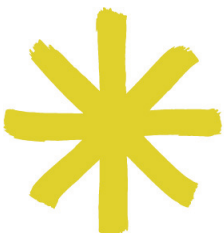




POLICY REPORT  
MAY 2021

# Building a Safer Buffalo: Invest in Communities, Divest from Police

Colleen Kristich



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## Introduction

Across the country, advocates are calling to cut police budgets in response to widespread misconduct made visible by videos of police killing unarmed civilians, disproportionately Black Americans, Indigenous people and people of color.<sup>1</sup> Many attempts at police reform have failed to meaningfully change the harmful culture and practices of policing, and even with outsized public investment in law enforcement, public safety problems persist. Concerned residents and advocates call for reallocating money from police departments into services and programs that improve public safety in safer, more equitable, and more cost-effective ways, while simultaneously addressing key community issues such as racial equity, mental health, and prosperity for all.

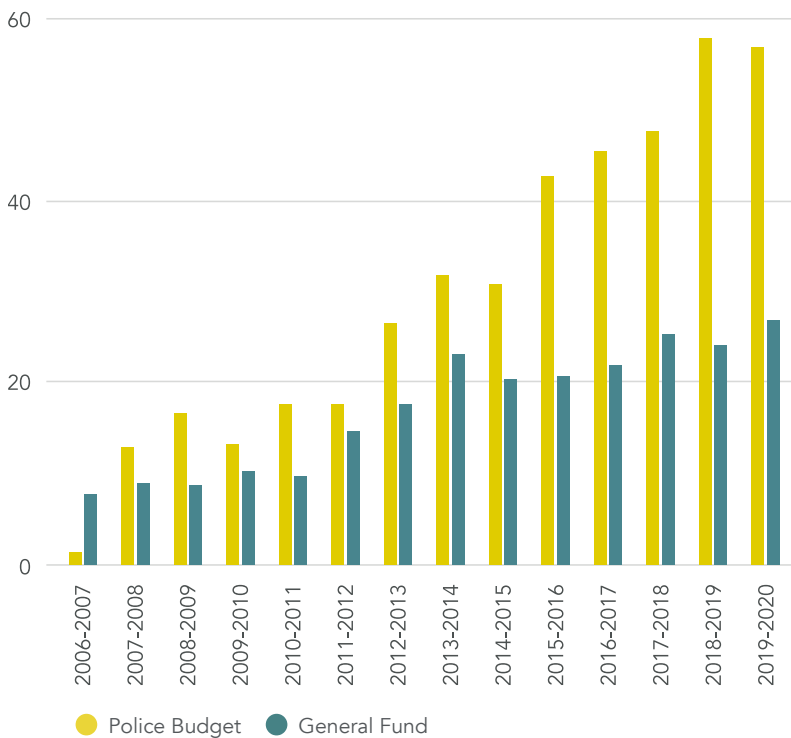
Advocates point to two reasons why police budgets should be reallocated to other services. A central argument is that police departments actively cause harm to communities of color, in particular Black communities. Research supports the claim that policing is racially disparate: that Black communities are simultaneously over-policed for enforcement of minor crimes and under-policed in relation to the police response to violent crimes such as solving homicides.<sup>2</sup> The harm caused by police is one reason why majorities of Americans support redirecting funds from policing and investing instead in non-police safety interventions.<sup>3</sup> The second reason that advocates cite for reallocating money holds a fundamental appeal: that some non-police interventions are simply more effective at creating and maintaining community safety compared to policing, with better returns on public investment and less inherent risk for both officers and civilians. The focus of this brief will be the second rationale, and it will explore models and evidence for alternative non-police community safety programs and interventions.

Some non-police interventions are simply **more effective** at creating and maintaining community safety compared to policing.

## The Buffalo Police Department Budget

Over the last fifteen years, the amount of money dedicated to policing in the City of Buffalo general fund has increased significantly. In 2006 the police budget was \$93 million; by 2020 that number was \$146 million, an increase of 57%. The \$146 million budget includes \$86 million in operating expenses and nearly \$60 million in benefits to active and retired police officers, which are pooled in a fund for all city employees. Over the same period, the city’s overall revenue increased by only 27% – less than the 31% change required to keep pace with inflation. As city resources became more scarce, the police budget took in an ever-larger share of a shrinking pie, outstripping the growth in revenue by 2:1.

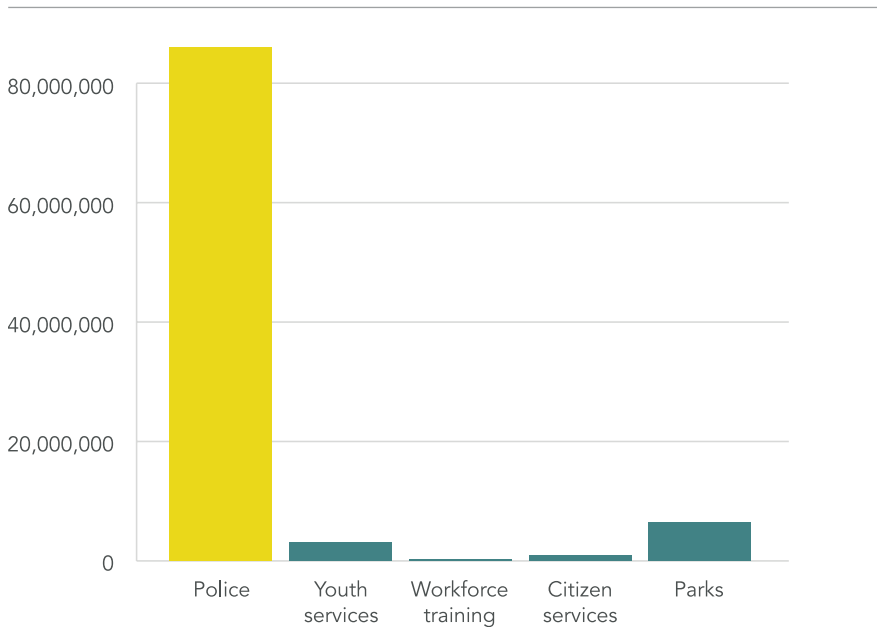
CITY BUDGET VS. POLICE BUDGET (PERCENT CHANGE 2006-2020)



As a result, other city departments have been effectively defunded – as revenue has been directed into the police department at their expense.<sup>4</sup> Over the same period, spending on city departments other than police and fire has increased by only 10%, less than a third of the rate of inflation.<sup>5</sup> The operating police budget (\$86 million) dwarfs city spending on most other services, including Citizen Services (\$805,000), Youth Services (\$2.97 million), and Workforce Employment and Training (\$183,000).

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CITY SPENDING

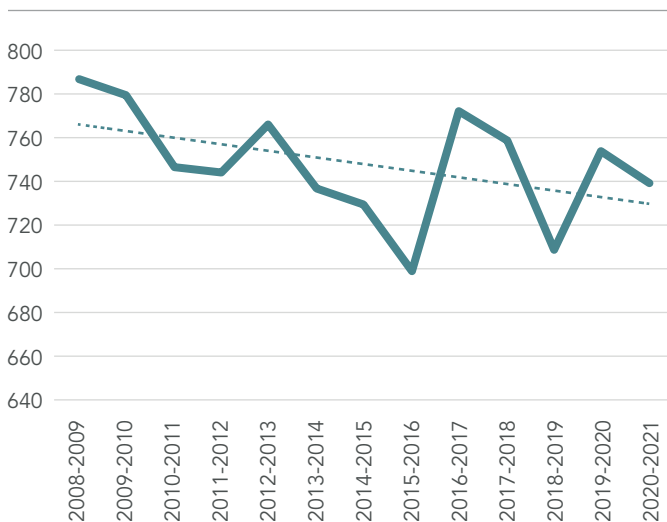


MASSIVE PERSONNEL COSTS

The size of the Buffalo police force has trended down overall since 2006. The actual number of sworn officers reported in the budget has fluctuated from 788 in 2008, down to a low of 700 in 2015, and back up to 740 in July 2020.<sup>6</sup> The budgets for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 allocate salaries for 798 sworn officer positions and estimate that 780 of those positions will be filled. With 740 positions actually filled, 58 funded sworn officer positions were left vacant as of mid-year 2020.

The size of the Buffalo police force has **trended down** overall since 2006.

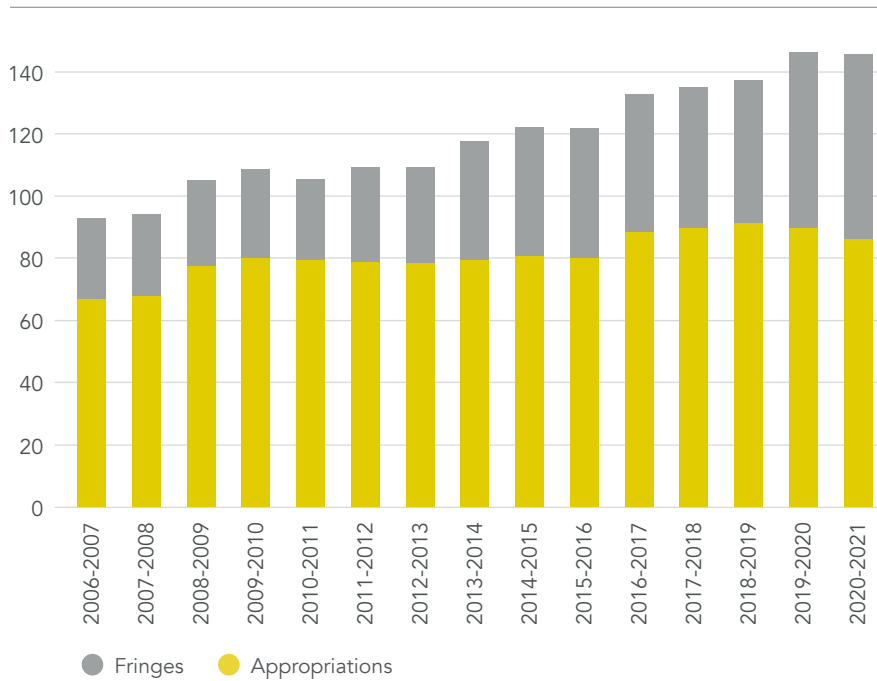
ACTUAL NUMBER OF SWORN OFFICERS



The increase in police spending thus seems to stem not from an increase in personnel numbers but personnel costs. A major portion of the police budget is spent on benefits, including pensions and healthcare benefits for retired officers, some who receive pensions of over \$100,000 per year.<sup>7</sup> According to FOIL data from fiscal year 2020, many active duty officers make over six figures: two officers were paid over \$200,000 in salary, overtime and extra pay combined and 275 employees (24% of all staff) made over \$100,000. The highest paid officer amassed \$114,850 in overtime, on top of a base salary of \$70,480, plus additional pay for longevity, attendance, court time and other factors. Additional benefits such as healthcare and retirement were not included in these figures. The median total pay was \$71,000.<sup>8</sup>

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TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS: APPROPRIATIONS AND FRINGES (IN MILLIONS)



The total police budget in the 2020-2021 budget year is \$145.7 million, which includes \$86 million in annual operating expenses allocated through the budget process, and \$59.7 million in benefits which are pooled in a fund for all current and former city employees. Out of the \$145.7 million, \$2.4 million came from revenue primarily generated through fines and fees, which means the city allocation was \$143.3 million. The breakdown of the \$145.7 million is as follows:

- 41% of the police budget (\$59.7 million) goes to benefits, including health insurance and pensions for retired officers.
- 38% of the police budget (\$54 million) goes to base salaries for sworn officers. There are 798 sworn officer positions.
- 8% of the police budget (\$11.3 million) goes to extra pay for overtime and court time.
- 6% (\$8.3 million) goes to civilian employee salaries. There are 206 civilian positions in the budget – primarily for fleet and building maintenance, dispatch, and clerical work.
- 8% (\$12.4 million) goes to other costs including uniforms, supplies and equipment.

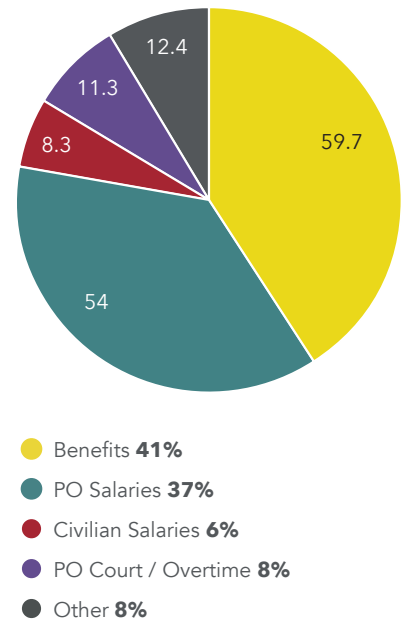
Altogether, 92% of the police budget is for salaries and benefits for current and former employees.

### POLICE TO RESIDENT RATIOS

Buffalo has an above-average number of police officers. The average ratio of police to residents for cities with 200,000-500,000 people is 18.7 police officers for every 10,000 people.<sup>9</sup> In Buffalo, as of July 2020, Buffalo had a ratio of 28.9 officers for every 10,000 Buffalo residents; there were 740 officers serving a city population of approximately 255,686.<sup>10</sup>

The number of police officers in Buffalo is 55% above average for cities of similar size. Minneapolis, Minnesota has around 430,000 residents, but their ratio is much lower than Buffalo’s, at 20.3 per 10,000 people.<sup>11</sup> Of course, cities have different sized police forces based on more than just population size. Poverty rates, crime rates, and the geographic size of a city matter too. Compared to Buffalo, Toledo, Ohio has a similar population and similar rates of poverty and violent crime, and it is roughly twice Buffalo’s size in square miles. However, in 2016 the ratio in Toledo was 21.3 officers per 10,000 residents, compared to 26.9 in Buffalo.

POLICE BUDGET BREAKDOWN (IN MILLIONS)



CITY	BUFFALO, NY	TOLEDO, OH	MINNEAPOLIS, MN
Ratio of officers per 10k residents (2016) <sup>12</sup>	26.9	21.3	20.3
Population <sup>13</sup>	255,686	273,505	431,016
Poverty rate <sup>14</sup>	30.1%	25.5%	19.1%
Crime rate (Violent crimes per 100k residents) <sup>15</sup>	990	952	925
Geographic area (sq.miles) <sup>16</sup>	40.4	80.7	54.0

## DOES A LARGER POLICE FORCE REDUCE CRIME?

The research on the impact of cities increasing the size of their police force is mixed. Different studies have shown that increasing police force numbers has a positive effect, no effect, or even a negative effect on crime.<sup>17</sup> Even among studies that claim that hiring more police reduces crime, there is disagreement on what types of crime are reduced: property crimes or violent crimes.<sup>18</sup>

Some recent studies suggest that big increases in police have a small effect on reducing crime. For example a 2018 study found that a 2009 federal police hiring program costing \$1.75 billion reduced crime in selected cities by 3.5%.<sup>19</sup> Another study estimates that increasing police numbers contributed to only 0-10% of the massive crime decline in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> A third study found that increasing the number of police by 50% in certain areas on random days reduced the average property crimes in that area by 15% (from 17 average crimes, mostly thefts, to 15) on those days.<sup>21,22</sup> In general, there may be a small positive relationship between the number of police and the rate of crime.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most positive studies estimates that employing one additional police officer prevents 4.27 violent crimes (mostly robberies) and 15.39 property crimes (primarily larceny and auto theft) per year. This study estimates suggest that hiring 9.5 additional police officers could prevent one murder per year.<sup>24</sup> But other studies have found that increasing the number of officers had no statistical effect on murder.<sup>25</sup>

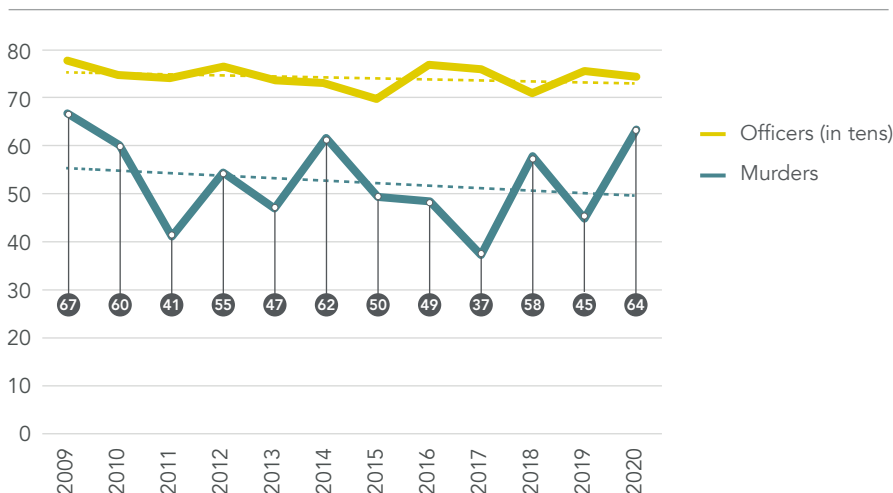
The general consensus among social scientists is that the overall number of police officers has a small and uncertain effect on crime, and that it is much more effective to modify existing police operations.<sup>26</sup> In addition, while going from a standard-sized police force to no police at all (as has happened during police strikes) may or may not increase crime,<sup>27</sup> there is plenty of evidence to show that gradual declines in police numbers do not negatively impact crime rates.<sup>28</sup>

The general consensus among social scientists is that the overall number of police officers has a **small and uncertain effect on crime.**

### Buffalo In Recent Years: Fewer Police, Less Crime

Evidence from Buffalo and around the nation shows that a decline in the number of police officers does not lead automatically to an increase in crime. In Buffalo, over the last decade, the size of the force has gone down slightly, but crime rates have held steady or declined. In each police budget, administrators report on selected outcomes for the police department: 911 calls for police service, arrests, the number of homicides and cases solved, traffic summons and parking tags issued, vehicles reported stolen and number recovered, narcotic search warrants issued and the number of tips received. Examining these outcomes, we see that per capita 911 calls have remained the same at 0.81 per person in 2006 and 0.81 in 2019. The per capita arrest rate declined steadily from 0.079 arrests per person in 2006 to 0.050 in 2019. The number of homicides varies from year to year, but overall a slight downward trend over the past 10 years can be observed.

COMPARISON OF NUMBER OF OFFICERS AND MURDERS BY YEAR



The rate of “Part 1” crimes, which include violent crime (murder and non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) and property crime (burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft and arson)<sup>29</sup> has decreased significantly, down 40% in 2019 from 2008 levels.<sup>30</sup> The number of Part 1 crimes per 100 people in Buffalo in 2008 was 7.06, compared to 4.24 crimes per 100 residents in 2019. Reported Part 1 crimes between 2012 and 2015 declined by 17%, even as the size of the police force was reduced by 67 officers over the same time period. In the same period, reported incidents of crimes of any type also declined. In 2009, the earliest year available for crime incident data on Buffalo’s Open Data portal, 21,786 crimes were reported. This number has declined almost every year since, to 12,022 in 2020.<sup>31</sup> This is consistent with national trends that show both a declining crime rate and a lower ratio of police to residents over the last 20 years.<sup>32</sup>

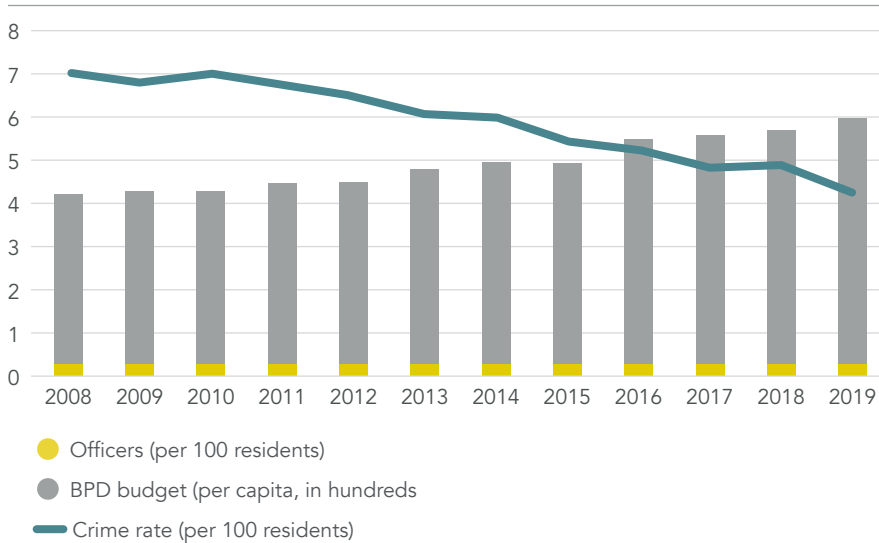
A decline in the number of police officers **does not lead** automatically to an increase in crime.

National trends show both a **declining crime rate** and a **lower ratio of police to residents** over the last 20 years.

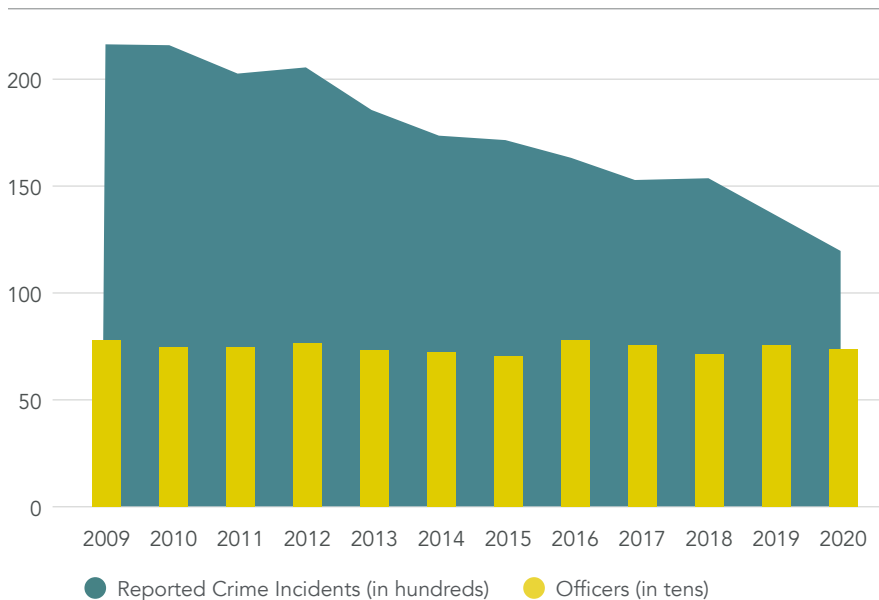


Again, this decrease happened over a period where the number of sworn officers marginally declined, even as the police budget continued to grow, from \$387 per capita in 2008, to \$573 per capita in 2019.

CRIME RATE, NUMBER OF OFFICERS AND BPD BUDGET



ALL REPORTED CRIME AND OFFICER NUMBERS, 2009-2020



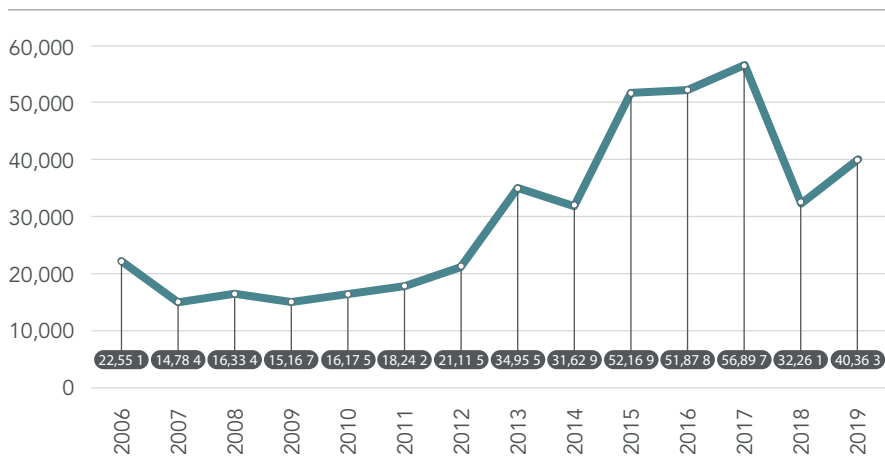
As crime has decreased in Buffalo, police-issued traffic tickets have **increased dramatically.**

As crime has decreased in Buffalo, police-issued traffic tickets have increased dramatically. In budget years prior to 2012, the reported number of traffic summons per year ranged between 14,500 and 22,500, with a 7-year average from 2006-2012 of 17,767 tickets per year (see table).

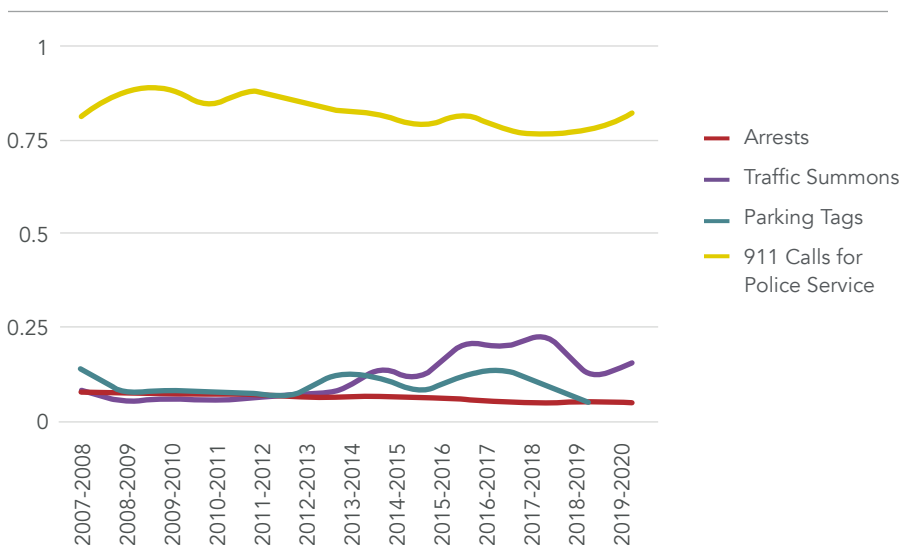
But beginning in the 2013-2014 budget year the annual total of traffic summons issued began to increase, peaking at 56,897 in 2017-2018. By the 2020-2021 budget year, the 7-year average from 2013-2019 was 42,879 tickets per year, a 241% increase. What explains the increase? In 2015, a new law allowed the City to begin to collect the revenue from traffic citations, rather than New York State. According to Jalonda Hill of Colored Girls Bike Too and the Fair Fines and Fees Coalition, almost certainly the profit motive for ticketing became an incentive for the City of Buffalo to issue more citations. As a result, the Fair Fines and Fees Coalition was organized to combat the issue of over-ticketing and the addition of thirteen burdensome fees which were added to tickets by new legislation in 2018. The coalition was successful in getting this legislation revoked and the fees removed in 2020.<sup>33</sup>

The profit motive for ticketing... became an incentive for the City of Buffalo to issue more citations.

TRAFFIC SUMMONS ISSUED



WORK STATS FOR PATROL SERVICES (ACTIVITY/CAPITA)



Overall, the time period between 2006 and 2020 tells a story: the size of the police force fluctuated but remained roughly the same, funding for the police increased, while reported incidents of crime of any type and violent crime all decreased, along with the number and rate of arrests. At the same time, 911 calls remained about the same and traffic citations increased.

### How the Police Spend Their Time

The stated mission of the Buffalo Police Department is “to serve and protect our residents and visitors; uphold the law with integrity, respect, and professionalism while preserving the rights and dignity of all; and maintaining peace by providing for the safety and security of the community.”<sup>34</sup> The tools that police are given are largely the tools of the criminal justice system: the power to issue citations and make arrests when a person is suspected of breaking a law, and the legal authority to use force, up to and including deadly force, to enforce compliance and protect themselves and others from severe injury or death. These powers are supported by the legal system and the court system. However, protecting residents from criminal activity is not what police officers spend most of their time doing.

According to national data on police activities, the majority of police time is spent responding to noncriminal matters, largely routine traffic stops and traffic accidents. On average, police departments spend 30% of total police time on crimes and 70% on noncriminal matters.<sup>35</sup> About 4% of police time is spent responding to violent crimes, including the time spent on investigation.<sup>36</sup> When examining calls for services, calls regarding serious violent crimes (murder, rape, aggravated assault and robbery) make up around 1% of calls.<sup>37</sup>

In 2015, 62% of contacts between police and civilians were due to a traffic accident or a traffic stop. An additional 30% of police contacts were due to civilians reporting non-criminal incidents such as medical emergencies, participating in neighborhood watch programs, being stopped by police on the street, or seeking help for other non-criminal matters. Nationally, in 2015, just 8% of contacts between residents and police were due to a resident reporting a crime or an officer making an arrest, and 92% of police-civilian contacts were due to noncriminal issues.<sup>38</sup>

In Buffalo, few data are publicly available about police-civilian contacts, calls for service, or how police spend their time. However, the Buffalo Police Department began to post some 911 call data on their Facebook page between August 5 and September 16th of 2020. According to these posts, in an average week the BPD had 5,824 calls for service. The calls were broken out for overdoses, robberies, burglaries and shootings/shots fired, and on average these categories combined accounted for less than 3% of all calls. In addition, the posts listed the number of arrests made

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during that period, which averaged 105 arrests per week. If extrapolated for the year, this means that on average each of the BPD’s 740 sworn officers makes around 7 arrests a year. This is in line with arrest data for 2019, when BPD officers made 8,423 arrests, over half for misdemeanors, or about 702 arrests per month. On average then, each officer makes less than one arrest per month, or about 11 arrests per year. Out of those 11 arrests, on average 5 are for felonies and 6 are for misdemeanors. If each arrest takes 4 hours and an officer works 40 hours per week, the average BPD officer therefore spends just 2% of his or her time on arrests. These estimates suggest that BPD time, calls for service, and civilian contacts are similar to figures from national studies, and that the majority of police time is spent on patrol and responding to noncriminal calls for service.

Another way to examine BPD time is to compare the number of positions dedicated to each police function. The following table shows the number of officers in each division, the stated responsibilities of that position, and the percentage of total officers in each division. The list does not include the nearly 200 civilians also employed by the police department. The list was compiled from FOIL data obtained from the Buffalo Police Department in July 2020.

POLICE DIVISION	SWORN OFFICERS	RESPONSIBILITIES	% OF OFFICERS
Patrol division	468	Respond to 911 calls, patrol designated areas, routine traffic enforcement	63%
Investigations	67	Detective division, including Homicide, Crime Scene, SVU and Narcotics	9%
Traffic division (inc. Radar)	61	Traffic control, enforce traffic laws, & investigate traffic accidents	8%
Academy	57	Includes instructors, trainees, and police range administrators	8%
Other	18	This includes all positions with only 1-2 officers such as Cyber Task Force, Family Justice, Joint Terrorism, Mayor’s Impact and others	2.4%
Commissioners	12	Manage the affairs of the department	1.6%
NET	12	Neighborhood Engagement Team	1.6%
Internal Affairs	11	Investigate complaints of officer misconduct	1.5%
School Resource	10	Respond to calls from Buffalo schools	1.3%
Dog Handler	7	Responsible for K-9 units	0.9%
CCB	7	City Court Booking	0.9%
Communications	5	No public information available	0.7%
Property	4	No public information available	0.5%

The majority of officers are patrol officers, and several other categories of officers, such as Traffic Division officers, spend their extra time on patrol as well, which means that at least 70% of Buffalo Police officers (around 530 officers) spend the majority of their time patrolling, responding to mostly non-criminal calls for service and performing routine traffic enforcement.

## Lessons From Other Cities

Buffalo is not unique in spending about a third of the city budget on police and in asking police to play a catch-all role in addressing community problems. Nor is Buffalo unique in facing the problems of racial discrimination and police brutality that spurred nationwide protests in the summer of 2020. Across the nation, cities that have relied on police to act as crisis responder, grief counselor, behavioral health therapist, family mediator, school disciplinarian, security guard and traffic enforcer have begun to re-think how to address social issues more effectively and have taken steps to reallocate the funds to do so.

Legislatures in New York City, Austin, Los Angeles, and Portland have all made cuts to their city police budgets in the last year, ranging from \$1 million to \$474 million. The funds have been moved into other city departments and invested into new and existing community programs to strengthen public safety in myriad ways. In Portland, police officers were removed from public schools, which freed \$1 million to be invested in community programs.<sup>39</sup> Los Angeles approved a \$150 million budget cut, with the intention to invest \$90 million in marginalized communities, \$10 million in youth employment, and the remaining amount into other city departments.<sup>40</sup> The city also approved a pilot program for a non-police mental health crisis responder program<sup>41</sup> and is considering a measure to remove police from traffic enforcement.<sup>42</sup> However, the majority of the Los Angeles cuts came from reducing the overtime budget, which was reduced by \$97 million.<sup>43</sup> Substantive changes to the force came by reducing the number of new officer positions by half, which saved \$26 million, and smaller reductions to funding for equipment and vehicles.<sup>44</sup>

## CUTTING OUTSIZED OVERTIME

Simply cutting overtime is a quick way for political leaders to reallocate funds from policing to services and community safety, without making serious structural changes to policing. If overtime budgets are cut, police will sometimes “bank” overtime hours until the next budget year, as is the case in Los Angeles,<sup>45</sup> by simply overspending and expecting the difference to be made up in future budget cycles. Even without cuts, departments often overspend their allotted overtime budgets; for example in fiscal year 2015 Buffalo Police exceeded their overtime budget by 40%.<sup>46</sup> New York City chopped the overtime budget for police by more than half, which accounted for 75% of its police spending reduction. However, budget

New York City, Austin, Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Denver, Dallas, San Francisco, Baltimore, Oakland, Boston, Berkley, Salt Lake City, Milwaukee, Durham, Philadelphia and Chicago **all made cuts to their city police budgets** in the last year.

documents show this cut as a one-year reduction, with overtime spending in future years rocketing back to previous levels to make up for the one-year reduction.<sup>47</sup> Besides being unsustainable, cutting overtime without reducing police roles and responsibilities does not get to the heart of the issues being put forward by advocates, and does not acknowledge that police officers are being called to too many situations better addressed by other means.

### MOVING MONEY AROUND – NEW YORK CITY

Another approach to cutting the police budget these cities have taken is to move staff and funds to other departments within city government. For example, New York City cut \$4.5 million from the police budget reportedly by shutting down the NYPD Homeless Engagement Unit and assigning all homeless outreach work to the Department of Homeless Services.<sup>48</sup> The 86 officers assigned to the former NYPD Homeless Engagement Unit were reassigned to other NYPD units, so it's unclear how this change freed up funds.<sup>49</sup> However, the \$4.5 million was indeed taken out of the police budget and pooled with savings from other cuts to be invested in community services, including \$85 million for family shelter services.<sup>50</sup> The Mayor announced that school crossing guards and school safety agents would move from the NYPD to the Department of Education, but in the adopted budget the \$350 million earmarked for these purposes remained in the police department. As of July, the Mayor's administration stated they were hoping to actually move the crossing guards and safety agents in November.<sup>51</sup> However, even if the funds had been moved to the Department of Education budget lines, no meaningful change would have been made because the DOE had been paying the police department to station officers in schools. The cut, if it had happened, would have been made on paper, while the plan put forward would keep the same officers in the schools and offer them more training.<sup>52</sup> In other words, at least \$350 million of New York City's \$1 billion police budget "cut" was never actually cut from the budget.

### TRANSITION BUDGETING – AUSTIN, TEXAS

Austin, Texas, made the largest percentage cut to the police budget – roughly a third, which amounted to a \$149 million reduction. Unlike Los Angeles and New York City, Austin did not rely on large cuts to overtime. However, the dollar figure does not tell an accurate story about what cuts were actually made. After cancelling three cadet classes and eliminating 150 vacant sworn officer positions, Austin set aside \$121.6 million from the police budget in a "transition budget."<sup>53</sup> The purpose of the transition budget was to allow for lawmakers to decide through the coming budget year how best to reorganize the duties and functions of the police department – i.e., to buy time. The transition budget allocated \$76.5 million to a "Decouple Fund," which is meant to move police functions

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like Internal Affairs, Forensics and 911 out of the purview of police, and \$45.1 million to a “Re-Imagine Public Safety Fund,” which is meant to assess the duties of certain units like Park Patrol, Nuisance Abatement and Highway Enforcement and decide if the units should be ended or separated from the police department.<sup>54</sup> While lawmakers have until September of 2021 to decide on how police functions will be decoupled or re-imagined, the Austin Police Department is still allowed to use the funds in the transition budget to carry on the usual functions of 911 and the other units, which could mean some of the transition funds may end up being cut from the police department budget in name only. This would mean in reality Austin only reduced the police budget by 5%, not 34% as announced.<sup>55</sup> However, as of March 2021, some progress has been made: the city bought two hotels and are converting both to supportive housing, using money cut from the police budget, and have also spent \$12 million of former police budget funds to set up an independent forensics lab outside of the police department.<sup>56</sup> What remains to be seen is how long the cuts will last - police unions and supporters are clamoring for an end to the hiring freeze, so while lawmakers attempt to further untie police functions from the department and reassign them elsewhere, at the same time advocates must work to protect the gains made from being undone in the next budget cycle.<sup>57</sup>

### HIRING FREEZES

Los Angeles, New York, and Austin all incorporated some level of staffing reduction in their plans for reducing police spending, and it is these cuts that are potentially the most lasting and in line with the real goals of reform advocates. Significantly, no city laid off any officers. Instead, through a combination of cancelling or reducing new academy and cadet classes, eliminating vacant positions, cancelling or delaying new positions, freezing civilian hires and allowing natural attrition through retirements, Austin was able to reallocate \$13 million, Los Angeles \$26 million and New York \$69.6 million. Because personnel costs make up the majority of police budgets, reducing the size of police forces in this way represents a real opportunity to shrink oversized budgets into the future. The danger, which Austin and Los Angeles are already facing, is pushback from police who would like the reductions to be temporary.

### PITFALLS TO AVOID

The main arguments police have made in opposing budget cuts are the following: that response times will be slower, that fewer cops on the street will lead to lawlessness and less safety, that crimes will go unsolved, and that violence will increase. These arguments stem from the idea that budget cuts will lead to fewer officers, and fewer officers will have difficulty responding to the levels of need. These arguments lose much of their

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force, however, if cities reduce the need for policing by reallocating police dollars to more efficient ways to respond to traffic safety, mental health, and other concerns that currently soak up most of the officers' time, freeing police up to focus their time on preventing and solving crime.

In both Los Angeles and Austin, in response to budget cuts, police departments are maintaining their patrol divisions and shutting down specialty units. In LA, this includes units focused on sexual assaults and animal cruelty, along with reportedly reducing desk hours at precincts to regular business hours, and directing people to a website to file routine accident reports.<sup>58</sup> The Austin Police Department is adjusting to its budget cut in a similar way – pulling officers off of specialized units and assigning them to patrol. Units that were reduced include DWI, Organized Crime, Highway Patrol and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement, while 31 officers previously on Park Patrol were reassigned and the unit disbanded.<sup>59</sup> As the Austin police chief stated, “Patrol is the backbone of our organization.”<sup>60</sup> However, perhaps it shouldn't be. It depends, in part, on how the patrol officers are spending their time.

It is patrol officers who are routinely called to handle non-criminal issues, such as the 8,000 calls to 911 in 2019 for illegally parked cars in the city of Buffalo.<sup>61</sup> And it is patrol officers who are the front line of response to mental, behavioral and economic needs that they are often ill-equipped to handle. Patrol officers tend to be those involved in racial profiling, unequal uses of force, and traffic stops that turn deadly. Leaving the decision of how to cut certain services, duties and programs of the police up to the police may not result in the changes that community residents want. Therefore, deciding what duties and roles are filled by the police is equally, if not more, important to community members than deciding how much money should be cut.

## WHAT WORKS IN POLICING

The conventional thinking about patrol work is that random patrolling reduces crime by deterring it before it happens, and that responding quickly to 911 calls means that officers interrupt crime or are able to catch perpetrators at the scene. But the idea that a rapid police response is effective at stopping crimes in progress is mostly unsupported. Studies on this topic have demonstrated that 75% of crimes are not discovered until after they occur and the perpetrator is gone. In the other 25% of crimes, delay in calling the police makes a quick response only marginally effective.<sup>62</sup> No studies have shown any direct effect on crime deterrence due to the rapidity of police response.<sup>63</sup> However, a 2017 study does show some evidence that a rapid police response to some crimes, mostly thefts, may increase the clearance rate by increasing the likelihood that a victim is able to give an accurate description of the suspect. As response times increase, victims' memories become worse.<sup>64</sup> Specifically the study found

Deciding what duties and roles are filled by the police is equally, if not more important to community members than deciding how much money should be cut.



that decreasing response times by 10% led to an increase of 4.7% more crimes cleared.

Research on the effectiveness of preventive patrolling is mixed. A Kansas City study in 1974 found that increasing or decreasing random police patrolling had no effect on crime or victimization.<sup>65</sup> Other studies that followed led to similar conclusions so that by 1994, many criminologists came to the conclusion that police do not prevent crime.<sup>66</sup> Even investigations by detectives, meant to solve crimes after they happen in order to prevent more crimes, do not show much evidence of effectiveness.<sup>67</sup> But even though the reactive, generalized approaches that make up the standard model of policing have been shown to be ineffective, many of these practices are still in widespread use.<sup>68</sup>

The failure of the standard model of policing led to a period of innovation in the 1990s that gave rise to “hot-spot,” “problem-oriented,” “broken windows,” and community policing, which all more or less attempted to change police patrol practices to focus more patrol efforts on specific geographic areas, specific crimes or specific people.<sup>69</sup> It’s well known that zero-tolerance iterations of some of these policing practices led to unconstitutional stop-and-frisk policies, in New York City and other places, which led to many young men of color being stopped and searched by police with no public safety benefit and a severe infringement on their civil liberties.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, “broken windows” policing has led to over-enforcement for minor infractions, which is what led to the death of Eric Garner, for example, who was choked to death while being arrested for allegedly selling loose cigarettes.

Today, researchers have concluded that standard policing methods are not effective and are attempting to understand how hot-spot, problem-oriented policing can sometimes work to alleviate place-specific crime problems.<sup>71</sup> Arguably the most well-researched policing theory, hot-spots policing, has been shown to consistently have a small but measurable effect on crime.<sup>72</sup> However, much research still needs to be done to pinpoint the most effective strategies, because simply increasing police patrol or traffic enforcement in “hot-spots” has not consistently demonstrated crime-reducing outcomes, but instead has increased surveillance, ticketing, and arrests for minor crimes, disproportionately affecting Black residents.<sup>73</sup> Two studies in Buffalo, for example, found that police checkpoints and drug raids did not have any significant effects on reducing crime in identified hot spots.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, place-specific interventions that go beyond enforcement, such as improving vacant lots and buildings, can also reduce crime in micro-areas like city blocks or intersections, without the negative effects of over-policing.<sup>75</sup> Community policing as a strategy has mixed results. Prior studies have found positive results when officers meaningfully engage in problem-solving with community residents,<sup>76</sup> while other

Two studies in Buffalo found that police checkpoints and drug raids **did not have any significant effects** on reducing crime in identified hot spots.

studies have found that community policing improves public perception of the police, but does not result in significantly lower rates of crime.<sup>77</sup> Community policing as an approach to safety seems to have merit only when undertaken with real department and community buy-in; surface-level initiatives are of little importance.

## WHAT WORKS BETTER THAN POLICING

In sum, all of the available evidence suggests that maintaining a larger-than-average police force has little or no impact on reducing crime. In contrast, increased wages and educational attainment have significantly larger and more cost-effective impacts on crime. For example, a 2020 study found that states with higher minimum wages have lower crime rates in periods of economic shock, so much so that a \$1 increase in the federal-level minimum wage leads to a 22% decrease in property crime, an effect that seems especially strong for young, low-skill workers.<sup>78</sup> Studies estimate that 60%-75% of the increase in property crime between 1979-1995 can be attributed to falling wages for unskilled men during the same period.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, researchers found that increasing the U.S male high school graduation rate by 1% could result in 400 fewer murders and 8,000 fewer assaults per year, with a total decrease of 100,000 fewer crimes of any type.<sup>80</sup> Increasing the average years of schooling for males by just one year could result in 30% fewer murders and assaults, 20% fewer auto thefts, 13% fewer arsons and 6% fewer burglaries and larcenies.<sup>81</sup> Cost-wise, the estimated social benefits from increasing the high school graduation rate for males by just 1% range from \$782 million to \$1.4 billion from reduced crime alone.<sup>82</sup>

Other interventions that have been demonstrated to reduce crime include improving physical environments<sup>83</sup> and access to public assistance,<sup>84</sup> housing,<sup>85</sup> and credit.<sup>86</sup> Besides public safety benefits, these methods have many added benefits such as improved health and wellness, increased civic participation, improved racial equity, and greater financial stability. In contrast, even with improved techniques, increases in police forces can have many negative collateral costs, such as exacerbated poverty from fines and fees, increased racial disparities, mass incarceration, decreased civil liberties, police violence, lawsuits, and destabilized communities.<sup>87</sup> With the plethora of policy options available for increasing public safety, policymakers must go beyond policing as the sole answer to public safety problems. In order for this shift to occur, new approaches must be developed to respond to the routine, non-criminal and low-level issues that now occupy too much police time.

All of the available evidence suggests that maintaining a larger-than-average police force has **little or no impact on reducing crime.**

## “Unbundling” Police work

Various alternatives to policing have been proposed for establishing community safety without law enforcement. Below are examples of proposed alternatives and supporting research.

### TRAFFIC

The most common reason a person comes into contact with the police is being pulled over at a traffic stop.<sup>88</sup> Enforcing traffic is an important safety function, but there are many reasons why police are not the best profession to fill this role. Locally and nationally, many instances of police violence began with routine traffic stops: in Buffalo, Quentin Suttles and Jose Hernandez-Rossy were pulled over and searched due to an alleged smell of marijuana, and Philando Castile, Sam Debose, Walter Scott and most recently Daunte Wright and Caron Nazario were killed or brutalized at traffic stops that began for very minor driving infractions. Police stop and search drivers of color at higher rates than white drivers, even though once a search takes place Black drivers are less likely to be carrying illegal drugs, guns or contraband than white drivers.<sup>89</sup> Reducing the number of interactions with police reduces the chances of a violent or deadly outcome, and better protects the civil rights of all drivers.

In Buffalo, the now-disbanded Strike Force focused efforts on stop-and-frisk style traffic checkpoints and, along with conducting unconstitutional searches,<sup>90</sup> issued thousands of tickets for expired inspection stickers, tinted windows, and other small violations. In fact, since Buffalo became eligible to keep more revenue generated from tickets in 2015, police began issuing exponentially more tickets: 52,000 in 2017, an increase of 20,000 from the 32,000 tickets the year before. This resulted in city revenue from non-criminal traffic violations rising to \$2.8 million from \$500,000 the year before.<sup>91</sup> Tinted windows was by far the most common type of ticket issued in Buffalo, with a daily average of 23 tickets issued to 13 cars. Police issued nearly seven times as many tickets for tinted windows as for speeding. BPD gives its officers discretion to write one ticket for all the tinted windows in a car, or to issue separate tickets. It is hard to imagine a non-arbitrary reason for that discretion, or, in fact, for ever issuing tickets for separate windows. From 2014 through 2017, the City issued 34,068 tickets for tinted windows, the highest in the State. The second highest city, Syracuse, issued 6,130, whereas Rochester issued only 2,952.<sup>92</sup>

What’s more, police heavy-handedness with ticketing does not impact all city residents equally. A civil lawsuit regarding Strike Force stated that 85% of police checkpoints were set up in majority Black and Latinx neighborhoods. Stop receipt data from 2020 showed that 68% of BPD traffic stops were of Black drivers, despite the city being only 37% Black.<sup>93</sup>

Locally and nationally, many instances of police violence began with **routine traffic stops**.

Fortunately there are existing, concrete solutions to the problem of traffic safety that do not involve the police. Investing in traffic calming infrastructure like speed bumps and street design is more effective and in the long term cheaper than paying police to enforce traffic laws. In Seattle for example, a redesign of a busy street cut the number of drivers going 10mph over the speed limit by 92% in one direction and 96% in the other direction.<sup>94</sup> Installing traffic circles over a three-year period in the same city reduced crashes of all types by 94%.<sup>95</sup> In New York City, targeting street infrastructure improvements to priority locations reduced pedestrian deaths by 36%.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, a National Institute of Health study found that issuing citations for speeding has limited effect on deterring future speeding.<sup>97</sup> In 2019 the Slow Streets program was introduced in Buffalo which allowed neighborhood groups to apply for their neighborhood zone of several residential blocks to be selected for traffic-calming infrastructure such as curb extensions, speed humps and mini roundabouts. The program website stated that 2-4 groups would be chosen to receive the improvements in 2020, but no information is available on the City website regarding which groups were chosen and if improvements were made.<sup>98</sup>

For remaining traffic issues that are currently under the purview of police, such as writing down accident reports, directing traffic, escorting a parade or funeral, or similar non-criminal traffic tasks, other uniformed, unarmed workers could easily take over those duties, as is the case in Germany. In Germany and England, uniformed, unarmed city employees issue tickets and respond to routine infractions, not the police.<sup>99</sup> Berkeley, California has adopted a measure to switch to this model,<sup>100</sup> and the issue is on the table in Los Angeles and New York.<sup>101</sup> Los Angeles has already moved in this direction by setting up a website for people to self-report routine accidents where no crime was committed.<sup>102</sup>

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

A number of high-profile deaths at the hands of police have involved people experiencing a mental health crisis, such as Daniel Prude in Rochester, New York. Estimates suggest that 25% to 50% of persons killed by police have at least some level of mental illness or disability.<sup>103</sup> In response to this clear need, many cities have begun implementing an alternative response to mental health crises by sending mental health professionals instead of police as first responders. The community responder approach, rather than a co-responder approach (where mental health professionals accompany police to behavioral health calls) is preferable for several reasons.

Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) has been implemented in police departments across the country since 1988, and since that time no study has shown it to be effective in reducing injuries or deaths of officers or

Many cities have begun implementing an alternative response to mental health crises by sending **mental health professionals instead of police** as first responders.

civilians.<sup>104</sup> The most positive effects seem to be an increase in the number of jail diversions for people in need of mental health services, and an increase in officer understanding of mental health needs and reduction in stigma.<sup>105</sup> In this way, CIT seems to be a positive step compared to untrained police response, but the same positive benefits can be achieved through mobile crisis team response without police involvement. The major organizers of the CIT movement (the National Association for Mental Illness, the American Psychiatric Association, CIT International and other organizations) acknowledged as much in an open letter in July 2020, urging federal leaders to support the development of mental health crisis response teams independent of police, rather than co-responder models.<sup>106</sup>

Possibly the oldest and most well-known mobile crisis response program is Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) at the White Bird Clinic in Eugene, Oregon. The program has been operating for over 30 years, and sends a mobile crisis worker and a medical professional in pairs out on calls that present a behavioral health need where there is no threat of serious violence or of a legal issue. CAHOOTS teams were the only responders to 13,854 calls in 2019, and out of these, just 25 calls (less than 1%) required an immediate police response.<sup>107</sup> In 30 years of existence the program has never been responsible for a single death or serious injury. The program costs \$2.1 million a year, and managers estimate that they save \$15 million a year in reduced emergency room utilization, EMS, and police time. Workers have no uniforms or weapons, just strong training in de-escalation and crisis response. The workers do not physically restrain people or use force.<sup>108</sup> Similar programs exist in Salt Lake City, Utah (Mobile Outreach Service Teams)<sup>109</sup>, Sacramento, California (Mental Health First)<sup>110</sup>, and Olympia, Washington (Crisis Response Unit)<sup>111</sup>, and more recently pilot programs have begun in San Francisco, Denver, Los Angeles, and New York City.<sup>112</sup> Bringing a community, non-police first responder program to address mental health crises in Erie County was voted the number one policy priority of 2021 by PPG partners.<sup>113</sup> Local county leaders have made statements in favor of the idea,<sup>114</sup> and the Buffalo Police Advisory Board drafted a report in support of such a program for the Police Oversight Committee of the Buffalo Common Council.<sup>115</sup>

At first the idea of sending unarmed mediators, crisis workers or harm reduction specialists to resolve most community problems may seem risky, however many such programs already exist and have been successful for many years. In Buffalo, Crisis Services Inc. has operated a Mobile Outreach Team and staffed a crisis hotline for mental health emergencies, domestic violence intervention, sexual assault survivors and more, since 1968. Social workers at the agency have successfully resolved thousands of crises, over the phone and in-person, without weapons and with a fraction

Bringing a community, non-police first responder program to address mental health crises in Erie County was voted the number one policy priority of 2021 by PPG partners.

of the salary of a police officer. The major differences between Crisis Services and CAHOOTS are the percentage of time that workers call for police backup, how calls are dispatched, and how closely each organization works with police. Crisis Services' Mobile Outreach reports that 60% of calls are handled without law enforcement, while CAHOOTS reports that over 97% of calls are handled without law enforcement involvement.<sup>116</sup> In addition, CAHOOTS first responders are dispatched through calls to 911 and to the police non-emergency line, whereas for most of its history Crisis Services had a separate hotline that people in crisis had to know about to call. Within the last year Erie County has begun a pilot project of diverting some 911 calls to Crisis Services, though little detail about this effort has been made publicly available.<sup>117</sup> The final difference is that Crisis Services has been heavily involved with the Buffalo Police Department for many years, primarily through training police in CIT. This is in contrast to some of the programs in other cities mentioned above which do not work with police at all, and this partnership causes some community members to be distrustful of Crisis Services.

While the Buffalo Police are under the jurisdiction of City government, most mental health services are provided by community-based organizations funded in part by Erie County. More importantly, 911 dispatch is a function of County government through Erie County Central Police Services. Therefore, in thinking about how to better address mental health crises and the role of the police, County leaders and the Erie County Mental Health Department and Erie County Central Police Services are major stakeholders. With a mobile Crisis Response Team in place, Erie County could develop new procedures for dispatching 911 and non-emergency calls for police services to the Crisis Response Team based on select criteria, which would prevent police from being sent to calls where their presence may escalate a crisis or be otherwise unwarranted. Diverting these calls would likely not affect police operations, other than reducing the number of times police are dispatched by perhaps 5-10%.<sup>118</sup>

Aside from diverting mental health issues from the criminal legal system into the health system, there is a great need to include drug use in the same health system response. In 2019, Buffalo police made over 1300 arrests for criminal possession of a controlled substance in the 7th degree, the number one most common arrest in that year (15% of all arrests).<sup>119</sup> The charge is for the lowest level of drug possession, defined as possessing residue of a controlled substance, for example, a syringe. Low-level drug possession accounted for 29% of all misdemeanor arrests in Buffalo that year, pointing to the fact that, while the majority of police time is spent on non-criminal issues, Buffalo police officers spend a substantial percentage of the time they spend making arrests on violations of this nature and level. Criminalizing drug use and ushering people who use drugs into the criminal legal system has by and large not proven to be an effective

Erie County could develop new procedures for dispatching 911 and non-emergency calls for police services to the **Crisis Response Team**.

or safe way to handle the issue of drug use, for the person using drugs, their families, the community, or the legal or health system. Community-based, harm reduction public health programs that humanize people who use drugs have, in general, much better outcomes than models based on punishment, incarceration and judgement.<sup>120</sup>

Rather than arresting people who use drugs, a health-focused, harm reduction approach such as that used in the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program could save system costs and link drug users with effective programs and services that will meet their needs. LEAD could work in tandem with a non-police community responder model such as those used for mental health needs described above, and the community responder model could be extended to include all behavioral health needs including drug use. Additionally, as is done in Portugal<sup>121</sup> and recently became law in Oregon,<sup>122</sup> drug use could be completely decriminalized and separated from the criminal legal system. Decriminalization can even be done by district attorneys who decide not to prosecute low-level drug possession offenses, as DAs in Los Angeles,<sup>123</sup> Mecklenberg County, North Carolina,<sup>124</sup> Portland, Oregon,<sup>125</sup> Chittendon County, Vermont<sup>126</sup> and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<sup>127</sup> have taken various steps towards. Changes in national, state, and local drug policies could bring about dramatic changes to the legal system and policing if drug use was thought of and treated as a health issue and not a legal issue.

## OTHER NON-CRIMINAL ISSUES

Noise complaints, neighbor disputes, wellness checks, homelessness and other quality of life social problems are among the many non-criminal complaints that police forces are called on to deal with in most parts of the country. The majority of these types of calls for police service do not result in arrest or in using force, and rarely require the unique services of a police officer. In reality, many calls for service that come through emergency 911 lines that do not involve a threat of violence or serious law breaking could be handled by uniformed civilian city employees with the power to issue citations and appearance tickets. More importantly, these civilian employees could provide more long-lasting interventions if they were trained conflict resolution specialists skilled in mediation and harm reduction. In essence, in a community responder model, police would only be called to situations where their particular skills are warranted: where there is a credible threat of violence or where a custodial arrest is necessary.

Similarly, the Homeless Outreach program in Buffalo, a HUD-funded program operated by Best Self Behavioral Health and the Matt Urban HOPE Center, relies on social workers to find people experiencing homelessness and connect them with housing and other services.

Changes in national, state, and local drug policies could bring about dramatic changes to the legal system and policing if drug use was thought of and treated as a **health issue and not a legal issue.**

The outreach workers go to places as bus stations, under bridges, and abandoned houses, sometimes during the day and sometimes at night. The worker's mission is to locate people in need of housing, build relationships and trust, and offer information, resources, and basic items to ultimately help that person access stable housing. Most housing programs have long waiting lists and specific requirements, which means the outreach worker plays a critical role in documenting how long an individual has been homeless, what their needs are, and other information that can qualify a person for housing such as their veteran status, mental health needs, abilities, age, and more. Without an advocate tracking and following up on these details, many people would remain homeless for years, or possibly the rest of their lives.

The relationships that are built are key to the success of the program. One man who was housed by the Matt Urban HOPE Center was visited by a worker under the bridge where he lived for over 2 years before he agreed to cooperate with the worker to enter housing. The program is so successful that Buffalo has more or less eliminated chronic homelessness among veterans.<sup>128</sup> The workers are not crisis responders: they go out 2-3 nights a week in warm weather and every night during cold weather to proactively meet people experiencing homelessness. Buffalo has an exceptionally effective response network of homeless services compared to other cities, even though Buffalo has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. The Erie County rate of homeless individuals is 7.3 out of every 10,000 individuals, much lower than the national average of 17 out of 10,000,<sup>129</sup> and has decreased over the past 10 years even as housing has become less affordable and homelessness across the state has risen.<sup>130</sup>

The Homeless Outreach worker model should be replicated as a Harm Reduction Outreach worker model for other populations who are overrepresented in police interactions: people who use drugs, people with mental health struggles, and people who commit low-level crimes such as stealing food or sex work because they are trying to survive. Doing so would shift the community's response away from the legal system to a public health response, which will be much more effective and cost-efficient than an arrest-incarceration-release-repeat model that doesn't address the root causes of a problem.<sup>131</sup>

## PREVENTING VIOLENCE

In a city like Buffalo that has a higher rate of violent incidents than many other cities, policymakers and community members are rightly concerned about how to reduce and prevent violence.<sup>132</sup> Reports of violent crime such as robberies, shootings, and homicides are only one measure of community violence: many other types of violence such as family and intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and child or elder abuse often go unreported.<sup>133</sup> Violence at the hands of police and corrections officers and violence in

**Buffalo has an exceptionally effective response network of homeless services compared to other cities, even though Buffalo has one of the highest poverty rates in the country.**



correctional facilities is similarly underreported and undercounted,<sup>134</sup> and practices that result in serious mental and physical harm such as solitary confinement, lack of access to healthcare, and homelessness are not commonly considered the acts of violence that they are. A holistic, public health focus to addressing violence considers all of these aspects and, rather than considering a violent act only as an individual fault to be punished, tailors policy changes to the community level by incorporating policies that increase racial, economic and gender equity. The Center for Disease Control calls this multi-level approach the social-ecological model for violence prevention.<sup>135</sup> In this model, action must be taken at the individual, family, community and societal levels to adequately address the complex and intertwined root causes of violence. Policing, in general, addresses only the individual level by temporarily removing a person who causes harm and ushering that person into the legal system. Policymakers who wish to make a real impact to reduce violence must go beyond this limited approach and take action on other levels.

At the societal level, broad based policies that improve social and economic equity reduce violence. Victims and perpetrators of violence often experience adverse childhood experiences,<sup>136</sup> which can lead to chronic stress that alters brain development. Living in areas of concentrated poverty in poor quality or unstable housing, experiencing food insecurity, experiencing racism, having limited access to mental and physical healthcare, and witnessing violence, substance use, and untreated mental health problems at home are all risk factors for violence of all types. Being a victim of violence can sometimes lead to a person perpetrating violence: for example, experiencing child maltreatment or being bullied both increase the likelihood that a person will be in physical fights or attempt suicide. On the other hand, programs and policies that improve healthcare, education, housing, economic stability, and community cohesion all act as protective factors that reduce violence.<sup>137</sup>

### **Promising Violence Prevention Strategies**

City-funded summer youth employment programs (such as the Mayor's Summer Youth program in Buffalo) show impressive outcomes in preventing youth violence. In New York City, program participants were 10% less likely to be incarcerated in New York State prisons than their non-participating peers five years later, and even more importantly, were more likely to be alive: participants had 18% lower mortality compared to peers, due to fewer homicides.<sup>138</sup> The mortality effect got larger over time, pointing to the idea that the program has long-lasting protective benefits. For participants over age 19, the difference in incarceration rose to 44%. Another study in Chicago found that teenagers who participated in an 8-week summer jobs program were 43% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime in the following 16 months than their peers.<sup>139</sup> A Boston study found a 35% reduction in arraignments for violent crime.<sup>140</sup> Any

At the societal level, broad based policies that improve social and economic equity reduce violence.

program with such impressive public safety outcomes should be supported, sustained and evaluated for expansion.

Another program that has demonstrated success is Cure Violence, (formerly known as Ceasefire) a violence interruption program which sees violence as a disease which can be contained and cured by interrupting “transmission.”<sup>141</sup> The program operates on “focused deterrence” which identifies specific individuals who are at high risk for gun violence involvement. By intervening with victims of violence and preventing retaliation, the model has been successful at reducing shootings by 30-63% in various cities and countries around the world including Chicago, New York City and Philadelphia.<sup>142</sup> The program was originally launched in 1995 and to date over 50 programs operate in the United States, under different names, some which have been criticized for heavy police involvement which has led to over-incarceration of young men of color.<sup>143</sup> In Buffalo, Should Never Use Guns (S.N.U.G), a program of Back to Basics Ministries, uses the violence interruption model to stop retaliatory shootings by sending trained peer counselors to assist victims and their families and use conflict resolution skills to prevent additional violence.

In Richmond, California, Advance Peace takes the focused deterrence model several steps further. Based on systematic reviews of the best available research on preventing urban gun violence, the program acknowledges that a very small percentage of community members are responsible for the majority of homicides, and that treating a whole community as suspect or high-risk exacerbates trauma and undermines police-community relationships.<sup>144</sup> Instead, any effective program must engage the few individuals at the heart of the conflict, acknowledge that they too have been victimized, and offer meaningful life alternatives from credible messengers.<sup>145</sup> With this understanding, a collaboration of stakeholders created the Peacemaker Fellowship in 2010. The program, like others, uses credible community messengers to intervene and stop retaliatory shootings, but in addition the fellowship pairs up to 50 “highly influential individuals” at the center of gun violence with a Neighborhood Change Agent (NCA). Throughout the 18-month fellowship program the NCA does intensive mentoring, often with daily check-ins, provides service referrals, and works with the fellow on a LifeMap, a set of goals chosen by the fellow such as earning a GED, getting a driver’s license or finding employment. Fellows receive additional benefits like stipends, opportunities to travel and paid internships.

Unlike programs that rely on the threat of incarceration for compliance, Advance Peace does not work with police and instead utilizes the power of positive, caring relationships to help participants heal from trauma.<sup>146</sup> An evaluation of one cohort in Sacramento found that during the 18-month fellowship period gun homicides and assaults declined 22% in the program

Treating a whole community as suspect or high-risk exacerbates trauma and undermines police-community relationships.

zones, while increasing 12% in non-program zones. In Richmond, gun assaults decreased 66% between 2010 when the program began and 2017. Of all of the fellows who participated between 2010 and 2015, 94% are still alive, 83% have had no gun injuries or hospitalizations and 77% have not been suspected in gun activity.<sup>147</sup> Today, Advance Peace operates in Richmond, Sacramento and Stockton, California. Buffalo policymakers should investigate bringing the Advance Peace program model to Buffalo and should look for ways to build on the success of existing violence interruption groups like S.N.U.G in implementing it.

### **Preventing and Eliminating Sexual Violence and Intimate Partner Violence**

Sexual violence and intimate partner violence have risk factors in common, in that victims are more often women, and that poverty, low socioeconomic status and gender inequality contribute to both forms of violence.<sup>148</sup> Policies that empower women with economic supports and opportunity and promote gender equality thus lessen the risk of sexual and intimate partner violence. Programs that can prevent and mitigate violence against women by increasing access to living-wage employment, education and economic supports include: affordable childcare, microfinance lending, affordable housing, direct economic support and workplace protections and family-supportive workplace policies.<sup>149</sup> One promising program example is the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration program, which gave 125 city residents an extra \$500 per month for 24 months. Unintentionally, 69% of program participants were women and an evaluation found that participants were more likely to find full-time employment, be healthier, and experience less financial scarcity, leading to greater self-determination, goal-setting, and positive risk-taking. The study found the extra money particularly helped women who were stretched thin due to unpaid caretaking roles and due to helping family members; women in the study routinely used the benefit to pay for care for aging or ill family members, buy school or sports equipment for children, or cover transportation or food costs for their network.<sup>150</sup>

Changing societal norms away from rigid gender roles and patriarchal norms can also reduce these types of violence, and refusing to ignore or condone sexual violence in workplaces and positions of leadership is another step towards violence prevention. Police forces must reckon with the ways in which traditional, male-dominated, policing norms have protected individual officers who are perpetrators of intimate partner and sexual violence,<sup>151</sup> among other forms of violence, and the ways in which a hypermasculine, authoritarian approach to enforcing the law has perpetuated harmful societal norms. At the very least, police departments must fire officers who are found to have engaged in violent acts. In a 2013 study, out of 107 police officers convicted of a criminal offense related to

Police forces must reckon with the ways in which **traditional, male-dominated, policing norms** have protected individual officers who are perpetrators of intimate partner and sexual violence.

domestic violence, less than half lost their job.<sup>152</sup> Public confidence in the ability of police to adequately respond to gender-based violence in the community evaporates when the department protects perpetrators in its ranks. Other changes that may affect this dynamic would be to disband SWAT teams and change the “warrior” mentality of militarized policing by selling off or otherwise getting rid of excess military equipment, weapons and vehicles.

### Centering Survivors

Research also demonstrates the importance of centering the experiences of survivors when responding to violence.<sup>153</sup> A few of the tenets of trauma-informed care are collaboration, choice, and empowerment, and the current legal system can exacerbate the trauma of surviving violence when system actors take action to address the incident without the input of the victim. The insufficiency, lack of choices, and trauma-inducing response of the legal system is one reason that survivors of sexual violence in particular decide not to report.<sup>154</sup> Solutions to addressing violence, including holding perpetrators accountable, can be found without relying on incarceration. In Brooklyn and the Bronx, Common Justice provides services to survivors and can divert serious felony cases into their alternative resolution program if the victim desires. The program seeks to collaborate with victims to “recognize the harm done, honor the needs and interests of those harmed, and develop appropriate responses to hold the responsible party accountable.”<sup>155</sup> Practices include, after extensive preparation, restorative justice circles, mutually agreed upon actions and a 12-15 month violence intervention program, which, if all tasks are successfully completed, allow the responsible party to avoid incarceration.<sup>156</sup> Rather than separate healing and accountability by sending a perpetrator to prison and a victim to counseling, Common Justice recognizes that often healing and accountability go hand-in-hand.

### YOUTH DIVERSION

In 2019, Buffalo Police made over 1,000 arrests of people between 13 and 20 years old. This age group accounted for 9% of all misdemeanor and 15% of all felony arrests that year.<sup>157</sup> There is strong evidence that early involvement with the criminal legal system leads to worse outcomes later in life,<sup>158</sup> especially if an arrest is followed by a conviction that saddles a young person with a criminal record and all of its consequences. Over half of youth misdemeanor arrests in Buffalo were for petit larceny, low-level drug possession, or third degree assault (the lowest level assault charge, where no serious injury is caused). It’s easy to imagine these incidents being handled outside of the legal system, because in most communities teenagers who are caught in one of these behaviors are not arrested. Instead, families, school administrators, shopkeepers and other adults collaborate to address and correct the behavior. It is therefore a reasonable

There is strong evidence that early involvement with the criminal legal system leads to **worse outcomes later in life.**

idea that no youth should be criminalized for non-serious offenses that can be addressed by other means, and to that end New Zealand restricted the power of police to arrest anyone under 18 without a warrant to very limited circumstances.<sup>159</sup> In Delaware and Florida, police are directed to issue civil citations rather than arrest youth for misdemeanors.<sup>160</sup> A civil citation is not an arrest, so it prevents the youth from being saddled with a record, while still pairing the youth with services and ensuring an appropriate sanction. In Florida, the pre-arrest civil citation program has an extremely low recidivism rate of just 4%.<sup>161</sup>

## OTHER LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS WITH PUBLIC SAFETY BENEFITS

### Green space

Investing in public infrastructure in highly-policed areas can reduce crimes of opportunity and even violent crime,<sup>162</sup> through environmental design. Research demonstrates that remediating abandoned homes and vacant lots reduces firearm violence and has an economic return of \$5-\$79 for every dollar spent.<sup>163</sup> Well-maintained green space has been linked to lower violent crime and a robust body of research support the idea that using techniques like lighting, trash cans, proper maintenance, clear visibility, clear boundaries, and other Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) tenets can reduce incidents of crime.<sup>164</sup> Well-maintained and attractive city parks, blocks and streets have the added bonus of increasing property values and improving health outcomes for residents.<sup>165</sup> In Buffalo, expanding the Mayor's Summer Youth Program and paying young people to clean and green vacant lots offers a way to reduce crime and benefit the community through multiple methods simultaneously.

### Lead poisoning prevention

There is scientific consensus that childhood lead poisoning can cause severe impairment to brain development and lead to learning disabilities, inattentiveness and cognitive delays in children.<sup>166</sup> There is some evidence that the brain damage a child sustains from lead poisoning can then lead to poor judgement and impulse control, which can contribute to incidents of violent crime later in the child's life.<sup>167</sup> Even if it did not reduce crime, reducing Buffalo's severe lead poisoning problem is an imperative for a host of health reasons, and investing more funds in safe, affordable housing is likely to reduce crime and improve public safety in multiple ways.<sup>168</sup>

### Wealthier communities as case studies

Proposing to fund education, housing, and other social services in order to promote public safety may seem like an experiment, but policymakers can look to wealthier communities as examples. In many wealthy communities, crime rates are much lower not due to a higher police presence per resident (in most cases the ratio is lower) or an inflated police budget, but

Investing in public infrastructure in highly-policed areas can **reduce crimes of opportunity and even violent crime.**

due to the fact that community residents have their basic needs met and have access to educational, recreational, and social opportunities that make for healthy, thriving lives. When criminal activity occurs in these communities, there are many off-ramps for youth, people who use drugs, and people experiencing mental health problems to receive treatment and divert into other systems of care than the legal system. In many wealthy communities, interactions with police are few and far between by design, and a more robust system of public services act as protective factors to prevent crime and violence.

## Recommendations

In line with the evidence-based practices and programs outlined in this policy brief, some recommendations for policymakers to consider have been put forward by those closely working on these issues and by those directly and disproportionately impacted by police violence.

**Erie County should develop a county-wide mental health emergency response team comprised of mental health professionals to act as on-site first response teams during mental health emergencies.** Mental health emergencies should be handled by trained mental health professionals, not police. A shift in the manner of response will reduce the risk of harm to residents with mental health challenges. Best practices from existing programs across the country should be utilized, and the County should take advantage of technical assistance on offer by the programs with the most successful outcomes.

**The City of Buffalo should invest in Just Streets, an approach that incorporates street design and police reform to keep streets safe.** Just Streets is an emerging framework that is being defined by those directly impacted by over-policing and biased traffic enforcement, such as, in Buffalo, the radical cycling group Colored Girls Bike Too and the Fair Fines and Fees Coalition, both led by Jalonda Hill. An upcoming PPG report by Hill on Just Streets will expand on the definition and provide greater detail on what sets this framework apart from Complete Streets and similar street design principles. According to Hill, by investing in the existing Slow Streets Program, the city can target infrastructure improvements to the most dangerous streets and intersections based on crash data. While details on how police could be removed from traffic enforcement are still emerging, both nationally and locally in the Fair Fines and Fees Coalition, one possible way would be for the city to create a new branch of the Parking Enforcement Division that would hire uniformed, unarmed traffic safety civilians to conduct routine traffic enforcement and take accident reports. Police officers would then be removed from all routine traffic enforcement activities.

Erie County should develop a county-wide **mental health emergency response team** comprised of mental health professionals to act as on-site first response teams during mental health emergencies.

**The City should allocate funding through an RFP process to non-profit community organizations to respond to non-emergency quality-of-life complaints more quickly and effectively, especially around environmental and neighborhood level issues.** This would allow underlying issues to be resolved and prevent problems from worsening into emergencies. These organizations can especially play a role in improving vacant land and derelict buildings, which have been associated with increased crime, and in improving lighting, sidewalks, and the overall appearance of neighborhoods, which are elements of crime prevention through environmental design. Neighborhoods that are attractive, walkable, and safe by design encourage more pedestrian traffic, block-level engagement and resident interaction, which in turn creates stronger communities and safer public spaces.

**Mayor Brown and the Common Council should begin the work of right-sizing the police force and police budget by instituting a hiring freeze for at least a year on all new cadets and academy classes.** The 2021-2022 police budget should eliminate all vacant positions and use attrition to reduce the size of the police force. Savings from these measures should be invested into previously described traffic safety measures, existing programs with public safety benefits such as the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program and implementing or expanding community-based programs for pre-arrest diversion, behavioral health treatment, and violence interruption, restorative justice, and survivor-oriented programs and services.

**The Buffalo Police Department, when faced with fewer resources and personnel, should refocus efforts on responding to issues that directly relate to serious violations of the law.** For example, with a civilian traffic safety department in place, a traffic division in the police department would be unnecessary.<sup>169</sup> Without traffic enforcement duties, patrol officers would be more available and could respond faster to calls, and it is likely that fewer patrol officers would be needed. Similarly, with a civilian behavioral health team in place, fewer calls would be dispatched to police. By minimizing the amount of time police spend on noncriminal issues and only assigning police to respond to the 911 calls that present a threat, a smaller police force could work more efficiently and use less overtime, which would save the city a significant amount of money. Finally, by narrowing the focus of policing away from noncriminal issues and refocusing efforts on public safety priorities the police department may have more time to provide care for officer PTSD, test rape kits, analyze data to recognize trends, undergo procedural justice trainings, and more. This theme has been proposed and endorsed by national law enforcement advocates such as the Law Enforcement Action Partnership<sup>170</sup> because such an approach would benefit officers as well as the community.

The City should allocate funding to non-profit community organizations to respond to non-emergency quality-of-life complaints **more quickly and effectively.**

**By redirecting city funds away from policing and into public services that support health, housing, education and jobs, Buffalo residents will have more opportunities to thrive.**

Healthy and secure communities are safe communities, and investments in programs and services that promote economic wellbeing and healthy behaviors have been shown to prevent crime. Local lawmakers must take on the difficult task of investing in proven public safety strategies while at the same time lessening the city's overreliance on law enforcement to address every problem. The allocation of city funds is a direct reflection of the values of the City of Buffalo, and we must value human life, opportunity, and potential for growth more than the values of control, surveillance, and punishment.

Investments in programs and services that **promote economic wellbeing and healthy behaviors** have been shown to prevent crime.



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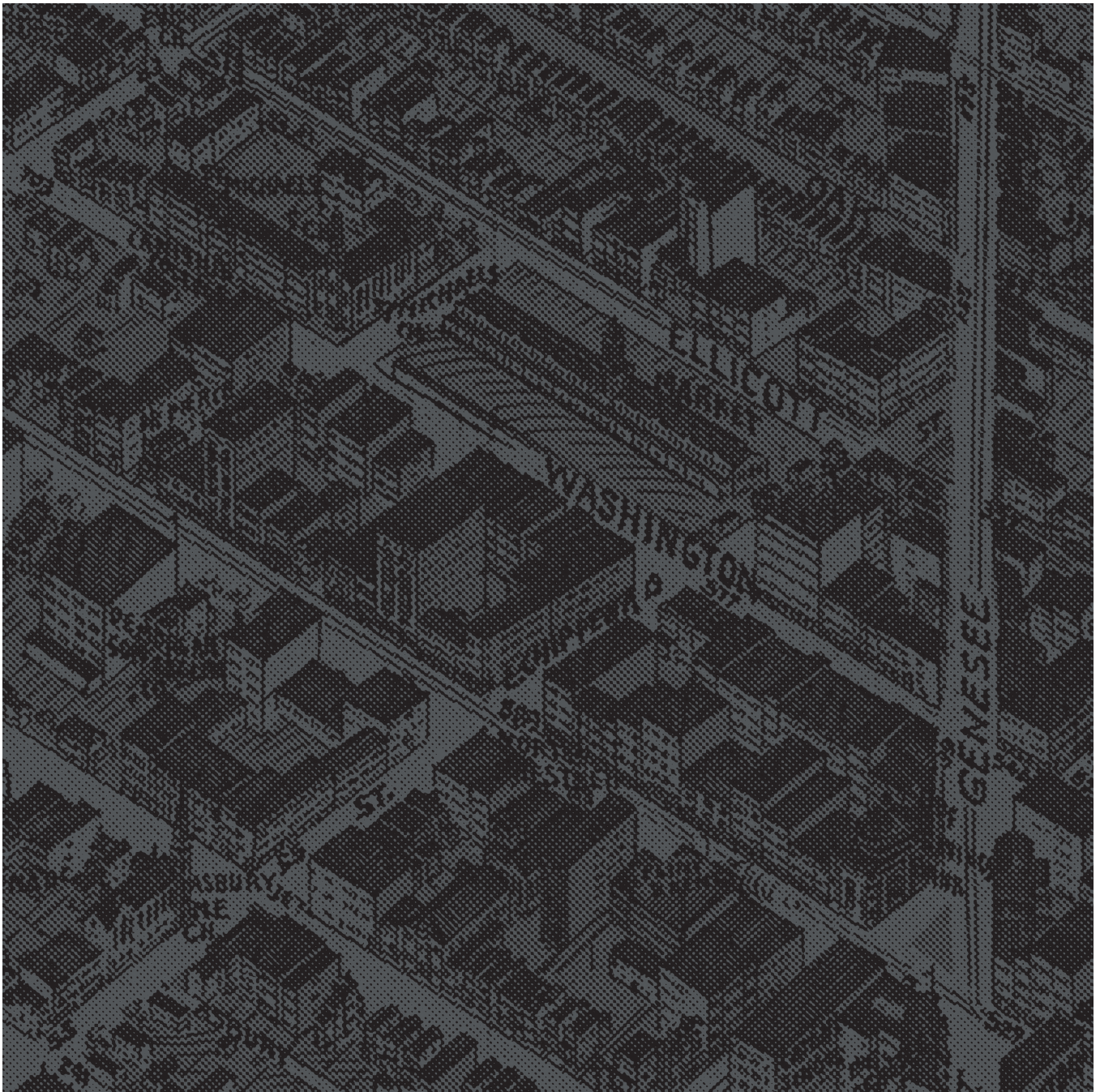


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*This report was written by Colleen Kristich, LMSW, a Community Researcher at PPG. She can be contacted at [colleen@ppgbuffalo.org](mailto:colleen@ppgbuffalo.org).*



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617 Main Street, Suite 300  
Buffalo, New York 14203

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