

A New Federal Paradigm for Safety, Accountability, and Justice

Executive Summary

Vera INSTITUTE
OF JUSTICE
Vera ACTION

Aiden Cotter
Sam Feineh
Josie Barton
Insha Rahman

February 2026

Under President Trump, America is at risk of becoming a far more dangerous place—from our food and skies to our streets and hospitals. His administration’s massive cuts to violence prevention, addiction treatment, and affordable housing threaten progress on crime, overdose deaths, and homelessness. Across the country, Americans feel less safe as Trump undertakes extreme, costly militarized crackdowns under the guise of fighting crime, leading to widespread outrage and the tragic killings of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti.

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,” by roughly a 60–40 margin. 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.

As Congress weighs the path forward on public safety, congressional Republicans appear poised to roll out a sweeping, punitive “comprehensive crime bill.” This is not a real plan to improve public safety, but rather a midterm strategy to weaponize fear—even as crime reaches historic lows. But instead of letting Trump continue to dictate the politics of crime, there is a clear opportunity to define a proactive agenda. Americans know that they do not need to choose between safety, accountability, and justice. We can—and must—achieve all three.

Below is a short summary of a larger platform that outlines a set of popular, proven solutions to counter crime fearmongering, rebuild trust with voters by demonstrating credibility on a kitchen table issue, and deliver safety people can feel in their daily lives. The platform is organized around six core planks:

1 Strong, Accountable Policing

Police are central to the nation’s public safety infrastructure. But departments are stretched thin and too often treated as the default response to every problem. Voters don’t just want more policing; they want better policing. That means supporting police *and* holding them accountable when they abuse their power. More funding or officers alone won’t guarantee safety or trust. Congress should back modern policing that works—faster 911 response, solving serious crime, professional training, and high-quality investigations—paired with transparency, clear rules, and real consequences for misconduct.

2 Ending the Overdose Crisis

The overdose crisis is one of the most urgent public safety challenges in the country—and enforcement alone won’t solve it. Tougher penalties have not meaningfully reduced drug use or overdose deaths. A public health strategy saves lives by expanding treatment and recovery

supports, strengthening rapid response, and making proven, lifesaving tools like [naloxone](#) and [fentanyl test strips](#) widely available. It also means ensuring people can seek emergency help [without fear](#) and guaranteeing care for people both [entering](#) and [leaving](#) incarceration to save lives and ensure [stable communities](#).

3 Supporting Strong Mental Health Systems and De-escalating Crisis

For too long, we have [asked](#) police to be the default response for mental health and substance use crises—situations that require clinical expertise, not enforcement. A [safer approach](#) sends the right help at the right time, allowing police to [focus on serious crime](#) while trained professionals handle complex health-related emergencies. Our communities need mobile crisis teams, trained professionals, accessible outpatient and inpatient care, and dedicated crisis care centers. Strengthening crisis response saves lives, reduces strain on law enforcement, and improves safety for everyone.

4 Tackling Gun Violence

While the country has [made](#) significant progress, gun violence [remains](#) a top voter concern and federal cuts risk that progress. Congress should provide stable federal support for evidence-based violence prevention—especially [community violence intervention](#) (including [hospital-based programs](#)) and [trauma recovery](#) services that reduce shootings and interrupt retaliation. A smart approach pairs prevention and intervention with practical safeguards that keep guns out of the wrong hands and sustain long-term reductions in violence.

5 Safe Streets and Good Quality of Life

Public safety isn't just crime enforcement—it's stability, opportunity, and neighborhoods where people can thrive. Communities are safer when they have [stable housing](#), well-maintained [public spaces](#), and safe, [structured options](#) for young people outside of school. Cutting [housing](#) and [supportive services](#) increases disorder and insecurity, not safety. The same is true for [retail theft](#): it harms workers and small businesses, but [punitive crackdowns](#) alone ignore the [instability](#) that often drives it. Congress should invest in housing and community revitalization, help businesses [adopt](#) effective safety infrastructure, and support [neighborhood-based ambassadors](#) who can de-escalate low-level incidents.

6 A Fairer, More Accountable Justice System

An effective justice system prioritizes safety, justice, and accountability—not [excessive punishment](#) alone. A [broad, bipartisan majority](#) of Americans support rehabilitation, proportionality, and second chances. Congress should reduce unnecessary incarceration while maintaining accountability: review overly long sentences, fix outdated sentencing disparities, expand compassionate or home-based release for people at low risk of committing new crimes, and remove barriers to reentry. A justice system that is fair and effective builds trust, supports crime survivors, and delivers long-term safety.

© 2026 Vera Institute of Justice and Vera Action.

For more information, please contact Insha Rahman, vice president of Advocacy & Partnerships and director, Vera Action, at irahman@vera.org, and Aiden Cotter, federal advocacy director, Vera and Vera Action, at acotter@vera.org.