

June 2020

# Advocacy Tools for a New Era of Public Safety

## We know that you are ready. You've been ready.

We must hold our leaders accountable to our communities and rethink public safety. Communities must be in the lead when it comes to designing a system of safety that works for them and their unique circumstances, history, and needs. It takes time, effort, and shared understanding.

Whether you use a computer or phone, tweet or write a letter, attend public meetings or join rallies, each of us has the power, individually and collectively, to effect change through grassroots organizing, policy advocacy, and civic engagement. This work isn't easy, and change may not come immediately, but it will come.

Below are a few steps you can take now to impact change in your community and demand an end to police violence.

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## Identify, include, imagine, insist.

**Identify the problem.** What are you most concerned about? Racial profiling? Use of force? Sexual violence or misconduct by police officers? Use of military equipment?

**Include diverse voices.** Who is already doing work around the issue(s) you're concerned about? Who are the community leaders who are at the table or who should be at the table? What voices need to be at the table in a coalition?

**Imagine a solution.** Do you want to change policy? Pass a new law? Change the structure and oversight of a local police department? Can you make current proposals you see better? Are there things you'd like to see that aren't being addressed? How can you use your voice for change?

**Insist on change.** Who are your targets and pressure points? How will you achieve change? Meet with officials? Write letters or op-eds? Attend city council meetings? Organize a rally or protest?

## Pressure points for change.

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Several levels of government control policing. You can agitate for change at all levels depending on what you want (e.g., a national database of police misconduct, a state law banning chokeholds or increasing your city's budget for community-based services).

### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The three branches of government are responsible for ensuring that policing meets constitutional standards and can incentivize states to implement change through funding. *They work for you!*

To find your elected officials and their contact information, visit [www.usa.gov/elected-officials](http://www.usa.gov/elected-officials).

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

City, town, or county officials regulate policing and pass laws in ways that you may see firsthand. The mayor, city council, and police chief control the budget and other resources for their local police department, including approving purchases of large items and equipment. *They work for you!*

### STATE GOVERNMENT

State legislatures pass laws setting general standards for law enforcement agencies including certification of police officers; stops, searches, and uses of force; and investigations of officer misconduct. They can also mandate or incentivize policy change through conditions on state funding *They work for you!*

### POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sheriffs and police chiefs and commissioners create and enforce departmental policies and usually decide discipline for misconduct or policy violations. You can reach out to your police chief or you can always talk to their bosses — the mayor and city officials.

To read our full length Advocacy Toolkit go to: [toolkit.civilrightspolicing.org](http://toolkit.civilrightspolicing.org)

Every community has its own needs and wants. But historically, policing has disproportionately harmed Black, Brown, and Indigenous people; LGBTQ people; people with disabilities; and poor people. It's vital to have some data on who is most impacted in your area to think through reforms. Here are some ideas you might want to consider for your community:

**Reallocate resources** from policing and law enforcement budgets and invest in community-based services, housing, education, health care, public schools, job training programs, preventive care for those with mental health needs, as well as other evidence-based programs that help communities thrive.

**Strengthen community-based services** and strive for widely available preventive mental health services and nonpolice responses to crises. Police officers are not trained to respond to people in mental health or substance use crises — officials should create adequate community-based services, such as crisis hotlines, walk-in centers, mobile crisis teams, peer crisis support services, and crisis stabilization units to meet the needs of people in mental health, substance use, or other crises.

**Insist on a seat at the table** to create a formal role for community members to publicly evaluate department policies and practices, participate in budget talks, and negotiate union contracts.

**Prohibit the use of lethal force** unless necessary when there is an imminent threat of death or serious injury and after exhausting all reasonable alternatives.

**Demilitarize police** and end the adoption of military weapons and technologies that harm and surveil Black and Brown communities and brutalize protesters.

**Repeal, decriminalize, and deprioritize minor offenses** such as loitering, drinking alcohol in public, disorderly conduct, public urination, etc., and establish preferences for a warning or a summons over an arrest where the law isn't repealed. These laws criminalize poor people and people experiencing homelessness. Many low-level offenses such as driving violations also serve as a pretext for stopping Black and Brown people.


**End “broken-windows” policing** and other policing models that emphasize the quantity of tickets and arrests over the quality and effectiveness of policing.

**End the use of police in schools** and hire professionals who are trained to handle disruptive behavior in school, such as counselors, mental health professionals, community intervention workers, and restorative justice coordinators.

**Ban profiling** in all discretionary decisions by law enforcement, including decisions to stop, investigate, question, search, arrest, respond to a call for service, seize property, initiate asset forfeiture, or charge an individual with a crime.


**Impose accountability** by creating community oversight boards with authority to review and discipline misconduct, challenging union contract provisions that impede discipline, and developing other community-led initiatives to oversee and review department policies and practices.

**Mandate data collection** and make it public in alternative and easily accessible formats that include number of stops, frisks, searches (including consent searches), and arrests, as well as demographic information and the basis for and outcome of the police enforcement activity.


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