



YOUNG PEOPLE'S POLICY PRIORITIES

Community Safety

It is impossible to untangle how we've thought about community safety from the history of racism and white supremacy in this country. When slavery was abolished by the 13th amendment in 1865, there was actually one exception made – “except as punishment for crime.” Plantation owners used this loophole to then use their political power to pass black codes, extremely restrictive laws that made normal things “crimes.” This could include political demonstrations, “vagrancy” (houselessness) and “loitering” (simply hanging out outside in a public space) – these were used almost exclusively against black people, who were then sent to work on plantations as part of a system of “convict-leasing.” This kept the economic system of the South, dependent on the oppression of Black people, in place. In Florida, one such vagrancy law was still on the books until 1972, when it was struck down by the Supreme Court for being “unconstitutionally vague” and encouraging arbitrary arrests.

The first publicly-funded, full-time police force was created in Boston in 1838, but the institution spread and became popular in the South, where the early police forces were slave patrols who caught and punished slaves escaping or revolting for their freedom. The police then became the arm to enforce segregation and later to suppress the Civil Rights Movement fighting for equal rights, the right to vote and other demands.

We still see these systems and their racist roots at play – instead of dealing with houselessness the system often makes it a crime and disappears these people into incarceration, parts of the police & prison system such as private prisons, bail, phone calls and food services involve private companies and thus add a profit motive to incarceration, and statistics on incarceration and conviction rates are much higher for black people and people of color. More recently, the tools of law

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enforcement have been used to criminalize immigrants of all colors through US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, started in 2003), detention and deportation centers and more.

We've seen repeated instances of police violence resulting in the unnecessary death of members of our community. Darren Rainey was a mentally ill man who was burned alive in a shower in a local jail in 2012. The guards controlled the temperature, but none of them were charged. Charles Kinsey, a behavioral therapist, was shot while lying down and with his hands up while taking care of an Autistic young man who had left his home in North Miami. Israel "Reefa" Hernandez was killed by a Miami Beach police officer who tased him for writing graffiti. Sebastian Gregory was 16 years old and lying down on a sidewalk in Kendall when an officer shot him six times and left him paralyzed from the waist down. Fortunately, as a nation we've understood these horrors and the systems that create them better since the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the peoples' movements that took the streets and commanded attention.

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Everyone deserves to live in a safe community – to feel safe going to school or work, to be safe in their home, to not have to worry about the kids playing outside in their community. Unfortunately, historically in our country and in our community, safety has been synonymous with more prisons and more police. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, five times higher than Canada and the UK. It has exploded from 500,000 people in 1980 to over 2.2 million in 2015, in part thanks to the War on Drugs, and Black people are incarcerated at rates five times higher than whites. At the local level, police take up big chunks of our local budgets that could be used for education or community services.

But prisons and police do not disappear problems, they disappear people, and leave the root causes of violence and harm in place. If this weren't true, we'd see that communities with the most police are the safest. But some communities, despite being targeted for decades for racist mass criminalization and incarceration, are still dealing with high levels of violence. Other communities, where safety is not an issue, are not marked by high levels of police but instead simply high levels of people having their needs met – of being able to have a place to call



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home, a meal to put on the table, a childcare system, park or sports program to take the kids to and access to a mental health counselor when you need it.

Prisons and police actually reinforce the top drivers of violence – an incarcerated person is further isolated from their community, less able to meet their economic needs, and exposed to more violence in our dangerous prisons. Someone with a criminal record has a 50% lower chance of receiving a callback or job offer. When you think about it, it's not surprising that a violent system has been unable to solve violence.

The overreliance on prisons and police is especially a local issue, as these are some of the areas where local governments have the most control. Miami-Dade County allocated over a billion dollars for the police and prison systems out of its \$5.6 billion operating budget in 2020. Look around our County – what would you invest in to make us safe if you could spend a billion dollars? A better school? A free mental health clinic?

The Miami-Dade Police Department is the largest police department in the Southeastern US, with an annual spending budget of almost \$700 million. Miami-Dade County currently operates the eighth largest county jail system in the country, and the seventh largest jail: Metro-West Detention Center (in Doral), one of the three main jails along with Turner Guilford-Knight Correctional Center (by the airport) and Miami Dade County Pre-trial Detention Center (by Civic Center / Jackson Memorial). Miami-Dade Corrections and Rehabilitation Department has over 2,600 employees and an annual spending budget of \$360 million. There is also the Miami Dade Juvenile Detention Center, operated by the state of Florida and where young people are held before being fully sentenced. The average length of stay is about 15 days.

In Miami-Dade County, over 4000 people are in jail every night, most of whom (about 80%) have not been convicted of a crime and many are simply there because they cannot afford to pay their bail. This system of withholding people before they are even convicted of a crime demolishes their lives outside of incarceration. In just a few weeks, people can lose jobs, custody of their children and fall behind on rent.

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Our system of police and incarceration is also used to target immigrants. The Krome North Service Processing Center in west Miami-Dade, one of the largest migrant detention facilities in the country, currently holds an average of about 600 migrant prisoners who are either in removal proceedings or awaiting deportation. The majority of Krome detainees are Haitian, followed by Mexican, Guatemalan, Chinese and El Salvadoran nationals.

Our County Mayor and County Commissioners, as well individual city mayors and commissioners for city police, have the power to decide how much of our budgets go to police and prisons, and place rules and guidelines on how they operate. States Attorneys are another powerful position. They are the chief local prosecutors and law enforcement officers for their counties, and hold an enormous amount of power in terms of what offenses they will prosecute, the terms of pretrial detention, bail setting, and diversion or alternate programming.

More and more, we're understanding that we need to divest from these systems of prisons and police and instead tackle root causes of violence. Some organizations have already been building that work locally. A local youth organization focused on our public schools, Power U, has challenged the presence of police in schools and instead fought for more school counselors and other resources for students, as they believe these school officers contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. The Miami Dream Defenders launched their Free the Block campaign (freetheblock.org) to tackle the over 4,000 people in jail in Miami-Dade every night by ending cash bail. They, along with other local organizations, have been leading an ongoing effort to stop a \$400 million new jail. PACT led in the implementation of a Group Violence Intervention strategy in certain neighborhoods to solve gun violence, that is community-based rather than leaving it entirely to the police. Organizations like Friends of Miami-Dade Detainees and FLIC have protested and called out the abuse of immigrant detainees at our local facilities, which eventually led to the closing of the Krome immigrant detention center.

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Bail / Bonds

In Miami-Dade County, over 4000 people are in jail every night, most of whom (about 80%) have not been convicted of a crime and many are simply there because they cannot afford to pay their bail. When someone is arrested, they are booked and their bail is set (for those not held without bail). Bail is the monetary amount a judge decides a person needs to pay to be released from jail while their case goes to court. If a person pays bail and then appears at all their court dates, they are returned the amount of their bail. However, bail is too expensive for most everyone (the median bail amount nationally is about \$11,000), and instead people go to a bail bonds firm, a company that has the money available and uses it to make a profit from people trying to free their loved one. You pay a bondman a percentage of the bail and in turn they pay the rest, though they keep the fee they charged and the full bail once returned.

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