



A New Federal Paradigm for Safety, Accountability, and Justice

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February
2026

Why Do We Need a New Paradigm?

In 2024, Donald Trump rode back into office on a wave of fear, driven by months of railing about “hellhole” cities and so-called “migrant crime.” While voters in that election may have ranked crime well below big-ticket issues like the economy and immigration, Trump recognized that safety is a fundamental value underpinning all these issues. Everyone deserves to be safe, and although the president has shown little interest in policies that sincerely tackle crime, he has consistently demonstrated an ability to exploit public concern about safety as a political tool to consolidate power.

Under Trump, America is at risk of becoming a far more dangerous place—from our food and skies to our streets and hospitals. His administration cut more than \$800 million in U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) funding for programs helping to drive down crime to historic lows, such as violence prevention and police training. And as the country finally turned the tide on overdose deaths and homelessness, Trump cut funding for addiction treatment and affordable housing. From gutting funding and programs for mental health treatment to child sex trafficking, the list goes on.

But still, Trump continues to exploit valid fears about crime and safety for his own ends. Across the country, people are watching the president justify extreme and militarized actions under the guise of fighting crime. At great expense, the administration has deployed thousands of National Guard troops and active military troops in our city streets despite the objections of local leaders, communities, and courts. ICE agents are conducting large raids and mass arrests in neighborhoods, workplaces, courthouses, and even hospitals. As the public demonstrated widespread outrage, federal law enforcement has responded with violence, leading to the tragic killings of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti.

Voters do *not* want this punitive escalation. A majority of Americans oppose National Guard deployments in their local areas, feel federal law enforcement is making communities less safe, and disapprove of ICE’s conduct. They want leaders who solve problems, not ones who stoke fear.

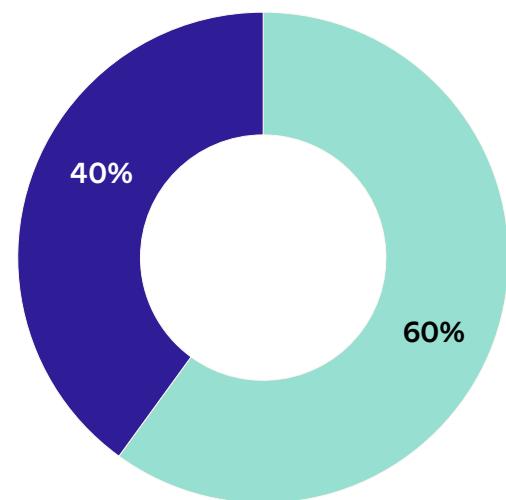
Vera Action's 40+ rounds of polling and research consistently show that a majority of Americans—including independents—prefer leaders who are “serious about safety,” not “tough on crime.” Being “serious about safety” means delivering strong, accountable policing to solve serious crimes; investing in schools, jobs, housing, and treatment; and targeting illegal guns to prevent crime and break its cycle. Accountability when someone breaks the law should mean remorse, repair, and, most importantly, change—not just strict punishment.

By roughly a 60–40 margin, voters favor this approach of preventing crime and breaking its cycle over punitive approaches. This strong preference holds across key demographics and electorally decisive groups, including white, Black, Latino, and AAPI voters. One reason a “serious” approach works so well is that voters are tired of hearing the same “tough-on-crime” policies without real results. Despite many cities reporting the lowest number of homicides and shootings in decades, most voters still believe crime is going up. Voters increasingly view issues like addiction, mental health, and homelessness as safety issues, even as they worry less about violent crime. Crucially, a “serious” approach includes real solutions for those public health and quality-of-life concerns.

With the midterms in sight, Trump again intends to double down on crime, including through a likely “comprehensive crime bill.” And even as a “serious about safety” approach is working to drive down crime across the country, lawmakers are once again hearing the wrong advice to turn away from what voters want and embrace out-of-touch “tough-on-crime” rhetoric. Instead of letting Trump continue to dictate the politics of crime, there is a clear opportunity to define a proactive agenda and lead with policies that prevent crime, respond to crises, and improve community well-being.

When given a choice between being “tough on crime” or “serious about safety,” voters heavily favor preventing crime and breaking its cycle

- SERIOUS ABOUT SAFETY:** We should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities—like good schools, jobs, and affordable housing—and help prevent crime by increasing treatment for mental health and drug addiction and by getting illegal guns off the street.
- TOUGH ON CRIME:** We should do more to get tough on crime—like having tougher sentences for people convicted of violent crimes, maintaining strong bail laws to keep dangerous people in jail, and providing police with more support and resources.



Source: YouGov May 2025 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked, “Even if neither is exactly right, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?”

Americans know that they do not need to choose between safety, accountability, and justice. We can—and must—achieve all three. The platform below outlines a set of real, proven solutions to counter crime fearmongering, rebuild trust with voters by demonstrating credibility on a kitchen table issue, and, critically, deliver safety people can actually feel in their daily lives. The platform is organized around six core planks:

- 1 Strong, Accountable Policing**
- 2 Ending the Overdose Crisis**
- 3 Supporting Strong Mental Health and De-escalating Crisis**
- 4 Tackling Gun Violence**
- 5 Safe Streets and Good Quality of Life**
- 6 A Fairer, More Accountable Justice System**

1 Strong, Accountable Policing

Too often, debates about policing are framed as a rigid choice between two extremes: unconditional support for law enforcement or calls for disinvestment. But voters understand that “back the blue” versus “defund” is a false dichotomy. Repeatedly, polling shows that the public does not want simply *more* policing; they want *better* policing. That means supporting law enforcement to carry out their essential duties while also insisting on accountability when they abuse their power or break the law. Such accountability is particularly urgent given the continued rise in police killings of civilians since the murder of George Floyd, reaching a record high of 1,271 in 2024.

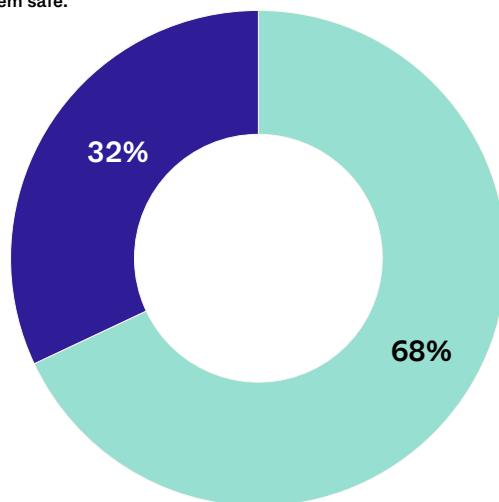
Police are central to the nation’s public safety infrastructure. They serve as our default first responders to an extraordinary range of situations—from routine disputes to life-threatening emergencies. Yet police departments across the country are under significant strain. As recruitment and retention challenges persist, surveys show that sworn staffing has fallen roughly 5 percent since 2020. Further, officers are routinely tasked with responding to complex social problems that fall outside traditional law enforcement. The consequences are clear: 911 response times are unacceptably long, and too many serious crimes go unsolved. Public safety and community trust suffer when police are stretched too thin, insufficiently trained, poorly supervised, or operating without clear standards and transparency.

Doubling down on blunt “tough-on-crime” strategies—by simply increasing budgets, adding officers, or loosening oversight—does not reliably deliver public safety or build the trust law enforcement depends on to function effectively. It is also out of step with what voters want. This is increasingly

Voters want to support the police and hold them accountable

 Police officers are public servants who play an important role in public safety and deserve support to do their jobs well. But with that authority comes responsibility: officers must be held accountable when they abuse their power or break the law. Investing in higher case clearance rates, fast police response times, and tools to solve serious crimes—alongside strong accountability—builds trust and makes communities safer.

 Police officers put their lives on the line for us everyday. They work high-stress jobs and make split-second life-or-death decisions. We cannot handcuff them by second-guessing every move. The hostile climate for police has discouraged proactive police work. We can't expect the police to keep us safe if we aren't willing to keep them safe.



Source: YouGov January 2026 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked “Even if neither is exactly right, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?”

clear as federal law enforcement violates constitutional rights, not only sparking outrage but also undermining confidence in state and local police.

Moreover, research undercuts the assumption that more police means less crime. Despite the pandemic-era spike, crime rates in the United States have declined significantly below 2019 levels, with a new Council of Criminal Justice analysis of 40 large cities showing a 25 percent drop in homicides, a 13 percent drop in gun assaults, and a 36 percent drop in robberies since 2019. These improvements occurred alongside significant federal and local investments in community-based public safety strategies—and they took place even as police staffing levels declined by roughly 5 percent. Taken together, these trends strongly suggest that increasing police presence alone is neither necessary nor sufficient to deliver long-term public safety.

Even research often cited to justify police expansion reinforces the limits of simply putting more officers on the street. A frequently referenced study finds that larger police forces may be associated with some reductions in crime, but it *also* finds that increased staffing leads to more arrests for low-level “quality-of-life” offenses, which disproportionately harm Black communities. Policing can also lead to social costs that undermine public safety, such as negative consequences for health outcomes, educational attainment, and economic security. These findings underscore that expanding police departments without reform and accountability can deepen inequities and erode trust rather than reliably improve safety.

Across the country, police departments are addressing these intertwined problems—recruitment and overstretched officers—by making better use of civilians for specific functions that do not require officers’ expertise, such as traffic enforcement and community engagement. Civilianization is a decades-old trend endorsed by groups like the International Association of Police Chiefs and Police Executive Research Forum that allows sworn officers to focus on patrol and other critical functions. Localities can take advantage of federal funding like the DOJ’s Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program to incorporate this strategy rather than just throwing money at these challenges.

An effective path forward on policing prioritizes professionalism, trust, and accountability. Legislation can provide law enforcement with the resources, training, and clarity they need to do their jobs effectively, while reinforcing transparency and accountability that protect both officers and the communities they serve, including:

Violent Incident Clearance and Technological Investigative Methods (VICTIM) Act

Solving Serious Violence, the Right Way

This bipartisan bill invests in what actually helps solve shootings and homicides: well-trained investigators, modern forensics, and community trust. By funding evidence-based investigative practices, victim and family support, and officer wellness—while requiring safeguards in hiring and protecting civil rights—the bill will increase clearance rates and improve accountability through modern responses that can help avoid overly aggressive policing.

Pathways to Policing Act

Building Police Forces That Reflect the Communities They Serve

This bipartisan bill strengthens public safety by expanding access to careers in law enforcement. It funds recruitment and outreach, along with programs that remove financial and structural barriers to becoming an officer—without lowering standards. By prioritizing candidates from underrepresented communities, nontraditional backgrounds, and those who live in the communities they serve, the bill supports a more diverse and community-connected police workforce.

No Secret Police Act

Transparency and Trust in Immigration Enforcement

This bill strengthens public safety and accountability by requiring Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officers to clearly identify themselves during immigration and border enforcement actions. By ensuring officers display visible insignia, identify their agency, and keep their faces unobscured—while still allowing appropriate tactical gear—the bill will reduce confusion, prevent impersonation, and protect both officers and the public. Clear identification can help build trust and better ensure accountability when that trust is broken.

Federal Police Camera and Accountability Act

Transparency, Accountability, and Privacy in Federal Policing

This bill requires federal law enforcement officers to use body cameras and patrol-car cameras during public interactions, ensuring that they document encounters from start to finish. It sets clear national rules for when cameras must be on, how long each law enforcement agency keeps the footage, and who can access it. It also includes strong privacy protections for crime victims, people in their homes,

and people reporting crimes anonymously. The bill bans facial recognition and biometric surveillance on police cameras, prevents footage from being hidden when officers are under investigation, and establishes real consequences when agents improperly disable cameras or destroy footage. By pairing transparency with privacy and enforceable accountability, the bill strengthens public trust and upholds constitutional rights without compromising officer safety.

Ending Qualified Immunity Act

Restoring Accountability in Civil Rights Enforcement

This bill restores the original intent of the civil rights law that allows people to sue government officials who violate their constitutional rights. It eliminates the judicially created doctrine of qualified immunity, which currently shields state and local officials from accountability unless a court has previously ruled on nearly identical facts. By clarifying that good faith, legal uncertainty, or the absence of a “clearly established” precedent is not a defense, the bill ensures that victims of constitutional violations can seek justice and holds public officials to the same legal standards as everyone else. Lawmakers have also introduced a separate bill that would reform qualified immunity for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents.



SPOTLIGHT JURISDICTIONS



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, reached its highest citywide homicide clearance rate in more than a decade after Mayor Brandon Johnson added detectives and reorganized the detectives bureau to deploy investigative resources more strategically—exactly the kind of capacity the VICTIM Act is designed to fund, from trained investigators to modern investigative practices.



The BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA, police department runs a paid Police Cadet Program to recruit and train future officers from the community. Launched in 2001, it offers a college scholarship, provides paid part-time work, and creates a direct path into the police department. The police chief credits the program with helping increase officer diversity from 6 percent officers of color to 22 percent, making it a clear example of the staffing model the Pathways to Policing Act is designed to fund.

2 Ending the Overdose Crisis

Even as overdose deaths declined by almost 27 percent last year, more than 80,000 people tragically lost their lives. Consequently, Congress and state legislatures have continued to pursue tougher penalties for drug use and sales. Yet a broad body of research has found that longer sentences do not meaningfully reduce drug use, overdose deaths, or drug-related crime. Most Americans recognize that fentanyl and other substances present a serious public safety challenge—one that intersects with crime but cannot be solved by enforcement alone.

Across the country and the political spectrum, Americans are united in demanding real solutions that prevent overdoses and save lives. Voters consistently rally behind a safety message that includes investing in substance use treatment to reduce crime.

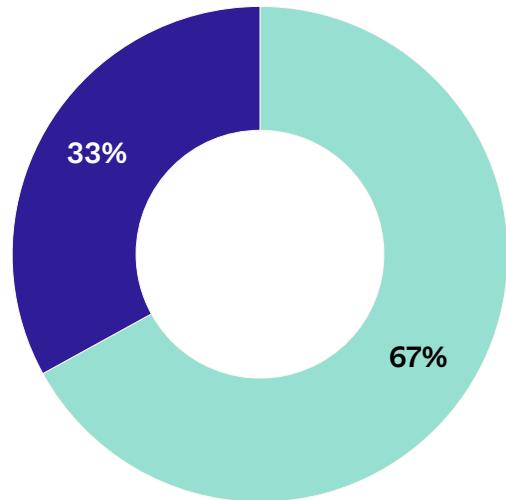
An evidence-based, polling-backed approach to substance use prioritizes early intervention, care, and rapid response. That means expanding access to community-based treatment, recovery programs, and proven, lifesaving tools like naloxone and drug test strips. It also means ensuring that when an overdose occurs, people can call for emergency help without fear of arrest.

These strategies are particularly important for people transitioning back into the community from prison, as roughly 65 percent of people in prison have a diagnosed substance use disorder, and overdose risk is as much as 129 times higher in the weeks following release. Connecting people to treatment, medication, and health care before release reduces preventable deaths, supports recovery, and strengthens public safety for everyone.

Federal legislation advancing this care-first, public safety-focused approach to overdose and addiction includes:

Voters want a public health response to addiction and the overdose crisis

- Public funding should be used to save lives during the opioid epidemic, including purchasing opioid reversal drugs like Narcan and test strips for first responders. These tools prevent overdoses, keep people alive, and give people a chance to get treatment and recover.
- Taxpayers' money should not be used to purchase opioid reversal drugs like Narcan or drug test strips. Using taxpayer dollars this way normalizes illegal drug use and enables dangerous choices instead of discouraging them. That's not compassion, it's reckless and traps people in a cycle of destruction.



Source: YouGov January 2026 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked, "Even if neither is exactly right, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?"

Having Overdose Protection Equipment (HOPE) Act

Empowering Communities to Save Lives

This bipartisan bill makes a simple, life-saving fix: it allows states and tribal governments to use existing federal opioid response funds to purchase overdose-reversal kits like naloxone and make them publicly accessible. It creates no new programs and imposes no mandates but rather gives communities tools to prevent deaths and respond quickly to overdoses.

Samaritan Efforts to Ensure Key Health Emergency and Life-Saving Protections (SEEK HELP) Act

Calling for Help Should Never Be a Crime

This bipartisan bill ensures people can call 911 during an overdose without fear of arrest for simple drug possession when seeking help for themselves or someone else in good faith. By limiting protections to emergency situations—and not shielding people already being searched or arrested when the emergency is reported—it encourages lifesaving medical intervention while preserving law enforcement authority. It puts public safety first by making sure fear of prosecution never costs someone their life.

Advancing Lifesaving Efforts with Rapid Test Strips (ALERT) for Communities Act

Preventing Overdose Deaths Through Early Warning and Education

This bipartisan bill strengthens public safety by allowing states and tribal governments to use existing opioid response funds to expand access to legal drug test strips and train first responders and community workers to use them responsibly. By pairing evidence-backed harm reduction tools with clear federal guidance and product standards, the bill helps prevent accidental overdoses without creating new programs or mandates. It supports informed, life-saving interventions while maintaining accountability and the rule of law.

Reentry Act of 2025

Bridging the Gap to Health and Safety After Incarceration

This bipartisan bill helps people leaving jail or prison stay healthy and safe by allowing states to use Medicaid to cover care in the 30 days before release. By ensuring access to medication, mental health support, and substance use treatment, it will reduce recidivism, health crises, overdose risk, and interruptions in care. The bill strengthens public safety and community health by supporting a smoother, safer transition back into society.



SPOTLIGHT JURISDICTIONS



LUCAS COUNTY, OHIO's community-based treatment efforts—including overdose prevention training, outreach, and naloxone distribution—helped drive a 20 percent drop in overdose deaths from 2020 to 2022. That impact shows how expanding access to naloxone and harm reduction tools, as enabled by the HOPE Act and the ALERT Communities Act, saves lives.



NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT, saw a 51 percent drop in opioid-related deaths in 2024 after local initiatives focused on Narcan training and distribution, as well as recovery support through coordinated social services—illustrating how widespread access to naloxone can help drive real declines in overdose deaths.

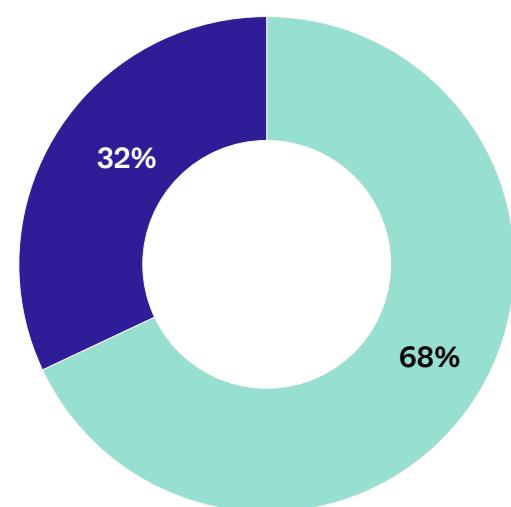
3 Supporting Strong Mental Health and De-escalating Crisis

For too long, we have asked police to serve as the default responders to mental health and substance use crises—situations that require specialized training and a clinical approach. This places officers in difficult positions and can lead to preventable harm: one recent study estimates that 32 percent of people shot and killed by the police are experiencing a mental health crisis. A safer, more effective public safety system ensures that the right responders are available for people in crisis, allowing police to focus on serious crime while trained professionals handle complex health-related emergencies.

Voters agree that we ask police to do too much—and that public safety improves when communities invest in mental health infrastructure alongside law enforcement. Strengthening crisis response means expanding mobile crisis teams, supporting

Voters want to address mental health issues with trained professionals—not law enforcement

- When people are experiencing a mental health crisis or struggling with addiction, they should be met by trained mental health professionals—not police—who can connect them to treatment and services. Addressing the root causes of these crises helps prevent future crime, disorder, and repeat offenses.
- All people who commit a crime—no matter how minor—should receive a strong police response, be arrested, and face punishment. We need to take back our streets from the mentally ill and the drug addicted. Allowing soft-on-crime responses weakens the rule of law, excuses criminal behavior, and erodes public order.



Source: YouGov January 2026 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked, "Even if neither is exactly right, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?"

mental health professionals, and increasing access to outpatient and inpatient care. It also requires creating dedicated crisis care centers—designed with clinical expertise and community input—where people can go for immediate care instead of jail or overburdened emergency rooms that are ill-equipped to provide ongoing treatment.

Finally, a truly functional crisis response system must address gaps in care for people detained pretrial. On any given day, nearly half a million legally innocent people are held in jail, often with serious mental health or substance use needs. Interruptions in care during this period can escalate crises and increase long-term risk. Ensuring continuity of treatment while someone is detained and during reentry stabilizes people, supports recovery, and improves safety for communities and first responders.

Federal legislation advancing this comprehensive approach to mental health and crisis response includes:

Mental Health Justice Act of 2023

Crisis Response That Keeps Communities Safe and Lets Police Focus on Violent Crime

This bipartisan bill provides funding for trained mental health professionals to respond to crises involving mental illness, disabilities, or substance use—areas where police often lack specialized training. By pairing rapid response with trauma-informed care, referrals, and community coordination, the bill ensures help for people in crisis. It also frees police to focus on violent crime while trained professionals address these complex social issues, strengthening public safety and providing a smarter, more compassionate approach to emergency response.

Behavioral Health Crisis Care Centers Act of 2025

Immediate, Compassionate Help for People in Crisis

This bill funds “one-stop crisis facilities” to provide immediate care for people experiencing mental health or substance use crises. These centers would offer on-site treatment, housing support, and coordinated services, and they would be designed with input from people with lived experience to improve outcomes. By providing specialized care and connections to facilitate long-term stability, this bill helps jurisdictions effectively and compassionately address the mental health crisis and keep communities safer.

Due Process Continuity of Care Act

Ensuring Health and Safety for People Awaiting Trial

This bipartisan bill allows states to use Medicaid to provide health care for pretrial detainees—people in jail who haven't been convicted. By covering physical health, mental health, and substance use treatment, states can prevent people from becoming destabilized due to interrupted medication or care, which will reduce health crises and support recovery. This early intervention promotes safer reentry into the community, strengthens public safety, and protects the rights and well-being of people awaiting trial.



SPOTLIGHT JURISDICTIONS



SPRINGFIELD, OREGON, is home to **CAHOOTS**, a long-running civilian crisis response program that sends medics and mental health professionals to handle behavioral health and substance-related 911 calls. A [2024 evaluation](#) found CAHOOTS cut arrests for behavioral-health incidents by 24 percent and increased access to medical treatment. But the program was partially [shut down in 2025](#) due to funding issues, underscoring why bills like the Mental Health Justice Act and the Behavioral Health Crisis Care Centers Act are needed to provide stable, scalable crisis-response infrastructure.



SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, [opened](#) a 24/7 crisis stabilization clinic in April 2025 that gives police, paramedics, and outreach teams a place to bring people in mental health or substance-use crises. In its first five months, the clinic admitted 344 people, 88 of whom then entered residential treatment, illustrating how similar centers funded through the Behavioral Health Crisis Care Centers Act could move people from street crisis into sustained care and recovery.

4 Tackling Gun Violence

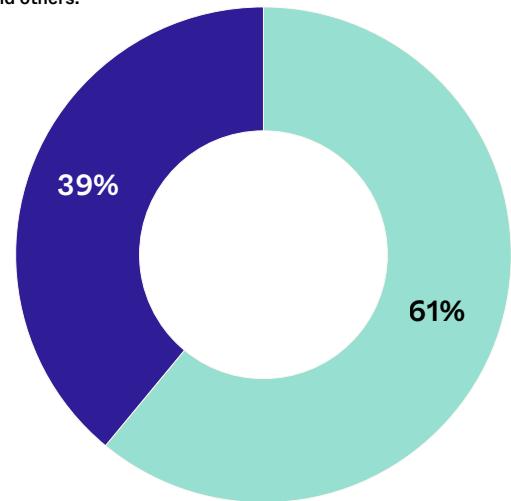
Neighborhoods are not safe when residents regularly hear gunshots or fear leaving their homes. While murder rates appear to be at their lowest point since 1900, and the country has made significant progress in reducing gun violence, much work remains. Voters agree: gun violence consistently ranks among voters' top priorities, and about 58 percent of Americans support stricter gun laws. Fortunately, incredibly promising programs have flourished under the past several years of federal investment, in particular community violence intervention (CVI) programs that reduce shootings by building relationships with those most at risk of being involved in gun violence. These programs, which have suffered massive funding cuts under President Trump, save lives and reduce the social and economic costs of violence, including medical care, policing, and incarceration.

Preventing gun violence requires a stable federal infrastructure to support local efforts—especially CVI programs (including their crucial subcategory of hospital-based violence intervention programs) and trauma recovery centers that stabilize crime survivors and interrupt cycles of retaliation. Rather than only responding to gun violence after it happens, a smarter, prevention-focused approach combines early intervention, support services, and practical regulations that keep firearms out of the wrong hands. By investing in evidence-based programs, communities can address the root causes of violence while strengthening public safety. Federal legislation advancing this approach includes programs that support intervention, prevention, and safety measures:

Voters support a range of responses to tackling gun violence

 To reduce gun violence, firearms should be subject to common-sense regulations like background checks to keep guns out of dangerous hands. But laws alone are not enough—we should also invest in community-based efforts that reduce conflict and equip young people with the skills and opportunities needed to prevent violence before it starts.

 The Second Amendment clearly protects the right of law-abiding Americans to own and carry firearms, and these rights should not be restricted. Guns are a reality in our society, and criminals will always find ways to get them. The most effective way to stop violent crime is for responsible citizens to be armed and able to defend themselves and others.



Source: YouGov January 2026 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked, "Even if neither is exactly right, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?"

Break the Cycle of Violence Act

Building Safer Communities Through Intervention and Support

This bill funds programs that reduce violence through prevention, intervention, and support—rather than punishment alone. By connecting at-risk people with counseling, mentorship, mediation, social services, and job or educational opportunities, the bill helps people avoid cycles of violence while supporting crime survivors. It also creates a national infrastructure for CVI, including grants, an office with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an advisory committee, and a response center to track results and share best practices. By addressing drivers of violence and providing opportunities, the bill saves lives, strengthens communities, and improves public safety.

Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2025

Background Checks for Safer Communities

This bipartisan bill requires background checks for nearly all gun sales, including private transactions, to ensure that anyone legally prohibited from owning a firearm cannot get one. By maintaining clear exceptions for family transfers, law enforcement, and temporary lawful uses, the law strengthens public safety without creating a national gun registry. Dealers must inform buyers of the rules, helping prevent illegal transfers and keeping guns out of the wrong hands.

School Violence Prevention Act

Preventing Youth Gun Violence Before It Starts

This bill invests in school- and community-based programs to prevent youth gun violence. By funding trauma-informed, culturally competent, and evidence-based strategies, it helps students heal, build social-emotional skills, and stay on a positive path. Grants support partnerships between schools and community organizations, connect youth with mentors and counselors, and promote safer environments—while requiring rigorous evaluation to identify what works and share best practices.



SPOTLIGHT JURISDICTIONS



BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, has cut homicides by nearly 60 percent since 2021 by treating gun violence as a public health crisis and using real-time data, community violence intervention, partnerships between community-based groups and law enforcement, and targeted social services to prevent shootings before they happen. Between 2024 and 2025 alone, nonfatal shootings fell 25 percent, carjackings 37 percent, and robberies 28 percent, mirroring the kind of locally driven intervention and infrastructure the Break the Cycle of Violence Act would sustain in high-risk neighborhoods.



RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA's Advance Peace, through its Peacemaker Fellowship, works with young people ages 14–25 at the center of gun violence, using trauma-informed coaching, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and intensive mentorship to help people process trauma and resolve conflict without violence. After the program launched in 2010, Richmond saw a 55 percent drop in firearm homicides and a 66 percent reduction in gun assaults causing injury or death by 2017. Sacramento's replication has been similarly successful, demonstrating CVI's lifesaving and cost-saving benefits. These experiences show why the School Violence Prevention Act's focus on counseling, mentoring, and community-based youth support is a credible public-safety strategy.

5 Safe Streets and Good Quality of Life

Safe, thriving communities require more than crime enforcement—they depend on stable housing, vibrant public spaces, and opportunities for youth to learn and grow. But the country is moving in the opposite direction: for example, homelessness reached a record high of more than 770,000 people in a single night in 2024, and while it appears to have begun declining in 2025, the Trump administration has pushed a raft of funding cuts and policy shifts that risk undermining progress. These changes do not reduce disorder or crime; they increase instability and make communities less safe.

Policies that deliver safety focus on community stability and well-being. Pairing housing with supportive services, restoring and greening vacant or blighted properties, improving street lighting, and investing in parks, playgrounds, after-school programs, and youth employment can strengthen neighborhoods and reduce crime. Simply put, well-supported communities are safer communities.

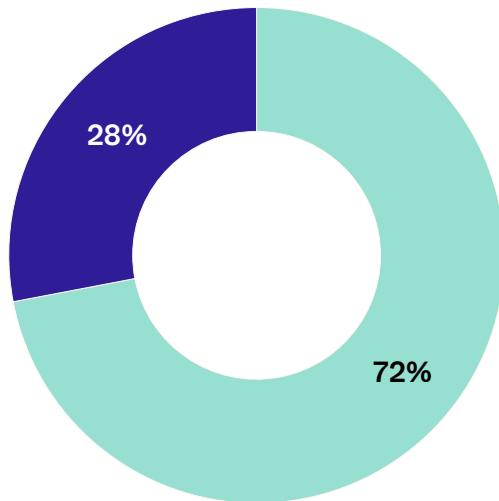
The same principle applies to retail theft: people must be held accountable, but punitive responses alone fail to address why it happens. Concern over retail theft has grown in recent years, leading lawmakers to consider punitive responses at the state and federal level, including the Combating Organized Retail Crime Act (CORCA) championed by the retail industry. We need to support our businesses, and consumers understandably want a safe and peaceful shopping experience, but increasing penalties as CORCA does is the wrong solution to a legitimate problem. A better solution involves addressing insufficiently regulated online marketplaces, as well as supporting both businesses and people, for example by helping retailers acquire proven theft-prevention infrastructure and ensuring access to neighborhood-based ambassadors who can de-escalate conflict, resolve low-level incidents, and keep people safe without defaulting to arrest and incarceration.

By leading with proactive measures and community revitalization, federal legislation can strengthen local economies and ensure that public spaces are safe for everyone, including:

To address homelessness, voters prefer community investments over punitive responses

 These issues are best addressed by my local government funding services like housing, mental health care, and drug treatment to help people recover and get back on their feet. Police should be involved where necessary for public safety but should not be the primary response.

 These issues are best addressed by forcibly removing homeless people and those who are behaving erratically from public spaces. Police should play a lead role, arresting and jailing those who break the law and being a more visible presence in public areas.



Source: YouGov January 2026 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked, "Even if it isn't exactly right, which of the following statements is closer to your view?"

Fighting Homelessness Through Services and Housing Act

Wraparound Services to Keep People Housed

This bill invests in proven housing programs that pair stable homes with wraparound services like mental health care, substance use treatment, health care, and job support. By addressing the reasons why people end up unhoused, it improves public safety, supports families and children, and reduces costly emergency responses. With strong oversight, community coordination, and accountability built in, the bill helps people stay housed, get healthier, and rebuild their lives.

Revitalizing Empty Structures Into Desirable Environments Act (RESIDE) Act

Turning Blight into Homes for Working Families

This bipartisan bill creates a five-year pilot program to help cities and states convert vacant, unsafe commercial buildings into attainable housing for low- and moderate-income families. By funding renovation, construction, and long-term affordability strategies, the program would revitalize blighted areas, address local housing shortages, and support communities in economic distress. It strengthens public safety, revitalizes neighborhoods, and provides working families with safe, affordable places to live.

Community Parks Revitalization Act

Safer Neighborhoods Through Parks and Recreation

This bill invests in parks, playgrounds and recreation facilities in communities facing high crime and economic hardship—in line with extensive research on how safe public spaces and youth opportunities improve public safety and public health. Funding safe, well-lit public spaces, youth recreation programs, and green infrastructure—while requiring community input, local matching funds, and long-term maintenance plans—reduces crime, supports young people, and strengthens neighborhoods without causing harm.

Mentoring to Succeed Act of 2025

Mentorship That Keeps Kids Safe, Supported, and on Track

This bill strengthens public safety and opportunity by creating a competitive federal grant program to help communities start, expand, or improve youth mentoring programs—especially for those most at risk of falling behind in school or getting into trouble. It supports structured, long-term mentoring relationships with screened

and trained mentors, alongside practical opportunities like career exploration, work-based learning, and job-readiness activities. The bill prioritizes programs serving youth in high-poverty, rural, and high-need communities. By connecting young people to stable adult role models and real pathways to education and employment, it helps prevent negative outcomes like dropout and juvenile justice system involvement—while building skills and hope for a stronger future.



SPOTLIGHT JURISDICTIONS



A rigorous study in **PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**, found that turning abandoned lots into green space reduced gun assaults in neighborhoods below the poverty line by 29 percent, nuisances by 30 percent, and burglaries by 22 percent. Residents in treated areas also reported feeling safer and using outside space more often, even though the intervention cost only \$5 per square meter to install and pennies to maintain. These results show how investments in clean, well-maintained public spaces—the kind funded by the Community Parks Revitalization Act—can proactively prevent crime and deliver real public safety gains.



HOUSTON, TEXAS's regional homelessness system, The Way Home, has cut homelessness by more than 60 percent since 2011 and housed more than 35,000 people by pairing rapid housing placement with coordinated, wraparound services. Its direct-to-housing model moves people straight from encampments into permanent, lease-based apartments, avoiding costly and destabilizing stays in shelters or transitional housing while case managers support long-term stability. This is the Fighting Homelessness Through Services and Housing Act in practice: housing plus services as a core public safety strategy.

6 A Fairer, More Accountable Justice System

A fairer, more accountable justice system strengthens communities by making sure that when people break the law, they repair the harm they caused, learn from their mistakes, and, most importantly, change their behavior. The evidence is clear that longer sentences do not deter crime, and a system delivering long-term safety must focus on rehabilitation as well as correct the harmful racial disparities that affect every step of the justice system from arrest to sentencing to incarceration. A broad, bipartisan majority of Americans support criminal justice reform, including policies like reforming outdated sentencing laws, reducing pretrial detention, reducing penalties for drugs, and expanding parole. This issue affects us all: nearly half of Americans have experienced incarceration in their own families, and we all live in communities that will receive the roughly 450,000 people who leave prison each year.

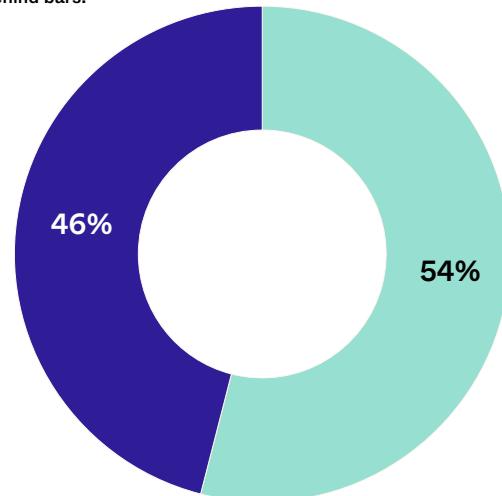
Even survivors of violence overwhelmingly reject long sentences and favor investment in crime prevention, crisis assistance, and community-based solutions over additional punitive measures. The federal government can—and should—join red, blue, and purple states across the country that are passing policies to reduce unnecessary incarceration and improve reentry while maintaining public safety. This includes laws that allow judges to review overly long sentences, consider the full context of a person's life and rehabilitation, expand compassionate or home-based release for people at low risk of reoffending, address outdated sentencing disparities, and seal certain criminal records.

By promoting accountability, fairness, and second chances, these approaches help break cycles of crime, support successful reentry, and restore trust in the justice system. Federal legislation that advances this vision includes:

Voters recognize that accountability doesn't just mean punishment alone

To make communities safe, people who break the law must be held accountable. This means seeing the harm they've done, accepting the consequences, learning from mistakes, and changing their behavior. Harsh punishment and long sentences alone lead to more violence. We need to provide people with programs that work to turn their lives around and prevent future crime.

We need to make sure that people who break the law are held accountable by enforcing strict punishment. If you do the crime, you should do the time, and that means serving the full sentence. Offenders shouldn't be able to get out of jail or prison early simply because they complete programs or have a good track record behind bars.



Source: YouGov January 2026 national survey commissioned by Vera Action. Respondents were asked, "Even if it isn't exactly right, which of the following comes closest to your view?"

Second Look Act of 2024

A Second Look for Fair and Proportionate Sentencing

Drawing on proven bipartisan state models, this bill gives federal judges a carefully structured opportunity to review very long sentences after 10 years, ensuring punishment still serves public safety and justice. Judges may reduce a sentence only if a person does not pose a danger and is ready for reentry, after considering rehabilitation, age, conduct in prison, victim input, and recommendations from prosecutors and corrections officials. With strong safeguards, victim protections, and supervised release requirements, the bill promotes accountability while reducing costly and unnecessary incarceration.

Justice in Sentencing for Survivors Act of 2025

Giving Judges Flexibility to Deliver Fair Sentences

This bill gives federal judges the discretion to consider a person's history of experiencing abuse or trafficking when determining a sentence, recognizing the full context of their lives rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all punishment. It also allows alternatives to incarceration when appropriate, promoting justice and accountability while maintaining public safety. By entrusting judges to make sensible decisions based on extensive experience and training, the bill ensures sentencing decisions reflect compassion, proportionality, and the totality of a person's circumstances—especially for survivors who have already experienced serious harm—following in the steps of red and blue states across the country.

Safer Supervision Act of 2025

Safe, Supervised Release for the Ill and Elderly

This bill expands home detention and compassionate release for elderly and terminally ill people convicted of nonviolent federal offenses, allowing courts—not just the Bureau of Prisons—to review requests. By focusing on people who pose little risk to public safety, it reduces costly, unnecessary incarceration while maintaining judicial oversight and supervised release. The bill promotes accountability, humane treatment, and smarter use of resources without compromising community safety.

Eliminating a Quantifiably Unjust Application of the Law (EQUAL) Act

Ending the Crack–Powder Sentencing Disparity

This bipartisan bill ends the outdated federal sentencing rules that still punish crack cocaine offenses far more harshly than powder cocaine, a disparity that disproportionately harms Black communities. This bill would ensure that crack and powder cocaine are treated equally under the law. For people who were previously

sentenced, sentence reductions are not automatic, but courts are empowered to grant them, promoting fairness and addressing racial inequities in sentencing. By correcting this long-standing racial injustice, the bill promotes fairness in our criminal justice system while avoiding unnecessary incarceration and maintaining public safety.

Clean Slate Act of 2025

Sealing Records, Rebuilding Lives

This bipartisan bill creates a federal “clean slate” system that automatically seals certain arrests and nonviolent convictions, while allowing others to seek sealing through a petition process. By clearing old, low-risk records, it removes unnecessary barriers to employment, housing, and education—improving public safety by supporting successful reentry and reducing recidivism. Drawing on proven bipartisan state models, the bill includes clear guardrails like court oversight and victim notification, giving people a real chance to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.



SPOTLIGHT JURISDICTIONS



PENNSYLVANIA is one of 13 states that have passed one or more Clean Slate laws, which automatically seal eligible criminal records after a waiting period. As a result, Pennsylvania has already sealed more than 40 million records for more than 1.6 million people, removing past low-level offenses from public view so they no longer block access to jobs, housing, and education. That scale is the point: automation makes record relief real, mirroring the federal framework proposed in the Clean Slate Act.



In April 2025, the MARYLAND legislature enacted the Second Look Act, allowing people convicted of offenses committed as emerging adults (ages 18–24) to petition a judge for sentence reduction after 20 years based on demonstrated rehabilitation. The law reflects a simple reality about public safety: people age out of crime, and courts need a structured way to reassess whether decades-long sentences still make sense. This is the federal Second Look Act in practice: judicial review, clear eligibility rules, and a pathway home for people who have done the work of accountability and transformation.

Choose Proven Solutions over Political Theater

As Congress considers the path forward on public safety, there are credible indications that Republicans—at the urging of the Trump administration—are preparing to introduce a “comprehensive crime bill.” While the scope of the bill remains unclear, it is liable to emerge as a sweeping, punitive legislative package branded as a response to crime, potentially rivaling the scale of the 1994 crime bill. The political purpose is clear: weaponize fear, manufacture a “tough-on-crime” narrative, and set up midterm messaging that would attempt to cast Democrats as weak on safety—even as crime remains near historic lows and Trump himself is devastating the safety infrastructure behind it.

Trump is repeating a familiar playbook: misinformation, scapegoating, and election-year posturing in place of real leadership and problem-solving. Lawmakers should not be caught flat-footed: voters don’t trust either party on crime, but there is a clear path to owning this issue and defeating “tough-on-crime” fearmongering with popular policies that work. Passing another punitive crime bill won’t make us safer; it will only unravel decades of progress and deepen the very crises it claims to solve. This moment demands leadership that rejects failed policies and instead advances popular, evidence-based solutions that deliver safety, justice, and accountability.

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