

Community Priorities for City of New Orleans Investments: Results from a Community Budget Survey, 2025

Introduction

The Big Easy Budget Coalition's mission is "to advance budget equity—the just and fair allocation of government resources—to create the conditions for all New Orleanians to participate and thrive."

The Big Easy Budget Coalition (BEBC) is a diverse, growing group of more than 30 social justice organizations across New Orleans. BEBC advocates for city budget investments that address root causes of violence and support safe, thriving communities.¹ The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice, and the Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center established the coalition in 2022 in response to the city's plan to appropriate much of its federally awarded \$388 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding

toward policing—despite the funding's stated purpose of "[fostering] a strong, inclusive, and equitable recovery" from the COVID-19 pandemic.² BEBC developed and proposed the Big Easy Deal, a set of requests for budget investments in public health, community safety, youth and families, housing, infrastructure, food access, labor, and economic development that would better support the community's health, safety, quality of life, and recovery. Vera, a member organization of BEBC, supported the refinement of the Big Easy Deal and the coalition's continued advocacy by conducting survey research to identify the community's priorities for how the city invests its financial resources, which include public tax dollars.

Survey Design, Recruitment, and Analysis

The Big Easy Budget Coalition Survey poses a series of questions across themes vetted by Fund The People, a former member organization of BEBC. Themes include perceptions of neighborhood safety, what individual people and communities need to

Figure 1
Survey tabling events and flyer locations, 2025

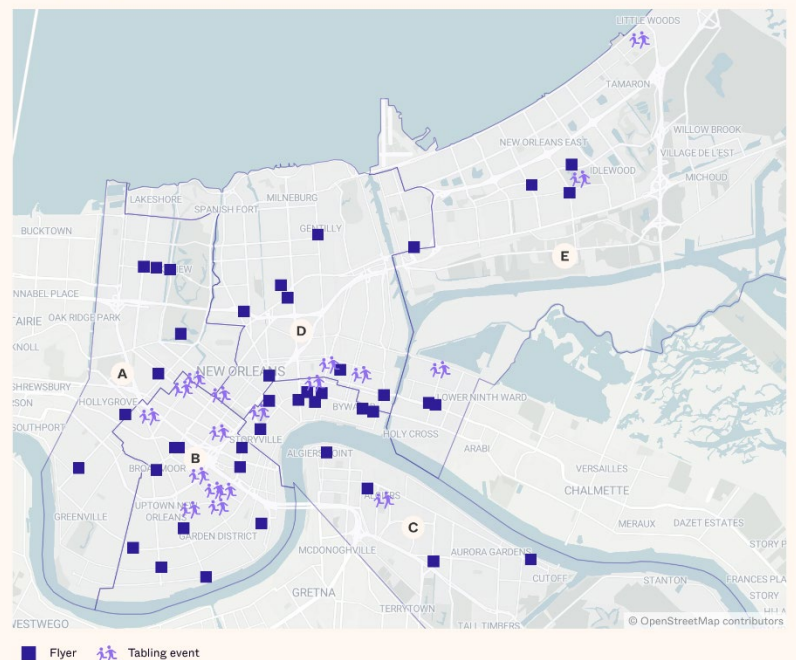


Figure 2

Survey respondents by race/ethnicity and gender, 2025

n = 298

Group	Count	Percent*
Black/African American	139	47%
Woman	100	34%
Man	34	11%
Gender nonconforming/nonbinary	4	1%
Prefer not to answer	1	<1%
White	118	40%
Woman	75	25%
Man	36	12%
Gender nonconforming/nonbinary	6	2%
Other	1	<1%
Latino/Latina/Latinx	22	7%
Man	11	4%
Woman	11	4%
Asian	7	2%
Woman	6	2%
Man	1	<1%
Prefer not to answer	7	2%
Prefer not to answer	3	1%
Woman	3	1%
Man	1	<1%
Other	3	1%
Woman	2	<1%
Man	1	<1%
Native American or Native Alaskan	2	1%
Prefer not to answer	1	<1%
Woman	1	<1%

* Note: All percents use the total sample population as the denominator.

thrive, perceptions of city investments, and priorities for city investments.³ The survey collects demographic information but does not collect names or contact information.

Vera administered the survey in English and Spanish using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. Researchers recruited survey participants by engaging community members at 20 public meetings and events; circulating flyers with QR codes in public spaces such as community centers, libraries, and post offices; sending email and text blasts; and posting to social media. (Figure 1.) To summarize the data, Vera researchers conducted a descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative elements of the survey and a thematic analysis of the open-ended, qualitative elements. As respondents from prior years could retake the survey, Vera analyzed 2023 and 2024 results separately.

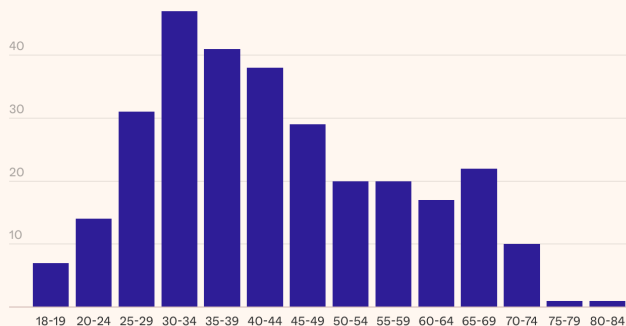
From February 1 through September 2025, 375 people consented to participate in the survey, and Vera analyzed 298 responses from residents from across all five New Orleans City Council Districts. The analytic sample included only the responses of people who met the eligibility criteria (people who were 18 years old or older and current residents of Orleans Parish) and completed questions beyond the initial demographic section of the survey.

The survey sample was not representative of the population characteristics of New Orleans, and the number of respondents from each district was not proportional to the share of residents therein. Black people made up nearly half of the survey sample, 47 percent; however, Black people make up more

than half of the population of Orleans Parish.⁴ (Figure 2.) Shares of white and female respondents (40 percent and 60 percent respectively) were overrepresented in the sample compared to their shares of the city population, where they account for approximately 30 percent and more than 50 percent respectively.⁵ Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 81 years old (median age: 40). (Figure 3.) Nearly 30 percent of respondents were residents of City Council District D (Seventh Ward, Gentilly, and St. Roch). (Figure 4.) Residents from Districts A (Uptown), B (Central Business District and Central City), and C (Algiers, Bywater, French Quarter, and Marigny) were each 15 percent to 26 percent of the sample. Residents of District E

Figure 3

Age distribution of survey respondents, 2025
n = 298



NOTES:
Participants ranged in age from 18-81. Median age was 40.

(Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East) were least represented, making up less than 10 percent of the survey sample.

Findings

Most people felt safe in their neighborhoods, even at night, but perceptions of safety were lowest among District E residents

Everyone deserves to be safe, and New Orleans has more to do to ensure the safety of all residents. Nearly 90 percent of respondents reported feeling

safe walking in their neighborhood during the day, and more than 60 percent felt safe walking at night. (Figure 5.) However, perceptions of safety were lowest among District E residents, as 65 percent of respondents from this district compared to 87 percent or more of respondents in Districts A, B, C, and D felt safe walking in their neighborhood during the day. Perceptions of safety when walking at night were lower than perceptions of safety when walking during the day for all districts and were lowest among District E respondents, with less than half of respondents feeling safe. District E, which is composed of communities still reeling from Hurricane Katrina's most devastating impacts, has the city's highest concentration of poverty and high incidence of community violence.⁶

Most people felt connected to their neighborhood

Respondents perceive safety as coming from the programs and services that support a high quality of life and social connectedness.⁷ Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported feeling connected to their neighborhood. (Figure 5.) Eighty-five percent of white respondents versus 73 percent of Black respondents felt connected to their neighborhood. District A residents felt most connected to their neighborhood (90 percent) compared to respondents from other districts—B (69 percent), C (74 percent), D (76 percent), and E (65 percent).

Figure 4

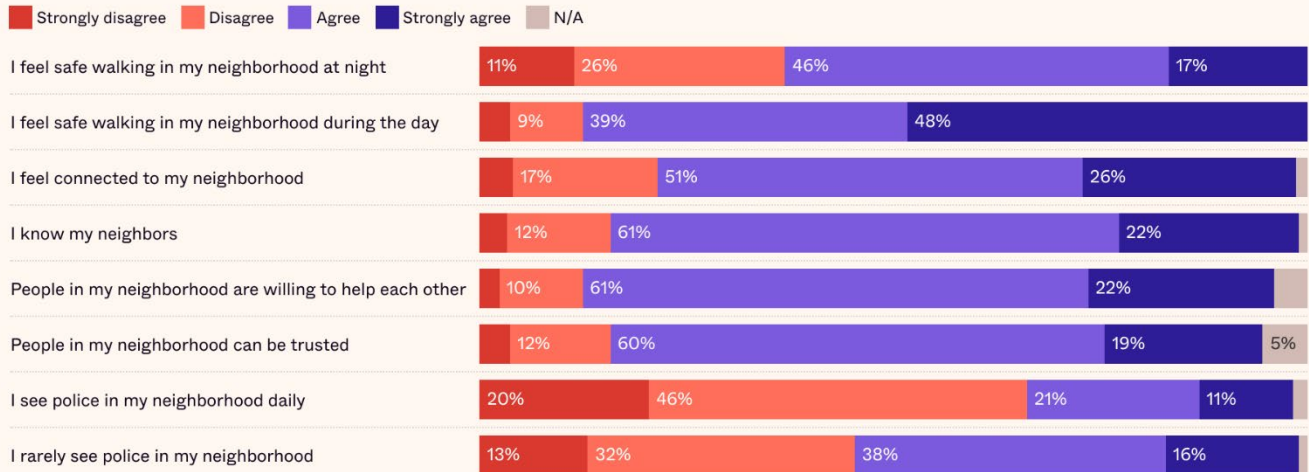
Survey respondents by city council district, 2025

N= 298

District	Count	Percent
A	46	15%
B	77	26%
C	63	21%
D	85	29%
E	26	9%
Missing	1	<1%

Figure 5

Perceptions of neighborhood safety, 2025



n = 297

Note: Proportions <5% are not visible in the graph above.

The top five community priorities for city investments were safe, affordable housing; educational opportunities for youth and families; mental health services; and programs and services for low-income people and families

Ninety-three percent (n=276) of the analytic sample of survey respondents responded to the prompt asking for their top three priorities for where they wanted the city to spend its tax revenue. (Figure 6.) The top five investment priorities identified by respondents included the following:

1. **housing** (n=150, 54 percent) that is safe and affordable for all residents;
2. **education** (n=144, 52 percent), including investments in schools, after-school programs, community colleges, tutoring, and out-of-school learning and enrichment opportunities for children and families;
3. **opportunities for youth** (n=96, 35 percent), including education, workforce development, activities, and programs;
4. **road and street repairs** (n=72, 26 percent); and

Priority: “[Permanently] affordable safe and healthy housing for all. . . .”

Priority: “Quality of life for residents such as better city services. A more responsive city regarding [residents’] needs. . . .”

5. **mental health services** (n=59, 21 percent); and **programs and services for low-income individuals and families** (n=59, 21 percent), which include rental and utilities assistance, social welfare, social services, and elder care.

Figure 6

Community priorities for city investments, 2025

	Priority	Count	Percent
1	Housing	150	54%
2	Education	144	52%
3	Youth Opportunities	96	35%
4	Roads/Streets	72	26%
5	Mental Health Services	59	21%
5	Programs & Services for Low-Income Families & Individuals	59	21%
7	Economic Development	42	15%
8	Drainage	37	13%
9	Health care	36	13%
10	Infrastructure Maintenance	34	12%
11	Public Transit	34	12%
12	Parks & Recreation	28	10%
13	Other	26	9%
14	Police & Courts	24	9%
15	Streetlights	21	8%
16	Safety	15	5%
17	Homelessness	11	4%
18	Utilities	9	3%
19	Sidewalks	8	3%
20	EMS & Fire	8	3%
21	Food Security	7	3%
22	Disaster Preparedness	6	2%
23	Crime	4	1%
24	Libraries	3	1%
	Total	276	

Most people believed that the city spends too much on police and courts and not enough on the resources and services they need to thrive

“To thrive, my community needs economic opportunities, safe streets, community involvement, elected officials who consider ALL constituents. . . .”

Survey respondents were shown a bar chart displaying the major allocations across the \$1.8 billion city budget.⁸ (Figure 7.) When respondents were asked about their perceptions of the city’s expenditures on an array of public resources and services, “Police and courts” was the sole category where most respondents—more than 60 percent—said the city spends “too much.” (Figure 8.) Police, courts, and the criminal legal system collectively receive 19 percent of the city’s total budget and 33 percent of the city’s revenue from taxes, fines, and fees, yet more than half of respondents across districts agreed to the survey prompt, “I rarely see police in my neighborhood daily.”⁹ (Figures 5 and 7.) Respondents believed the city spends “too little” on nonpolice emergency services (42 percent); roads, streetlights, and drainage (85 percent); housing (85 percent); programs

and services for low-income individuals and families (86 percent); opportunities for youth (87 percent); mental health services (86 percent); and education (89 percent).

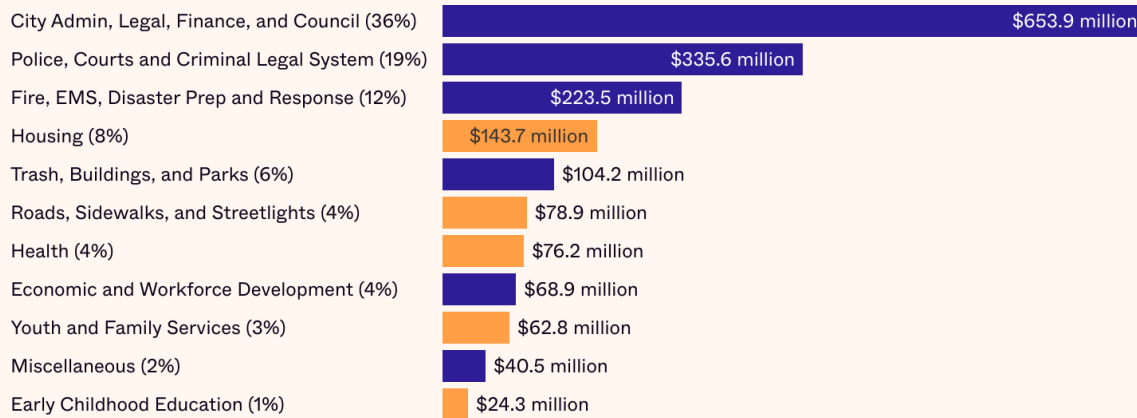
Residents believed that the criminal legal system should focus more resources on nonpunitive, rehabilitative interventions that prevent and address violence

The New Orleans criminal legal system should focus more resources on “interventions outside of [the] policing/carceral system.”

The survey asked respondents to identify areas where they believe the criminal legal system should focus more resources. Of those who responded to this question (n=286), the majority prioritized crime prevention through early intervention (81 percent), skills and employment training (63 percent), and treatment (56 percent). (Figure 9.) Only 16 percent wanted to see more resources go toward arresting people, and 8 percent of respondents believed the criminal legal system should focus more resources on punishment.

Figure 7

2025 City of New Orleans General Operating Budget, \$1.8 Billion



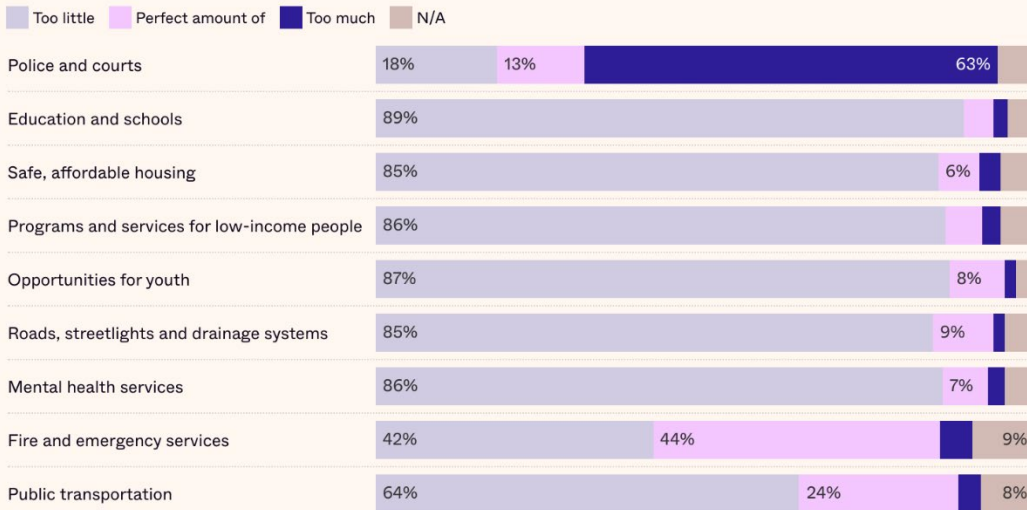
Note: Gold bars are the community's top priorities from 2024 results of the Big Easy Budget Coalition's community survey.

Budget category names were adapted from the Committee for a Better New Orleans to help the community understand the city's budget priorities. These category names are not directly listed in the city budget. Source: Committee for a Better New Orleans, "Resident's Guide to the City Budget," <https://www.cbno.org/budget>.

Figure 8

Perceptions of City Spending, 2025

Prompt: "The city spends _____ money on:"



n ≈ 287

Note: Proportions <5% are not visible in the graph above.

Figure 9

"Which of the following areas do you think New Orleans' criminal legal system needs to focus more resources?"

Response	Count	Percent
Prevention through early intervention	232	81%
Skills and employment training	180	63%
Treatment	160	56%
Arresting offenders	46	16%
Other, please specify	42	15%
Punishing offenders	22	8%
I'm not sure	13	5%
Number of responses	286	

Conclusion

Although most respondents reported feeling safe and connected to their neighborhood, community members prioritized resources and services that make for a safer, more thriving city—safe, affordable housing; education; opportunities for youth; mental health services; and programs and services for low-income people.

The Vera Louisiana research team, along with the community researchers who supported the 2025 survey research, presented the investment requests of the 2025 Big Easy Deal and the survey findings to the Community Development Committee of the New Orleans City Council on September 29, 2025. The team will also draw on the survey findings and Big Easy Deal to create talking points that coalition members and supporters can use when providing public comment during the October budget hearings.

This year's Big Easy Deal, the largest deal yet, proposes \$175 million in investments in public health, public safety, youth and family services, infrastructure, food access, and workforce development, among other areas, to ensure more resources and services are equitable and accessible for residents. More than \$80 million in investments won by BEBC's advocacy has resulted in affordable housing construction, opportunities for youth, community violence prevention and intervention, restorative justice, crisis response, trauma recovery services, programs combating food insecurity, and education initiatives.¹⁰

BEBC's advocacy, however, faces headwinds for the fiscal year 2026 budget, set to be adopted by December 2025. Sweeping changes to tax law and budget cuts proposed for the state by Governor Jeff Landry are being compounded by comparable proposals at the federal level by President Donald Trump and his administration. Louisiana has some of the highest rates of poverty, hunger, and housing insecurity in the country; state and federal funding have been critically important for expanding access to health care, food and nutrition, housing, and education.¹¹ State and federal cuts will have an outsized effect on the state and will further exacerbate the vulnerability of the City of New Orleans and insecurity of families across Louisiana.¹² The availability and flexibility of city funding for allocation toward community priorities are already being affected—a situation made harder by the approximately \$100 million shortfall in fiscal year 2025.¹³ This means that BEBC will need to be even more strategic with its asks and advocacy, and city councilmembers and other city officials may ultimately need to advocate for direct appropriations from the state budget or retain some of the revenues generated by state-owned facilities and operations in New

Orleans.¹⁴ Noting these and other likely changes with the coming election of a new mayor, new city council members, and other newly elected city officials in October, BEBC stands firm in its mission and vision in the pursuit of investments that improve health, safety, and quality of life for New Orleans residents.

Endnotes

¹ The Big Easy Deal, “About Us,” <https://perma.cc/NW85-PMV5>.

² The Big Easy Deal, “About Us.”

³ Regarding perceptions of neighborhood safety, relying on crime statistics as the primary metric of safety fails to account for the ways community members experience safety and the limitations of police data in fully capturing harm. Community members have expansive definitions and perceptions of safety that include more than policing and an absence of crime. For more, see Kim Mosby, Jakevia Wheeler, and Connor Burruss, “Community Priorities for City of New Orleans Investments: Big Easy Budget Coalition Survey Methods,” (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2025).

⁴ For demographic breakdowns of neighborhood statistical areas, Orleans Parish, and the country, see the Data Center, “Neighborhood Statistical Area Data Profiles,” <https://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/neighborhood-data>. The Data Center analyzed data from United States Census 2000, 2010, and 2020; American Community Survey 2019–2023; and 2022 Local Employment Dynamics. The Data Center reports a population of 376,035 for Orleans Parish from the American Community Survey 2019–2023—broken down as 54.7 percent Black, 30.1 percent white, and 53.1 percent female.

⁵ The Data Center, “Neighborhood Statistical Area Data Profiles.”

⁶ See Greg Allen and Marisa Peñaloza, “20 Years After Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans Still Lags Behind,” National Public Radio, August 26, 2025, <https://perma.cc/T7JL-7HVK>. See also the Data Center, “Neighborhood Statistical Area Data Profiles.” Several characteristics of neighborhood statistical areas (NSAs), including housing and housing costs, income and poverty, and race/ethnicity, are provided from United States Census 2000, 2010, and 2020; American Community Survey 2019–2023; and 2022 Local Employment Dynamics. According to the American Community Survey 2019–2023, most NSAs in District A (Planning Districts 3 and 5) have an average household income well above \$100,000, and one NSA’s average household income is above \$230,000. Conversely, all NSAs in District E (Planning Districts 8, 9, 10, and 11) have average household income levels between \$30,000 and \$92,000. See also Mike Perlstein, “New Orleans East Has the Most Crime, Longest Response Times by Police—Residents Frustrated,” WWL, May 23, 2023, <https://perma.cc/VN4D-S8DB>.

⁷ Emily Rhodes, “In New Orleans from the Barbershop to the Bakery: What Makes You Feel Safe?,” Safety and Justice Challenge, February 17, 2021, <https://perma.cc/6JHL-PFRZ>. In the New Orleans Safety and Justice Challenge Community Advisory Group’s findings from residents’ responses to “What makes me feel safe?,” answers included “learning [from] others and doing for others,” “music,” “hope,” “family,” and reflections on religion and spirituality.

⁸ The 2025 version of the survey included a bar chart displaying the major allocations across the FY 2025 city budget. The chart was included because, in previous years, several community members were reluctant to offer their perceptions of the city’s spending without first knowing what the city spends on each category.

⁹ See Committee for a Better New Orleans, “Residents’ Guide to the City Budget,” <https://perma.cc/HJ7X-VBAN>. About half of the New Orleans city budget (the general fund) comes from money raised by the city from taxes, fines, and fees. The other half (“other funds”) comes from state and federal government, millages, and grants and is earmarked for specific uses. The interactive graphic of the fiscal year 2025 proposed budget shows that expenditures on the police, courts, and the criminal legal system make up about one-third of the general fund and one-fifth of the overall city budget.

¹⁰ This figure includes money allocated by the city to a wide range of programs and services including food security, community crisis intervention, housing, and restorative approaches to school conflict—among many others. A more detailed accounting of this number is on file with the authors and is available upon request from Cameryn Okeke, program manager, at cokeke@vera.org. For more on the Big Easy Budget Coalition, see <https://perma.cc/EZ8U-V2CV>.

¹¹ Southern Poverty Law Center, “Impact of Federal Cuts to Social Safety Net in Louisiana,” <https://perma.cc/4VDM-YGEZ>.

¹² Southern Poverty Law Center, “Impact of Federal Cuts to Social Safety Net in Louisiana.”

¹³ Rachel Handley, “City Begins Finalizing Budget as Shortfall Cruises Toward \$100M,” WWL, October 14, 2025, <https://perma.cc/MUP4-S5Y7>.

¹⁴ New Orleans City Council, “Community Development Committee Meeting,” September 29, 2025, YouTube, 22:25–24:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3FIEcv5obM>.

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The Vera Institute of Justice is powered by hundreds of advocates, researchers, and policy experts working to transform the criminal legal and immigration systems until they’re fair for all. Founded in 1961 to advocate for alternatives to money bail in New York City, Vera is now a national organization that partners with impacted communities and government leaders for change. We develop just, antiracist solutions so that money doesn’t determine freedom; fewer people are in jails, prisons, and immigration detention; and everyone is treated with dignity. Vera’s headquarters is in Brooklyn, New York, with offices in Washington, DC, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. For more information, visit vera.org. For more information about this fact sheet, contact Kim Mosby, Associate Director of Research, at kmosby@vera.org.