



**POSSIBILITY LAB**

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY

Abundance Accelerator

**An Abundance Agenda  
Approach to Public Safety**

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## Abundance Accelerator

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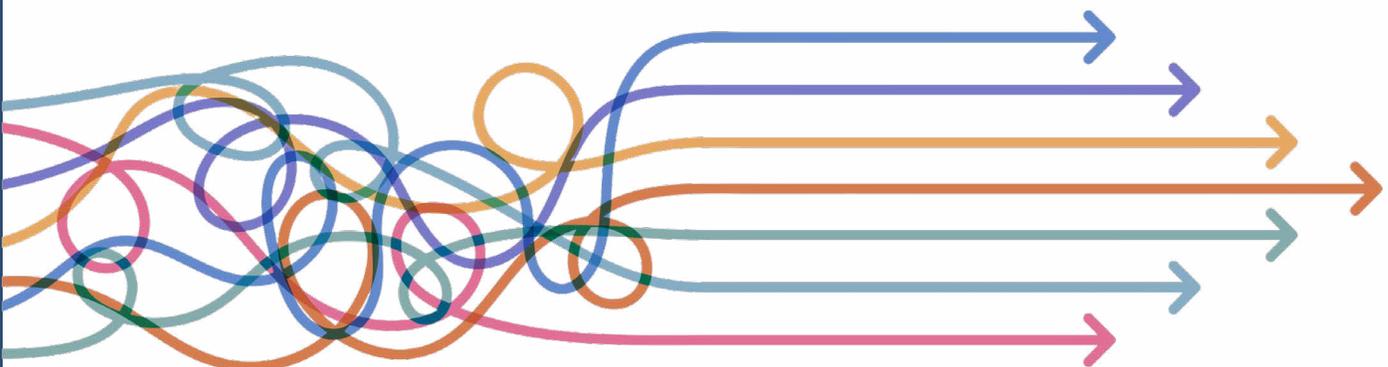
### **About the Abundance Policy Research Consortium**

In the summer of 2024, the UC Berkeley Possibility Lab invited researchers and experts from across California to develop an evidence-based, fundamentals-first policy agenda for expanding access to 12 human essentials, including: housing, transportation, energy, food, water, safety, education, employment, digital connectivity, healthcare, childcare, and eldercare. The Consortium operates within the Possibility Lab's Abundance Accelerator, which focuses on a holistic vision of supply-side policymaking that builds with people, not just for them.

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### **About the Abundance Policy Report Series**

This paper is one of 12 reports being released in 2026 as part of the Abundance Policy Report Series, commissioned and edited by the Possibility Lab's Abundance Accelerator. For this series, each member of the Consortium produced a research report that analyzes their policy domain's existing context in California, identifies the root causes creating their policy area's scarcities, proposes policy levers to improve supply, and discusses potential challenges for implementation.



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## About the Possibility Lab's People-Centered Approach to Abundance

In California and across the country, we've seen growing support for the abundance agenda. However, as the movement gains momentum, deeper tensions have surfaced around how to balance growth and efficiency with equity and justice. In response, the Possibility Lab has used this dialogue to refine its vision for people-centered policymaking in California, reimagining not just what we build, but who builds it, who benefits, and how power is distributed in the process.

As part of the report series, each Consortium member analyzed their essential policy area across the Pillars, Principles, and Practices that comprise the Lab's framework for "[People-Centered Abundance](#)." In their respective reports, each member of the Consortium critically engages with the Pillars, Principles, and Practices, assessing which are most relevant for policymaking in their field and which are less applicable. The intent of this exercise is to bridge otherwise disconnected policy domains and bring them into the same conversation, with the ultimate goal of building a cohesive policy agenda for an abundant California.

The people-centered abundance framework has nine tenets, organized into three Pillars, three Principles, and three Practices. The Pillars reflect core ideas of the abundance agenda, such as increasing the supply of essential goods and focusing on policy outcomes. The Principles highlight the values and priorities that inform the Possibility Lab's unique perspective on creating abundance that is shared by all people. The Practices characterize the Lab's recommended approach to achieving abundance, which involves confronting tradeoffs and working in partnerships to strengthen our civic infrastructure and make data-driven policy decisions.

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### DISCLAIMER

The contents of this report and others in the Abundance Policy Report Series reflect only the views of the author(s), who is solely responsible for the content and accuracy of the information presented herein. This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the UC Berkeley Possibility Lab and its Abundance Accelerator for the purpose and in the interest of information exchange. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of UC Berkeley's Possibility Lab, other partners of the Abundance Accelerator or authors in the Policy Report Series, the California Community Foundation and its Donors, or the University of California.

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## **Author: Mikaela Rabinowitz**

Dr. Mikaela Rabinowitz is the Director of Data and Research at the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR). She supervises NICJR's team of Policy Analysts as they complete research and data analysis in criminal and juvenile justice, youth development, and violence reduction.

Mikaela is a long-time social science researcher who believes that rigorous investigation can help drive more just and equitable public policy. Prior to joining NICJR she held a number of policy, research, and advocacy positions in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Until July 2022, she served as the Director of Data, Research, and Analytics for the San Francisco District Attorney's Office under DA Chesa Boudin. In this role, she was responsible for establishing a research agenda aligned with the office's strategic priorities and policy initiatives and overseeing the implementation of this agenda through internal projects and partnerships with academic and nonprofit research organizations. As part of the DA's senior leadership team, Mikaela was part of an unprecedented effort to reduce the footprint of the criminal justice system in San Francisco, while increasing the infrastructure for diversion and restorative justice.

Mikaela is also an advocate for improving the quality, uniformity, and transparency of criminal justice data. To this end, she has been involved in local, state, and national criminal justice data transparency efforts, including the BJA-sponsored Justice Counts initiative and the recently signed Justice Data Accountability and Transparency Act in California.

In 2021, Mikaela published her first book, *Incarceration without Conviction: Pretrial Detention and the Erosion of Innocence in American Criminal Justice* with Routledge Press. Based on the results of a mixed-methods analysis of pretrial detention in Cook County, IL, she argues that the Supreme Court's increasingly narrow interpretations of the presumption of innocence and due process protections for pretrial defendants, and the corresponding increase in pretrial detention, have fundamentally undermined the meaning and value of innocence in the criminal justice system.

Mikaela holds a PhD in Sociology from Northwestern University and a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in African American Studies from Columbia University.



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## Executive Summary

California spends tens of billions of dollars each year on policing, corrections, and supervision, yet communities continue to experience high rates of crime and too little trust in public safety systems. This paper argues that a paradigm shift is needed—away from scarcity-based thinking that frames safety as a zero-sum contest over resources, and toward an Abundance Agenda for Public Safety that focuses on generating more safety, opportunity, and well-being for all Californians.

While the Abundance Agenda was originally developed for sectors like housing and infrastructure, its principles offer a useful lens for rethinking public safety—even if not a perfect fit. Criminal justice systems do not produce a “good” in the same way as housing units or energy infrastructure, but they can be redesigned to free up capacity, reduce harm, and create the conditions for greater safety. The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform’s (NICJR) *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest* (RIR) framework operationalizes these principles for public safety by:

- Reducing the footprint of the criminal justice system through community-based alternative response and more targeted supervision.
- Improving outcomes by focusing law enforcement and corrections on solving serious crime and implementing evidence-based practices.
- Reinvesting savings into community violence intervention, job training, housing, and other supports that address the root causes of crime.

Applying a people-centered understanding of abundance, as envisioned by the Possibility Lab, helps reframe this approach from one of scarcity and tradeoffs to one of capacity-building and growth. It means:

- Adopting an abundance mindset that rejects the false choice between reform and safety.
- Investing in both the sworn and civilian public safety workforce.
- Ensuring that reinvestment is targeted to the communities most impacted by violence.
- Equipping government with the data systems, infrastructure, and partnerships needed to deliver on its promise of safety.

To put this vision into practice, the report recommends consolidating California’s violence prevention initiatives into a single Office of Violence Prevention within the California Department of Justice (CA DOJ), funding alternative response programs statewide, revitalizing CA DOJ’s 21st Century Policing program, and incentivizing evidence-based approaches across agencies.

By acknowledging the limits of the abundance framework but using it as a guiding mindset, California can move beyond a narrow focus on controlling crime toward a model that generates abundant safety—lower crime, stronger trust, and thriving communities.

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## Introduction

In recent years, the Abundance Agenda has drawn increasing attention as a new approach to generating essential goods and services. Emerging “as a response to scarcity-based thinking, which often frames societal challenges in terms of limited resources and zero-sum games,” the abundance agenda is a growth-centered approach based in the belief that technology, innovation, and smarter, more streamlined regulation can be leveraged to generate a greater supply of the key things that people need.<sup>1</sup> While there are, of course, different formulations of the abundance agenda with associated variations in their emphases, all promote some version of a “supply side approach” that focuses on the production and distribution of goods. As Klein and Thompson state it succinctly in their field-leading book, *Abundance*, “we need to build and invent more of what we need. That’s it. That’s the thesis.”<sup>2</sup>

Given this emphasis, it is unsurprising that the core issues the abundance agenda has focused on are those directly tied to and affected by the production of goods, like housing and infrastructure. Even solutions to issues that are not, in and of themselves, building and production issues such as climate change are viewed through a supply-side production lens, with an emphasis on the development, production, and implementation of clean technologies.

While this supply side growth framework is the central underpinning to the abundance agenda, it is worth noting that there are a number of other principles that are prevalent in abundance-oriented thinking that do have salience for a variety of other policy areas. In particular, the movement away from zero-sum thinking, in which there is a finite number of social goods, towards an emphasis on generating more of all social goods for all people is valuable for reframing our approach to public safety. Similarly, the abundance agenda’s emphasis on effective governance and efficient government institutions offers a valuable blueprint both for individual public safety agencies and for governmental approaches to safety more comprehensively.

Currently, California—like the rest of the United States—dedicates an enormous array of fiscal and human resources to policies and practices that are intended to promote greater safety, yet we have too little to show for it. Too often, our criminal justice systems are called upon to provide services that are better addressed through other mechanisms, which both mitigates the ability of our law enforcement agencies to focus on their core functions and draws resources away from those approaches that are effective. As a consequence, the sheer size of these investments is so great that they substantially limit resources available for other investments.

If we could reduce the scope of our criminal justice agencies so that they accounted for a smaller proportion of governmental investments in safety, we could allow those agencies to better focus their work on what it is they are best situated to do while also having more resources to invest into complementary approaches, including alternative responders, community violence intervention (CVI), and offices of violence prevention. In addition to costing

less than most traditional public safety services, these approaches have the added benefit of investing resources directly into the communities that are experiencing the least safety, thus also helping to address some of the underlying causes of crime.

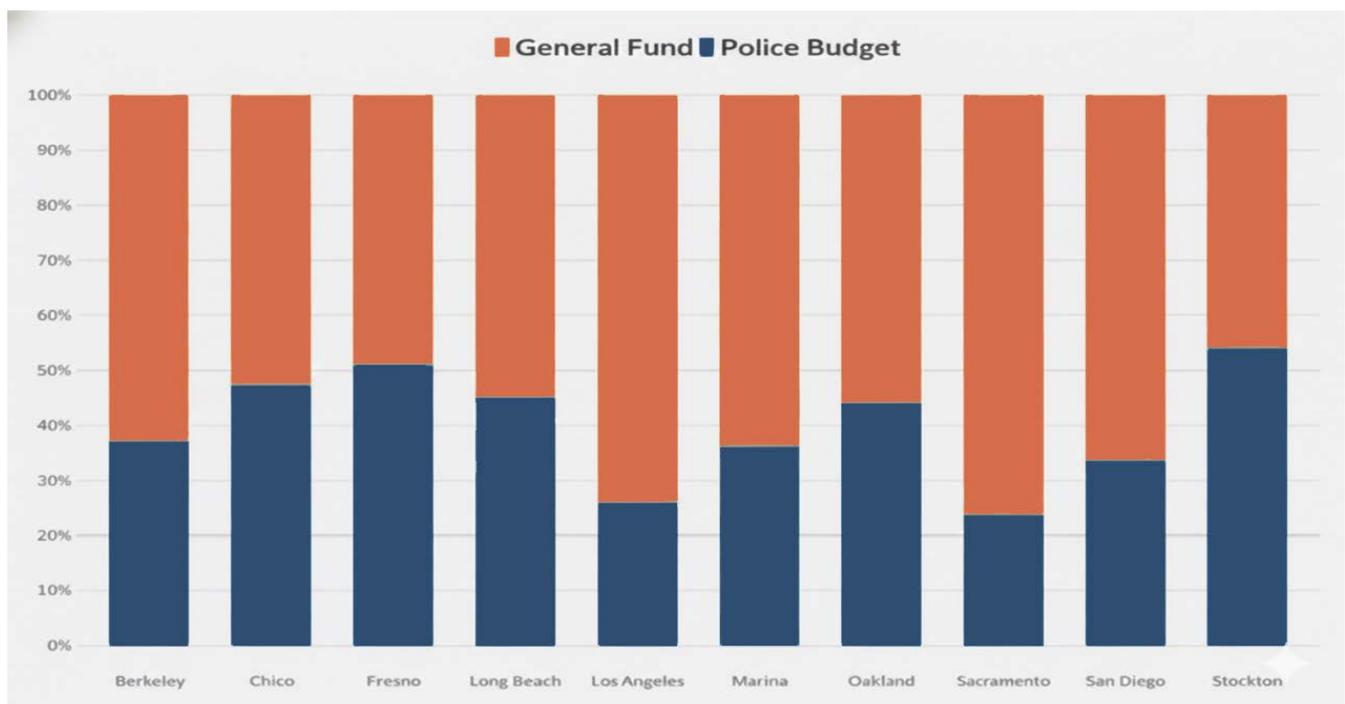
The goal of this paper is to explore the applicability of the abundance framework for a new approach to community safety. Toward that end, I begin by describing problems with the current dominant framing of and policy around safety, before moving into a detailed discussion of an alternative framework for safety and wellbeing. After introducing this new framework, I review the abundance pillars, principles, and practices (as defined by the UC Berkeley Possibility Lab), with a discussion of their relevance for reframing and improving public safety policy. Finally, I describe policy levers the State of California could employ to promote a new and improved approach to public safety.

## California Policy Context

In politics and public policy, as well as in general parlance, when people refer to safety or public safety, they are usually referring to the array of city, county, and state agencies that constitute the criminal justice system. By any measure, the scope of these systems in the United States is enormous. The agencies that constitute the criminal justice system exist at every level of government including city, county, state, and federal. The size, scope, and distribution of the criminal justice system is so vast that multiple efforts to comprehensively map and quantify it have failed. The data that are available are dramatic: more than 10 million arrests are made each year,<sup>3</sup> almost 2 million people are in prison or jail on any given day, and more than twice that many are under probation or parole supervision.<sup>4</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the cost of the system is high. According to the Prison Policy Institute, the annual total cost of all government spending on criminal justice systems is \$182 billion, with \$63.2 billion going to policing and \$80.7 billion spent on corrections (prisons, jails, parole, and probation).<sup>5</sup> In California alone, the state spends \$14.3 billion per year on the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), which operates all state prisons and state-level parole supervision. At the local level, expenditures on public safety agencies dwarf those of almost everything else. A recent analysis by NICJR found that, across the US, an average of 30.3% of cities' general fund budget go to their police departments; in California, this number is even higher, with 38.0% of city general funds going to police.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1. Funding for Policing Takes Up a Huge Portion of California Cities' General Funds**



Despite the abundance of criminal justice system agencies and expenditures, however, the United States does not have abundant safety. Both property and violence crime rates in the US far exceed those of all other G7 countries and the European Union, despite the US spending far more on public safety agencies, indicating that our efforts to reduce crime are not particularly effective.<sup>7</sup> Examining outcomes for public safety agencies underscores their limited efficacy: according to the most recent national numbers, approximately 70% of people released from prison are rearrested within 5 years.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, there is limited evidence that policing alone is an effective means of reducing crime.<sup>9</sup> Due in part to the myriad noncriminal issues that law enforcement agencies are expected to respond to, many reported crimes are never solved.<sup>10</sup> According to a 2024 analysis, per capita spending on law enforcement in California increased by 52% from 1990-2022 while crime clearance rates fell by 41%.<sup>11</sup>

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## Relevant Recent Legislation

This is not to say that California has not made progress in shifting its approach to safety. The last couple of decades have seen a wide array of criminal justice policy changes, many of which have helped change the state's approach toward one that focuses law enforcement resources on more serious crime while investing in community-based resources for lower-level incidents. Assembly Bill (AB) 109 in 2011 and Proposition 47 in 2014 both shifted the penalties for lower level and nonviolent crimes, while encouraging the use of evidence-based practices and providing funding for community-based treatment and support. Although some of these changes were rolled back by Proposition 36 in 2024, the funding for and focus on community-based treatment and services remain.

California has also made important investments in CVI. In 2017, the state legislature reformed the California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention Program (CalGRIP) by turning it into the California Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (CalVIP). CalVIP, which has a legislative mandate "to improve public health and safety by supporting effective violence reduction initiatives in communities that are disproportionately impacted by violence," provides three years of funding per cycle to support evidence-based local violence intervention and prevention efforts. These efforts were further bolstered and institutionalized in 2023 with AB 28, the Gun Violence Prevention and School Safety Act, which instituted a groundbreaking 11% excise tax on firearms and ammunition sold in California, with the first \$75 million collected each year allocated specifically to CalVIP.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these changes, there is much work to be done. As noted above, at both the state and local levels, expenditures on traditional public safety remain exorbitant, with too few of these funds directed towards interventions and approaches that have been shown to reduce crime. In both corrections and law enforcement, public safety agencies are asked to do work that is either ineffective—such as incarcerating or supervising individuals who are low risk to commit future crimes—or outside their scope of expertise—such as responding to a myriad of noncriminal calls for service. Beyond being ineffective, expecting criminal justice agencies to

do these things is expensive and massively cuts into the types of community investments and interventions that can reduce the need for a criminal justice response in the first place. In this respect, the lens of abundance offers a helpful reorientation by motivating policymakers to rethink the safety system so that it is designed to deliver the right services through the right institutions, rather than overloading criminal justice agencies with responsibilities that they are not set up to accomplish.

Given the persistent challenges of our current public safety policy and infrastructure, it is worth considering how to approach it differently. Toward that end, the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) proposes a new framework for shaping public safety policy and investments: *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest*. Below, I describe this framework.

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# Reduce, Improve, Reinvest: A More Effective Framework for Abundant Safety

The NICJR justice reform framework of *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest* can be used to transform systems and increase public safety. This framework operationalizes the Abundance Agenda’s call to generate more of what we need — in this case, more safety, trust, and opportunity — rather than rationing safety through punitive approaches.

- **Reduce:** Use community-based alternative response programs to reduce, if not eliminate, police officers from responding to low-level and noncriminal calls for service. Focus probation and parole supervision on the smaller number of people who are assessed as high risk.
- **Improve:** Increase the quality of policing and repair the relationship between police and community. Improve the quantity and quality of services, supports, and opportunities available to youth and adults under supervision. Improve the outcomes of youth and adults in the criminal justice system.
- **Reinvest:** Capture and use the savings from a reduced criminal justice system to invest in communities most impacted by crime, violence, and incarceration.

The following sections profile services, programs, and strategies that can be used to reduce the scope (and cost) of the criminal justice system, improve how it operates, and then reinvest savings into an array of services that are more effective at generating safety. It is only through these changes that California (and the United States) can move toward a system of abundant safety—that reduces harm by investing in people and communities, while focusing law enforcement resources on the most serious and violent crime.

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## Reduce the Scope of the Criminal Justice System

### Alternative Response to Calls for Service

There is a growing recognition of the benefits of community-based responses to certain types of nonviolent calls for service.

In 2020, as calls grew in Seattle to significantly reduce the Seattle Police Department (SPD) budget, SPD publicly argued that doing so would be “catastrophic for public safety in the city of Seattle.”<sup>13</sup> Yet internally, the Department acknowledged that “up to 45% of SPD patrol service hours do not require an officer,”<sup>14</sup> and surveyed command staff identified multiple areas of service that would be better responded to by parties other than a sworn officer.<sup>15</sup>

In March of 2023, the Los Angeles Police Protective League (the police officers’ union) re-

leased a proposal identifying 28 types of calls to which LAPD sworn officers should no longer respond, such as Public Health Order violations, non-violent calls for service at city parks, and abandoned vehicles. In so doing, they suggest, “Ceasing to respond to certain non-emergency calls...would allow Los Angeles police officers to more swiftly respond to other emergencies, improve neighborhood safety, engage in community policing as it was originally envisioned, increase crime clearance rates, and improve police/community outcomes.”<sup>16</sup>

Police response can also have specific negative implications. The Center for American Progress notes that “police officers may unintentionally escalate a situation, simply by showing up on the scene,” particularly for people with behavioral health disorders who have experienced negative contacts with the justice system and within communities of color, as “calls for service related to minor incidents are more likely to result in justice system involvement for Black people.”<sup>17</sup>

One framework for alternative responses to low-level and noncriminal calls for service (CFS) is NICJR’s Tiered Dispatch model. This model was created in 2021, when NICJR worked with several cities’ Reimagining Public Safety committees and task forces. Within Tiered Dispatch, each CFS is assigned to one of four tiers based on call type: 1) noncriminal; 2) misdemeanor; 3) nonviolent felony; and 4) violent felony.<sup>18</sup> The tier determines whether a Community Emergency Response Network (CERN) team, police officers, or both are dispatched to a call.

As more calls are handled by CERN teams, the reduced burden ideally allows for reductions in patrol staffing and increased law enforcement focus on solving crimes and addressing serious threats to public safety.<sup>19</sup> For example, a preliminary evaluation of Denver’s Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) Program found that community responders diverted thousands of noncriminal calls away from the Denver Police Department, which could ultimately lay the foundation for reassigning officers from patrol into more targeted units responding to serious and violent crime.<sup>20</sup>

## Limit Community Supervision of Low-Risk Individuals

Like police departments, community corrections agencies (such as probation and parole) are ripe for reduction. A sizable body of research has shown that only a small percentage of individuals on probation or parole are assessed as being at high risk of re-offense and, even among those who are considered high risk to reoffend, most are more likely to engage in low level criminal conduct that is better addressed through nonpunitive interventions.<sup>21</sup>

A metaanalysis by the Vera Institute of Justice reports that “decades of research confirm...that overly supervising low-risk probationers and parolees is likely to produce worse outcomes than essentially leaving them alone.” This is particularly true for people of color, who are “more likely than white people to be under community supervision, to be charged with a technical violation,<sup>22</sup> and to be incarcerated for that violation.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the toll on individuals and communities, these revocations are wildly expensive. A 2019 Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center study found that 45% of state prison admissions are due to violations of probation or parole for new offenses or technical violations, and that technical violations make up nearly a quarter of all state prison admissions.<sup>24</sup> CSG also found that nationally “on any given day, 280,000 people in prison—nearly 1 in 4—are incarcerated as a result of a supervision violation, costing states more than \$9.3 billion annually.”

By reorienting their approach to focus on the relatively small number of people assessed as high risk, community supervision agencies can save both time and money.

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## Improving the Criminal Justice System

### Policing

Implementing an alternative response model increases the ability of police departments to focus resources on what is needed most—solving crimes, engaging in focused enforcement to reduce gun violence, and responding to immediate and serious threats to public safety.

Many police department budgets have increased significantly over time, yet homicide clearance rates have fallen nationwide. In a 2023 article, *The Guardian* noted, “Over the past four decades, homicide clearance rates—the metric used to determine how many homicides police solve—have decreased from about 71% in 1980 to an all-time low of about 50% in 2020.”<sup>25</sup> While the causes of this decrease are multifaceted, it is clear that simply increasing police budgets does not solve more murders, a significant factor in making communities safer.

For example, in 2021, the Oakland Police Department (OPD) received 44% of the City’s General Fund, and more than half of that funding was allocated to patrol. According to the former Captain of the Homicide Division, with limited budget and staffing, OPD homicide detectives each investigated up to 12 murders per year, while the Police Executive Research Forum recommends that homicide detectives investigate no more than four to six homicides annually.<sup>26</sup> These constraints are evident in investigative results: The homicide clearance rate in Oakland is routinely below 50%. Less than half of the people who commit murder in Oakland are ever brought to justice.

The research of Economist David Bjerck reinforces this notion. He analyzed data covering homicides in approximately 50 of the largest US cities from 2007 to 2017, finding that “the way large city police departments have historically spent their funds, more funding has not helped catch more murderers.”<sup>27</sup> Notably, this same study found that the likelihood of a homicide being cleared was significantly lower for Black and Hispanic adult male victims and for homicides in minority neighborhoods. Consistent with this finding, the Police Scorecard

Project notes that nationwide, “police reported finding a suspect in 84% of homicides of white victims from 2013–2020 compared to only 64% of Latinx victims and 57% of Black victims.”<sup>28</sup>

While homicide clearance is only one metric of a department’s effectiveness, clearances do play a crucial role in violence reduction. Retaliation and new cycles of violence are far less likely when individuals believe they will likely be caught and prosecuted for their crimes. When community members trust that police will use fair procedures when dealing with their community and will follow through and effectively address crime,<sup>29</sup> they become more likely to cooperate in investigations and less likely to take matters into their own hands.

There is evidence, though, that investing in the *right* policing resources can have a real impact on safety. After years of lower-than-average homicide clearance rates, the Boston Police Department implemented an intensive effort to improve their post-homicide criminal investigation processes and practices. Key changes included: 1) increasing the unit’s staffing to reduce detectives’ caseloads and add a victim-resource officer to work closely with witnesses and victims’ families; 2) implementing monthly homicide review meetings during which detectives, supervisors, and forensic staff would scrutinize the investigation’s approach, evidence gathering, and lines of inquiry; and 3) improving training and technical capacity. A rigorous evaluation of the project found that “the intervention significantly increased key investigative activities and improved clearance rates relative to existing homicide clearance trends in other Massachusetts and US jurisdictions.”<sup>30</sup>

These findings point to the value of reinvesting cost savings from reduced patrol units into increasing the number of investigators, gun violence reduction units, viable alternative response programs, and community-based violence intervention.<sup>31</sup>

## Highly Accountable Learning Organization

As a police department focuses on serious crime and violence, it should also work to improve relations with the community it serves and become a better organized and well-functioning department. As the Possibility Lab’s people-centered abundance framework notes, ultimately both community buy-in and greater operational efficacy are central to building and sustaining an abundance of all social goods.

NICJR developed the concept of a Highly Accountable Learning Organization (HALO), a police department that is transparent, accountable, and data-driven, and that adheres to performance management and continuous quality improvement. A HALO police department is continuously assessing, learning, and improving.<sup>32</sup>

Becoming a department that actively embraces these principles and practices may include joining a larger movement such as the Georgetown University Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) Project. ABLE serves as a national hub for training, technical assistance, and research focused on establishing “a police culture in which officers routinely intervene—and accept interventions—as necessary to: prevent misconduct, avoid police mistakes, and

promote officer health and wellness.”<sup>33</sup> Through ABLE, law enforcement agencies are able to receive training along with a host of other resources to assist them in advancing their own bystandership strategies.

ABLE was modelled after the Ethical Policing is Courageous (EPIC) program, which was created by the New Orleans Police Department and community partners. The program “educates, empowers, and supports the officers on the streets to play a meaningful role in ‘policing’ one another.”<sup>34</sup> EPIC aims to alter the culture surrounding policing to limit police misbehavior and promote a collaborative environment by training officers to be accountable to each other and intervene before an unlawful act takes place, irrespective of hierarchy.

A law enforcement agency that takes these approaches may also adopt one of several evidence-based policing strategies described above that have been shown to be effective in reducing crime, resolving incidents, and improving the quality of policing without the use of heavy handed enforcement tactics that can erode public trust and increase the risk of excessive force.<sup>35</sup>

## Improving Community Corrections: Probation and Parole

In addition to supervising too many people who are not high risk to reoffend, community supervision agencies are rife with ineffective, confusing, and unnecessarily lengthy supervision conditions set by judges and parole boards that do not account for an individual’s offense, risk, or needs. The Vera Institute notes that these conditions can range from the obvious (“Report as directed by your officer”) to the nearly impossible (“Do not associate with known felons,” without regard for whether people have family members who are felons).<sup>36</sup> Those who cannot meet these conditions are at risk of incarceration.

There is also great potential to reduce the length of supervision terms based on more robust assessment, which could further increase staff capacity to focus on those with the greatest needs. Additionally, incarceration should not be used as a response to technical violations (i.e., noncriminal rule violations) of probation or parole. New York State’s Less is More Act, passed in 2021, offers a valuable model: incarceration is entirely prohibited for a person’s first two technical violations of parole, so that people are not reincarcerated if they have not actually been accused of a new crime. In addition, if a person on parole is accused of a new crime, he or she receives a recognizance hearing before a judge to determine if he or she should be returned to custody pending a hearing on the new charge, rather than being automatically reincarcerated during this time.<sup>37</sup>

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## Reinvest in Communities

Cost savings from better assessment and reduced probation and parole supervision terms can be reinvested into evidence-based, community-led resources and supports that can

address the root causes of crime and violence, such as vocational training, job placement, housing, and education. As former New York City Probation Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi notes in *Mass Supervision: Probation, Parole, and the Illusion of Safety and Freedom*, “Reinvesting resources that we now waste imprisoning people for rule violations holds much greater potential for rebuilding communities that have suffered under decades of mass incarceration and mass supervision, and centuries of structural racism.”

## Community Violence Intervention and Gun Violence Reduction Strategies

Cost savings realized through reduced reliance on law enforcement to respond to CFS and improved policing practices should be reinvested in community violence intervention (CVI) and gun violence reduction strategies (GVRs).

NICJR supports the development and implementation of gun violence reduction strategies in several cities across the country. GVRs is a comprehensive, data-driven, multifaceted strategy that specifically identifies the small number of individuals who are at very high risk of being involved in gun violence and employs intensive interventions with those individuals.

There are several other CVI strategies that, when implemented with fidelity, have been successful at reducing gun violence, even among those most entrenched in gun violence. These interventions, which include hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs) and [Advance Peace’s Peacemaker Fellowship](#), are detailed in NICJR’s report on [Effective Community-Based Violence Reduction Strategies](#).<sup>38</sup>

## Offices of Violence Prevention

Offices of violence prevention (OVPs), also sometimes known as offices of neighborhood safety and a number of other names, often frame their missions as applying a public health approach to violence reduction. These offices typically describe their work in terms of community violence intervention and prevention, with a focus on gun violence and an application of strategies to intervene in or prevent violence for community members at highest risk of engaging in or being the victim of gun violence.<sup>39</sup>

Although OVPs, like criminal justice agencies, are themselves government agencies, partnerships with CBOs are a central feature of their operational approach. As part of this work, OVPs work with and administer funds to CBOs in communities that are disproportionately impacted by violence so that those CBOs can deliver services to reduce crime and generate safety.

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# Applying a People-Centered Approach to the Generation of Abundant Safety

As noted previously, there are multiple iterations of the “abundance” approach, each with their own emphases and priorities. While the broader abundance agenda has been valuable in highlighting the need for supply-side thinking, streamlined systems, and strengthened state capacity, it can sometimes sideline communities in an effort to prioritize efficiency and production. In contrast, the UC Berkeley Possibility Lab’s Abundance Accelerator offers a distinct, [people-centered framework](#) that builds on the general pillars of the movement with principles and practices designed to ensure that those most affected by reform are actively involved in shaping solutions. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on interrogating an “abundance” approach to public safety through this specific people-centered lens. Below, I discuss the intersection of specific pillars, principles, and practices of people-centered abundance with the *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest* framework in order to assess their relevance and utility for an abundant approach to safety.

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## Encourage an Abundance Mindset

Like other policy areas, current criminal justice policy is beset with zero-sum thinking. In this context, too often policymakers posit a choice between criminal justice reform and public safety. In this framing, fewer police, sentencing reform, and other reductions to the size and scope of the criminal justice system are viewed as antithetical to achieving greater community safety and wellbeing. The problem with this thinking is that it fails to grapple with what criminal justice agencies should actually be doing with their resources, and omits any acknowledgement of the types of responses or interventions that are better situated elsewhere.

The *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest* approach challenges this zero-sum framework, refining the assumptions and expectations for what criminal justice agencies can and should do while acknowledging a need for investments in other areas to drive public safety. In so doing, *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest* facilitates an abundance mindset that focuses on generating safety rather than only on fighting crime.

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## Put People at the Center of Abundance

Putting people at the center of abundant safety requires investing in people as workforce and engaging with people as stakeholders and community members. In terms of the former, achieving abundant safety in California requires investing in both the traditional public safety workforce and the community-based workforce necessary for CVI, alternative response, and other non-law enforcement-centered responses. Regarding the traditional public safety workforce, basic course requirements to become a peace officer have not been updated

since 1993 and thus do not include any modules related to the myriad innovations in policing over the past 32 years. There is no required training on data driven policing, CompStat, or any of the many ways that high quality policing has incorporated data. Moreover, there is no required training on CVI, mental health responders, or other civilian responders to crime and violence who have proven effective, often in partnership with law enforcement. Investing in the State of California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) and in the local law enforcement academies that implement their requirements is essential for achieving greater safety.

Investing in the civilian public safety workforce is equally important. While CVI has shown great promise in reducing violence, building and sustaining a CVI workforce is notoriously difficult given the high risk and high stress involved in the work and the low pay scale. Staff development programs (like NICJR's Violence Reduction Management Institute (VRMI) and the University of Chicago Crime Lab's CVI Leadership Academy) are privately funded and far short of the scale needed to truly build out a community workforce to promote safety. Investments in this workforce should include salary standards as well as training and capacity building.

Putting people at the center of abundance also means improving trust between law enforcement agencies and the people and communities they serve. Criminal justice agencies must apply the lessons learned from decades of research on policing in communities that are disproportionately affected by crime and violence, much of which has been situated within a framework of "procedural justice." As this work has long evidenced, people want policing that is fair and effective, which includes both greater efficacy in solving serious and violent crime and less time spent on wider efforts that unnecessarily ensnare people in the criminal justice system.<sup>40</sup>

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## **Ensure Equitable Access to Goods and Services**

As projects like [Million Dollar Blocks](#) and [Million Dollar Hoods](#) have long shown, current investments in criminal justice systems tend to focus a high volume of resources *on* low income communities without meaningful investments *in* those communities. By being more intentional and more targeted in how and where we invest in criminal justice agencies, we can garner savings that can be invested in community-based organizations (CBOs) that have been shown to reduce crime and generate safety.<sup>41</sup> The funding and distributional structure of these investments would geographically align with the places where many law enforcement and other public safety resources are currently invested, but because the investments would focus on CBOs rather than government agencies, these would be investments in these communities rather than on them. These community-level investments would better ensure safety is a standard quality of life for all Californians, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This would go a long way towards increasing equity in both inputs and outcomes.

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## Equip the Government to Serve the People

Concerns about government efficacy and a related desire to strengthen the operational capacity of government agencies is a core tenet across various abundance approaches. Beyond the investment in the people who comprise the public safety workforce, discussed above, California must improve the operational capacity of the myriad city, county, and state agencies that constitute the criminal justice system. Moreover, a critical aspect of improving government's operational capacity is helping to steer private organizations to lead in work that is best situated outside of government.

In terms of improving the operational capacity of criminal justice agencies, both the HALO framework and the Tiered Dispatch model offer concrete ways to improve government capacity to more effectively serve the public, with the former providing a strategic framework for how law enforcement agencies should operate while the latter provides tactical guidance for prioritizing government resources. Both of these approaches require technological investments to address infrastructure and totally inadequate IT/data capacity, which are persistent issues that preclude more effective operations.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, as discussed above, often these agencies are expected to provide so many services that go beyond their core functions, that they have little capacity remaining to effectively meet those core functions. Police departments should focus more on solving serious and violent crime and less on responding to noncriminal calls for services and other lower-level issues. Correctional agencies should dedicate more resources towards people who pose a clear risk to public safety and fewer towards those who do not.

In addition, as noted above, too often the public sector defines public safety investments only as investments in criminal justice agencies, despite the fact that many of the solutions to crime are better situated outside law enforcement. In this context, strengthening state capacity means building the capacities of criminal justice agencies while also building government capacity to address crime and promote safety through other mechanisms. These include alternative responses to calls for service, establishing offices of violence prevention, and more.

Finally, equipping the government also means establishing and strengthening partnerships with non-governmental entities that can do what government cannot, like serving as credible messengers and life coaches for young men at high risk for involvement in gun violence, or interrupting and deescalating conflicts in real time to avoid shootings. In most abundance work, this approach emphasizes partnerships with business, but it is also important to shift how government works with nonprofit community-based organizations that are so critical to government efforts to meet human needs (as elaborated below).

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## Make Informed Tradeoffs Based on Community Input

As noted in the beginning of this paper, the State of California and the cities and counties therein spend billions of dollars on a variety of traditional public safety investments, despite the fact that the investments draw limited resources away from other critical needs. There is, however, limited evidence to indicate that these choices reflect the tradeoffs that most people and communities would choose. As noted above, research on procedural justice has long shown that most people prefer a surgical approach to law enforcement operations, that focuses on solving serious crime without criminalizing people for behaviors that do not cause harm. Research on gun violence reduction strategies (GVRS) has similarly found that most people prefer “targeted enforcement actions only when necessary and against those individuals engaged in violent behaviors (who have been forewarned), thus limiting the harmful effects of more broad-based aggressive policing practices, such as community-wide crack-downs or other zero tolerance policing strategies, which can be too expansive and appear arbitrary.”<sup>43</sup>

Consistent with these attitudes, there is evidence of widespread public support for investments in alternative response models, such as CERNs, in addition to evidence that most of the public supports increasing community investments over more incarceration. While public opinion is notoriously fickle and difficult to measure, the Possibility Lab’s *Firsthand Framework For Policy Innovation* evidences the nuance with which people approach public safety policy when given the opportunity to weigh in.<sup>44</sup>

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## Generate New Ideas and Activate Partnerships

While building government capacity is a critical component of an improved approach to safety, so too is recognizing what government cannot do. Too often, criminal justice agencies are expected to provide services and interventions that are better situated in communities and community-based organizations, despite strong research showing that community-based organizations can and do reduce crime and promote safety.<sup>45</sup> As described throughout this paper, models such as OVPs, CERNs, and CVI all activate partnerships with community-based organizations and can help *Reduce* the role of criminal justice agencies, allowing them to *Improve* their quality of service, while serving as a vehicle to *Reinvest* in communities.

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## Policy Levers to Generate Greater Safety in California

California has taken a number of important steps to shift its approach to safety. In both the adult and juvenile justice systems, a number of statewide shifts have dramatically reduced the size and scope of the state's prison systems, and reduced probation supervision terms for most offenses.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the expansion of the California Violence Intervention Program (CalVIP), has seen millions of dollars disbursed to local governments and CBOs to invest in community-based violence reduction work.<sup>47</sup>

There are, however, a number of other policy levers the state could apply to build on this progress and continue to promote a more effective approach to public safety. One important policy intervention would be the consolidation of currently disparate state initiatives to invest in community-centered and public health approaches to crime and violence. In addition to the CalVIP, which is currently administered by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), the State of California has a Violence Intervention Initiative in the Injury and Violence Prevention (IVP) branch of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). Furthermore, there is an Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) in the California Department of Justice (CA DOJ). While each of these entities does important work, their dispersion across multiple state agencies diminishes the state's ability to deploy a cohesive strategy based on public health approaches to crime and violence. Consolidating these initiatives and investments into a single office of violence prevention situated in the Department of Justice would streamline and align those efforts while making explicit the fact that these offices and the public health approaches that they employ are a critical component of public safety infrastructure.

Through a robust and centralized office of violence prevention in the Department of Justice, the state could and should play a larger role in facilitating the establishment of CERN teams and other alternative response mechanisms across California. Just as the state incentivizes investments in CVI through CalVIP, so too could state grant programs fund the development of CERN teams, while also providing technical assistance and requiring data collection to ensure that these approaches are implemented effectively.

In addition to these efforts aimed at bolstering safety investments outside the traditional public safety sphere, CA DOJ should also revitalize its now dormant program on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing and become a leader in setting forth a policy agenda for effective policing. As part of this effort, CA DOJ should promote the HALO practices described above, setting forth a set of standards for use of data and evidence-based practices and providing both training and incentives for implementation. As part of this process, CA DOJ should fund the development of new POST trainings aligned with these practices and provide grant funding to cover the cost of peace officer participation in these trainings. Similarly, DOJ grants to law enforcement agencies that invest in data infrastructure while requiring regular public reporting of key metrics would help address both data capacity and transparency gaps, helping to build trust with communities while also improving the quality of service provided.

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## Conclusion

California has an opportunity to reimagine public safety in a way that is more effective, equitable, and sustainable. The framework of *Reduce, Improve, Reinvest* offers a path forward: scaling back the overreach of the criminal justice system, improving the quality and focus of policing and supervision, and channeling the resulting savings into proven community-based strategies. Applying a people-centered approach to abundance reinforces this vision by moving beyond scarcity-based thinking, centering community participation and input, and equipping government to more effectively deliver safety as a shared public good.

By consolidating state efforts, investing in alternative response models, strengthening police investigative capacity, and building the infrastructure for community violence intervention, California can generate lasting safety while reducing the harms of over-incarceration and over-policing. True abundance in public safety will mean not only fewer crimes, but healthier, more resilient communities in which all Californians can thrive.

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