructions-turning-ccops-model-bill-ccops-facial-recognition-ban-model-bill-ccopsfr-ccops>

- Divest/invest campaigns are winnable with time, resources, and strategic organizing.
- Divest/invest campaigns need to be adapted to specific local political landscapes. Budget formation processes also vary depending on location; it is critical account for the process in planning the timeline and strategies of a campaign.
- Research support—gathering information about local funding as well as the strategies of previous and current campaigns as well as the outcomes of various initiatives—can help with the formation and success of current and future divest/invest campaigns.
- There is a continued need to develop, support, and pilot alternatives to policing that center building safe communities.

There are also some key challenges that must be considered as organizers build divest/invest campaigns.

The challenges include:

- Some city leaders and councils are opposed to shifting resources away from policing. In Minneapolis, for example, [increases to police funding were passed despite support for alternatives to policing from communities](#).<sup>32</sup>
- Police unions that campaign against divest/invest initiatives and other transformative efforts can be a [major roadblock](#), especially where police unions are particularly powerful.<sup>33</sup>
- Some organizations may need assistance with the technical aspects of planning a campaign, engaging in necessary research, and gaining expertise around media strategy—an important element to successful campaigns. Funders for Justice, with several partner organizations, has developed a [Divest/Invest toolkit](#). The toolkit reviews divest/invest campaigns from more than 50 groups organizing for divestment from criminalization and outlines strategies to overcome obstacles to implementing successful campaigns.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> KTSP, “Minneapolis City Council passes \$1.6 billion budget, more police officers included” December 12, 2019, <https://kstp.com/politics/minneapolis-city-council-passes-16-billion-budget-more-police-officers-included/5576492/>

<sup>33</sup> James Surowiecki, “Why are police unions blocking reform?” *The New Yorker* September 12, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/19/why-are-police-unions-blocking-reform>

<sup>34</sup> Funders for Justice, *DIVEST/INVEST*, <https://divest.nfg.org/>, <https://40ep0y39wiq61vsfuh7fnei1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FFJ-Divest-Invest-1.pdf>

- Some communities lack a preexisting organizing infrastructure and may need additional support in successful organizing strategies more generally in addition to specifically around divest/invest work. See [here for more](#) on strategies.<sup>35</sup>
- There is a growing list of alternatives to policing that center safety and anti-violence work. For some organizations, there may be a need for companion organizing to build alternatives. The organization Transform Harm has developed strategies for [transformative justice](#) and alternative approaches to community violence and harm.<sup>36</sup> Oakland POWER Projects has several reports documenting their work on [alternatives to policing and emergency preparedness](#) and [decoupling healthcare from policing](#).<sup>37</sup>
- There is a continued need for funding to research, develop, support, and pilot alternatives to policing that center building safe communities. The Neighborhood Funders group notes that [unrestricted multi-year funding](#) for trainings, convening, peer-to-peer learning, and leadership development is crucial for organizations working on divest/invest campaigns, while the 2017 report *The Crisis of Criminalization* challenges funders to [develop a collaborative, comprehensive response](#).<sup>38</sup>

## Key Recommendations

- Support additional research on successful models for managing emergencies and crises outside of policing.

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<sup>35</sup> Funders for Justice, *DIVEST/INVEST*

<sup>36</sup> TransformHARM, “Transformative Justice,” <https://transformharm.org/transformative-justice/>

<sup>37</sup> Oakland POWER Projects: <https://oaklandpowerprojects.org>; Critical Resistance for Urban Shield Coalition, *People First! An Oakland POWER Projects Report on Policing and Emergencies* (Oakland: Critical Resistance, 2018), [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6aae790e2e72497ad09ffc/1533718146254/CR\\_OPP2\\_SUS\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6aae790e2e72497ad09ffc/1533718146254/CR_OPP2_SUS_report_final.pdf); Oakland POWER Projects, *Decoupling Policing from Health Services: Empowering Healthworkers as Anti-Policing Organizers* (Oakland: Critical Resistance, undated) [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6ab5f7352f535083505c5a/1533720057821/TheOakPowerProj\\_HEALTHreport.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59ead8f9692ebee25b72f17f/t/5b6ab5f7352f535083505c5a/1533720057821/TheOakPowerProj_HEALTHreport.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Andrea J. Ritchie and Beth Richie, *The Crisis of Criminalization: A Call for a Comprehensive Philanthropic Response* (New York: Barnard Center for Research on Women, 2017), <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS9-Challenging-Criminalization-Funding-Perspectives.pdf>; Neighborhood Funders Group, “Recommendations to Funders,” [https://40ep0y39wiq61vsfuh7fnei1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ChallengingCriminalization\\_FundingPerspectives.pdf](https://40ep0y39wiq61vsfuh7fnei1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ChallengingCriminalization_FundingPerspectives.pdf)

- Increase development and funding of community-based, violence-interruption initiatives that do not involve law enforcement in any capacity.
- Create and expand crisis intervention teams that deal with mental health, domestic abuse, substance abuse, and other emergencies across the United States and Puerto Rico.
- Expand material support and resources for training and implementing organizing around divest/invest campaigns.
- Develop media and communications strategies that help create a narrative shift and paradigm shift away from policing and punishment toward developing community infrastructure.
- Advance frameworks that center non-reformist reforms as opposed to criminal justice reforms that channel more resources and power to policing, jails, and prisons must be advanced.
- Increase research on successful non-reformist reforms that de-center police from conversations around public safety.
- Support research and resources around strategies to combat the influence of police unions on implementing divest/invest initiatives—one of the biggest barriers to reducing police violence and increasing accountability.
- Increase government and philanthropic funding for organizations building alternatives to policing.

## Conclusion

This research memo reviews several reports, data projects, and toolkits that center alternative to policing frameworks and police abolition, but there is a need for more research on abolition and alternatives to policing. In addition, there is a need to study and evaluate community-based alternatives that currently exist across the United States and Puerto Rico. The initiatives that currently exist, and those that have existed in the past, have often been often under-funded, or not funded at all—which limits the communities engaging in these initiatives. It also limits communities from getting wide-spread media attention and learning from each other’s challenges and opportunities. There is a need for increased

resources and funding from governments and funders that support the work of creating a new model for public safety.

Developing models, policies, and practices of abolition and of alternatives to policing represent the future of creating a more just and equitable society that centers safety and wellness, not punishment and policing. The success of these initiatives and efforts will be contingent on the presence of community-led organizing, additional research, pilot projects, media strategy, and increased funding and resources to build a new model of public safety.

## **Additional Resources**

The following organizations and efforts represent the foundation of the movement to end the harm that policing has on communities; each has either an explicitly abolitionist agenda or seeks to create alternatives to punishment and policing<sup>39</sup>:

- **Anti Police-Terror Project**

The Anti Police-Terror Project is a Black-led, multi-racial, intergenerational coalition that seeks to build a replicable and sustainable model to eradicate police terror in communities of color. We support families surviving police terror in their fight for justice, documenting police abuses and connecting impacted families and community members with resources, legal referrals, and opportunities for healing.

- **Centre for Justice & Reconciliation (CJR)**

A program of Prison Fellowship International, for more than 20 years CJR has developed and promoted restorative justice in criminal justice systems around the world.

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<sup>39</sup> This is a non-exhaustive list.

- **Critical Resistance**

Since its formation in 1998, the goal of Critical Resistance has been, and continues to be, building a movement to eliminate the prison industrial complex.

- **Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI)**

Working within the framework of hospital-based violence intervention programs established in 1994, in 2009 eight programs across the country began the network now known as the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention. To heal communities affected by violence, HAVI fosters hospital and community collaborations to advance equitable, trauma-informed care and violence intervention and prevention programs.

- **Project Nia**

Founded in 2009 in Chicago, Project Nia is a grassroots organization that works to end the arrest, detention, and incarceration of children and young adults by promoting restorative and transformative justice practices.

- **Survived and Punished**

The Survived and Punished project demands the immediate release of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and other forms of gender violence who are imprisoned for survival actions.

- **Black & Pink**

Founded in 2005, Black and Pink is a national organization with a grassroots network of 13 chapters, rooted in principles of abolition to dismantle the criminal punishment system and to liberate LGBTQIA2S+ people/people living with HIV/AIDS who are affected by that system through advocacy, support, and organizing.

Newer organizations and efforts also exist which either have an explicitly abolitionist agenda or are centered on creating alternatives to punishment and policing. These efforts and organizations include:

- **Black Lives Matter** (also see: [defundthepolice.org/](https://defundthepolice.org/))

#BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer. Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

- **BYP100/Black Youth Project 100**

Founded in 2013, BYP100 (Black Youth Project 100) is a member-based organization of Black youth activists creating justice and freedom for all Black people.

- **Dream Defenders**

Dream Defenders was founded in April 2012. A multiracial group of young people who are organizing to build power in our communities, advancing a vision of safety and security—away from prisons, deportation, and war—and towards healthcare, housing, jobs, and movement for all.

- **Durham Beyond Policing**

Durham Beyond Policing successfully organized a divest/invest campaign. Working together since 2016, the grassroots coalition organized community members to divest from \$70 million spent on policing and prisons and reinvest municipal resources into supporting the health and wellbeing of Black and Brown communities, benefiting all community members in Durham, North Carolina. Durham voters responded to the crisis of mass incarceration and police violence by electing the current City Council, a new Sheriff, a new District Attorney, and three new Judges, all committed to reforming the Durham criminal justice system.

- **Freedom to Thrive Coalition**

Freedom to Thrive is a national convener of Black and brown organizations fighting for reinvestment in our communities and an end to the punishment-based criminal and immigration systems. They convene campaign for reinvestment and against criminalization, build movements

that unite Black and brown communities, and offer healing justice training programs and mentorship towards liberation

- **Liberate MKE**

Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based #LiberateMKE successfully organized an invest/divest campaign. Instead of police, the community would invest in programs that address the root causes of poverty and violence, like jobs, public health, and housing, and non-police violence prevention projects such as violence interrupter programs.

- **Movement for Black Lives/M4BL**

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), formed in December 2014, under the fundamental idea that we can achieve more together than we can separately. M4BL was created as a space for Black organizations across the country to debate and discuss the current political conditions, develop shared assessments of what political interventions were necessary in order to achieve key policy, cultural and political wins, convene organizational leadership in order to debate and co-create a shared movement wide strategy..

- **MPD 150**

MPD 150 is at the frontlines of the process of dismantling the Minneapolis Police Department and reimagining community-based public safety.

- **No Cop Academy**

No Cop Academy is a Chicago-based effort to stop the construction of a \$95 million dollar Cop Academy, and to fund youth & communities instead.

- **Oakland POWER Projects**

Oakland Power Projects aim to increase resistance to the every-day violence of policing, strengthen people's skills to respond to community health needs in ways that minimize police contact, and ultimately decouple access to health care from policing.

- **Safety Beyond Policing**

Safety Beyond Policing campaign is comprised of New Yorkers who do not want New York City agencies to invest in hiring more police and instead to invest the 94 million dollars proposed for a thousand more police in resources that will improve the quality of life for poor people of color.

*For more resources, news, and ways to get involved in community safety and police accountability work, visit the [Community Resource Hub's website](#).*

## **Articles and Books**

For additional information on alternatives to policing, abolition, and other related and relevant issues, please refer to the following resources:

### **Abolition of Policing Workshop**

CR Oakland, "Abolition of Policing workshop," *Critical Resistance* <http://criticalresistance.org/abolition-of-policing-workshop/>

### **Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: Building Transformative Justice Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, "Readings and Media," BATJC <https://batjc.wordpress.com/readings-media/>

### **Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: Building Transformative Justice Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

Mia Mingus, "Pods and Pod Mapping Worksheet," *Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective*: June 2016, <https://batjc.wordpress.com/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>

## **Black & Pink Prison Abolition Syllabus**

Jason Lydon, “Prison Abolition Syllabus,” *Prison Library Support Network*, <https://we.riseup.net/plsn/black-pink-prison-abolition-syllabus/>

## **Community Policing and other Fairy Tales**

A collection of comics & stories for a police-free world, curated by MPD150, <https://www.mpd150.com/comic/>

## **Critical Resistance: The CR Abolition Organizing Toolkit**

Shana Agid, Brooks Berndt, Rachel Herzing, Ari Wohlfeiler, *The CR Abolition Organizing Toolkit* (Oakland: Critical Resistance, undated) <http://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/CR-Abolitionist-Toolkit-online.pdf>

## **Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence**

Community -Based Interventions Project, *Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence* (Oakland: Creative Interventions, 2018), <http://www.creative-interventions.org/tools/toolkit/>

## **Critical Resistance: Resources on Policing**

Critical Resistance, “Critical Resistance Resources on Policing,” Critical Resistance <http://criticalresistance.org/abolish-policing/>

## **The End of Policing**

Alex Vitale, *The End of Policing* (New York: Verso, 2017)

## **The End of Policing: Putting Abolition Into Practice**

Houston DSA, “The End of Policing: Putting Abolition into Practice: A Conversation with Alex Vitale”

*YouTube* Streamed January 31, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq76o\\_t7SN0&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq76o_t7SN0&feature=youtu.be)

### **How Can We Reconcile Prison Abolition With #MeToo?**

Victoria Law, “How Can We Reconcile Prison Abolition with #MeToo?” *Filter Mag*, September 12, 2018, <https://filtermag.org/how-can-we-reconcile-prison-abolition-with-metoo/>

### **How to Intervene When Someone Is Being Harassed—Without Calling the Cops**

Reina Sultan, “A Guide to Bystander Intervention Without Colling the Cops,” *Vice* January 27, 2020, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/5dm38x/a-guide-to-bystander-intervention-without-calling-the-police](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/5dm38x/a-guide-to-bystander-intervention-without-calling-the-police)

### **Implementing Abolition: How to Create Just & Lasting Decarceration**

National Lawyers Guild, “Implementing Abolition: How to Create a Just & Lasting Decarceration,” *National Lawyers Guild*, webinar, streamed April 9, 2019, <https://www.nlg.org/webinar-implementing-abolition-how-to-create-just-and-lasting-decarceration/>

### **MPD 150 Resources**

MPD 150 maintains an updated list of books, articles, essays, news items, toolkits, including writing on the Uprising, with a focus on Minneapolis organizing and activism and writing from the latter-half of 2020 alongside older pieces and foundational texts related to divesting from policing, abolition, and investing in and reimagining community-based public safety. (<https://www.mpd150.com/resources/>):

### **Organizing Towards a New Vision of Community Justice**

Raj Jayadev and Pilar Weiss, “Organizing Toward a New Vision of Community Justice,” *Law and Political Economy*, blog entry, May 9, 2019, <https://lpeblog.org/2019/05/09/organizing-towards-a-new-vision-of-community-justice/>

### **The Police Can’t Solve the Problem. They Are the Problem.**

Derecka Purnell and Marbre Stahly-Butts, “The Police Can’t Solve the Problem. They Are the Problem.”

*New York Times* September 26, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/26/opinion/the-police-cant-solve-the-problem-they-are-the-problem.html>

### **Prison Abolition Syllabus 2.0**

Dan Berger, Garrett Felber, Kali Gross, Elizabeth Hinton, and Anyabwile Love, “Prison Abolition Syllabus 2.0,” *African American Intellectual History Society*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/prison-abolition-syllabus-2-0/>

### **What Does Police Abolition Mean?**

Derecka Purnell. “What Does Police Abolition Mean?” *Boston Review* August 23, 2017, <https://bostonreview.net/law-justice/derecka-purnell-what-does-police-abolition-mean>

### **What To Do Instead of Calling the Police: Some Options**

TRIP!Project, “What to Do Instead of Calling the Police—Some Options,” January 12, 2018, <http://tripproject.ca/what-to-do-instead-of-calling-the-police-some-options/>