

JUST & SAFE

HOW TO REFORM POLICE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SYSTEMS WHILE INCREASING PUBLIC SAFETY

NICJR★
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

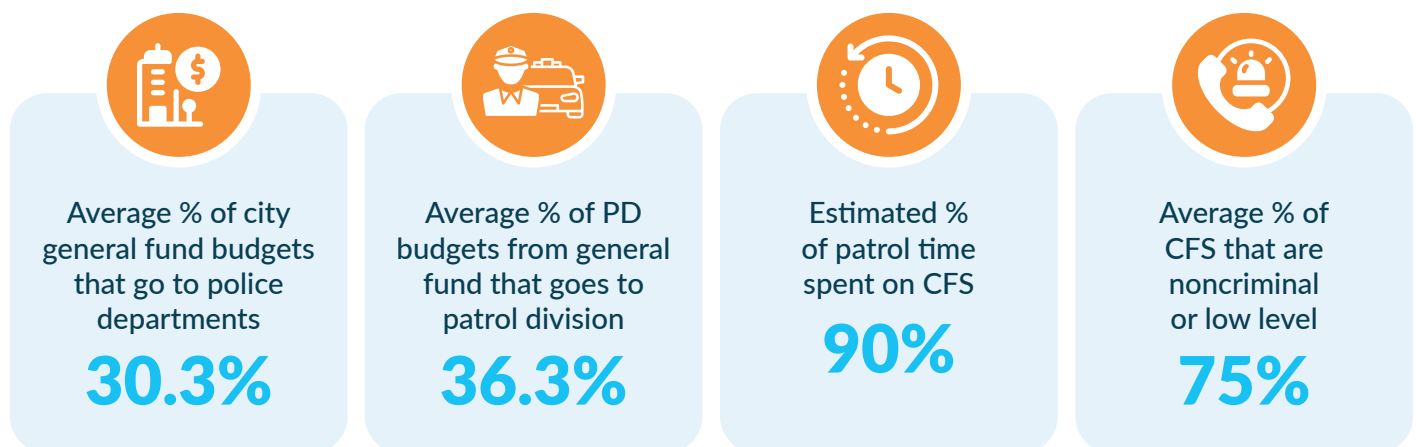
Executive Summary

Police departments in the United States are charged with a broad set of responsibilities, and officers typically have little specialized training in the breadth of complex issues they encounter. Police are asked to respond to robberies and homicides, but they also enforce traffic rules and respond to noise complaints, domestic disputes, mental health crises, unhoused individuals, and more. Simply put, police are asked to do too much with too little.

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) has conducted multiple studies analyzing the type and severity of calls for service (CFS; i.e., 911 calls) in a variety of police departments across the country, finding across the board that CFS are overwhelmingly for noncriminal or low-level incidents. For example, according to NICJR's analysis of Oakland Police Department (OPD) calls for service data, between 2018–2020, nearly 60% of calls responded to by OPD were for noncriminal matters. This amounted to more than 368,000 responses. And in Seattle, NICJR found that 79% of calls received were noncriminal or low-level events, and only 6% of calls were associated with felonies of any kind, violent or nonviolent.

For this report, NICJR analyzed CFS data as well as police department budgets for 10 California cities and eight cities in other US states. Across all 18 cities:

Figure 1: Patrol Costs and Calls for Service Across 18 Cities



Police departments serve many functions beyond responding to calls for service. However, patrol divisions make up the largest portion of police departments, accounting for nearly half of the staff and even a larger portion of the budget in many agencies. Because calls for service are overwhelmingly for noncriminal or low-level incidents, almost all of the work of a patrol division consists of responding to calls that do not relate to serious crime or violence. This is true both in large, urban areas and in smaller, more suburban or rural communities.

In an op-ed for the largest newspaper in Chicago, a 31-year veteran of the Chicago Police Department, David Franco, wrote that police officers “spend entire shifts dealing with noncriminal matters from disturbance and suspicious person calls to noise complaints and fender-benders. Most of the criminal matters are low-level issues: trespassing, property damage, cell phones stolen from cars.... With so many low-level issues put on our shoulders, police cannot prioritize the serious crimes that our city desperately needs to address.”

Meanwhile, the number of people in a given jurisdiction who are responsible for most gun violence is very small – usually less than 1% of the jurisdiction’s population. NICJR and its partner, the California Partnership for Safe Communities, have conducted a series of Gun Violence Problem Analyses in several cities, including Indianapolis, IN; Green Bay, WI; Austin, TX; and Washington, DC. A very similar outcome has been found in each city: Gun violence is tightly concentrated among a very small number of young adults who are at very high risk. These individuals are identifiable, and the violence is predictable and therefore the shootings are preventable, with effective intervention.

Yet most police departments dedicate very few resources to the kind of focused enforcement and intelligence gathering necessary to significantly reduce gun violence. The significant burden of responding to noncriminal and nonviolent CFS constrains the capacity of many police departments to engage in the necessary work of solving crimes, reducing gun violence, and responding to immediate and serious threats to public safety.

For this report, NICJR also analyzed data from nine correctional agencies in five jurisdictions across the country to assess their workload, focus on serious crime, and budgets. There is a similar mismatch in the broader criminal justice system, where significant resources are expended providing lengthy correctional supervision terms to both high-risk and low-risk individuals that do not effectively meet the needs of either population. Although only a small percentage of those on probation or parole supervision are at high risk for violence or re-offense, in many jurisdictions one in five people has a supervision term of more than five years. In Maryland, for example, only 8.2% of individuals under supervision are assessed as being at high or very high risk of re-offense. Even among those, most assessment tools do not differentiate between high risk for violent offenses and all other types of re-offense.



Overall, too many law enforcement and criminal justice system resources are focused on incidents and individuals that can be safely and effectively addressed by alternative means, allowing policing and correctional resources to be used to reduce and prevent serious crime and violence.

The last section of this report includes recommendations on how to implement a Just and Safe jurisdiction, which includes:

- ✓ Implementing effective community-based alternative response programs
- ✓ Significantly reducing police response to low-level and noncriminal calls for service
- ✓ Re-assigning officers from patrol to increase staffing to proactive units focused on reducing and investigating nonfatal shootings and homicides
- ✓ Develop police departments into Highly Accountable Learning Organizations (HALO)
- ✓ Reduce – Improve – Reinvest: Reducing the size of criminal justice agencies; vastly improving their operations and the outcomes of system-impacted youth and adults; and reinvesting savings from a reduced system back into the communities most impacted by crime, violence, and incarceration