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President and CEO

Maya Wiley

May 12, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
2267 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Minority Leader Jeffries, Majority Leader Thune, and Minority
Leader Schumer:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the NAACP Legal
Defense & Educational Fund, Inc., and the undersigned organizations, we write to express
our concerns regarding legislation that has historically been taken up during Police Week.
Such bills embrace deeply flawed and overly punitive practices that exacerbate the
disproportionate incarceration of Black and Brown people and immigrant populations. We
urge you not to take up any legislation that furthers the criminalization and dehumanization
of Black and Brown communities or targets people because of their immigration status.

We are particularly troubled by proposals from the Trump administrationⁱ and Congress to
increase investments in law enforcement to aggressively enforce immigration laws, as well
as investments in militarized policing strategies that have proven to be ineffective in
promoting safety for marginalized communities that experience higher rates of violence and
higher rates of disinvestment, arrests, and incarceration.ⁱⁱ We are also troubled by the aims of
the president's executive order on policing and bills that seek to shield officers from
accountability and increase criminalization for offenses against law enforcement that are
already subject to harsh criminal penalties.ⁱⁱⁱ

Increasing investments in law enforcement—with no accountability and no efforts to address
and interrupt the root causes of violence—undermines safety and advances policies that rob
communities of stability and security. Instead of marking Police Week by supporting
increased, unchecked resourcing of law enforcement, we ask you to pivot away from the so-
called “tough on crime” policies that rely on law enforcement alone. We urge you to build

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safety by investing in the actual communities suffering from violence, implementing proven prevention strategies, and investing in the resources and systems that make all communities thrive.^{iv}

For far too long, we have relied on criminalization, incarceration, and policing as the ways to create public safety in our communities. This approach—driven largely by investments in the criminal-legal system—has failed our nation, and particularly its communities of color. It is time we recognize that true public safety is brought about by equitable access to quality education, health care, affordable housing, and economic opportunities. If we are to provide genuine safety to everyone, Congress must begin investing in non-carceral, community-led programs, rather than continuing to increase funding for policing tactics that have little prophylactic impact on crime rates.^v Since 2000, increased incarceration has had an almost zero effect on crime, including violent crime.^{vi}

The evidence suggests that community-based investments in non-carceral programs—not investments in the criminal-legal system—are most effective at keeping people safe and enhancing community wellbeing.^{vii} Initiatives with proven track records, such as violence interruption and prevention programs, neighborhood mediation programs, and safe passage to school programs, are key to creating safe communities.^{viii} Additionally, we should invest in evidence-based programs that provide an alternative response where law enforcement has traditionally been the first responder. This includes moments of crisis related to behavioral health or substance use, where responses may be needed to address quality of life issues or people who are unhoused or experience poverty, to resolve disputes between people, and even in traffic enforcement.^{ix} These strategies should be implemented in concert with key system investments at the community level that improve access to housing, quality education, health care, and economic opportunity. Safe communities are those where people have access to affordable health care and mental health services, where schools have the resources necessary to provide quality education to all children, and where people have safe and affordable housing.

So-called “tough on crime” policies have neither made us safe nor served justice. These policies have led to the targeting of Black and Brown people by law enforcement and the public^x based on a dangerous and wrongful association of Blackness with criminality.^{xi} Elected officials and policymakers have consistently made our communities less safe by upholding outdated policies that continue the shameful mass incarceration of Black and Brown people^{xii} and perpetuate the structural racism and anti-Blackness in this country embedded in our carceral system. The recent increase in harsh immigration enforcement, often without due process, is also rooted in a narrow vision of who belongs in the United States. We cannot arrest, deport, or imprison our way to safety. Investing in programs and strategies that address the root causes of instability in communities is the best way to increase the safety of all people in America.

We urge you to use Police Week to center justice and humanity over criminalization. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Chloé White, senior policy counsel, justice, at The Leadership Conference, at white@civilrights.org, or Kristina Roth, senior policy associate, at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, at kroth@naacpldf.org.

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Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
American Civil Liberties Union
American Humanist Association
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Center for Policing Equity (CPE)
Drug Policy Alliance
Equal Justice USA
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Justice Policy Institute
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
MomsRising
Muslim Advocates
NAACP
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Popular Democracy in Action
Prison Policy Initiative
Southern Poverty Law Center
StoptheDrugWar.org

ⁱ See “Executive Order: Strengthening and Unleashing America’s Law Enforcement to Pursue Criminals and Protect Innocent Civilians.” *The White House*. April 29, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/strengthening-and-unleashing-americas-law-enforcement-to-pursue-criminals-and-protect-innocent-citizens/>.

ⁱⁱ See, e.g., Moore, Kesha, et al. “The Truth Behind Crime Statistics: Avoiding Distortions and Improving Public Safety.” *NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. Thurgood Marshall Institute*. P. 25. 2002. <https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-08-03-TMI-Truth-in-Crime-Statistics-Report-FINAL-2.pdf>; Bump, Philip. “Analysis: Over the Past 60 Years, More Spending on Police Hasn’t Necessarily Meant Less Crime.” *The Washington Post*. June 7, 2020. www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/07/over-past-60-years-more-spending-police-hasnt-necessarily-meant-less-crime/; Lee, YongJei, et al. “Conclusions from the history of research into the effects of police force size on crime—1968 through 2013: a historical systematic review.” *J. of Experimental Criminology*. 19 Aug. 2016. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-016-9269-8>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Executive Order, *supra* note 1.

^{iv} See, e.g., “Vision for Justice.” *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights*. 2024. <https://www.visionforjustice.org/>; “Community Safety Legislative Agenda for 2025.” *Community Safety Agenda*.

2024. <https://communitysafety.us/community-safety-legislative-agenda/>; “Framework for Public Safety.” NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. Feb. 2023. <https://www.naacpldf.org/framework-for-public-safety/>.

^v See, e.g., Bump, *supra* note 2.

^{vi} See, e.g., Brooke-Eisen, Lauren, et al. “What Caused the Crime Decline?” *Brennan Center for Justice*. 2015. Pg. 79. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/what-caused-crime-decline> (“This report demonstrates that when other variables are controlled for, increasing incarceration had a minimal effect on reducing property crime in the 1990s and no effect on violent crime. In the 2000s, increased incarceration had no effect on violent crime and accounted for less than one-hundredth of the decade’s property crime drop”).

^{vii} See, e.g., Bondurant, S. et al. “Substance abuse treatment centers and local crime.” *Journal of Urban Economics*. Vol 104, Issue C. 2018. Pgs. 124-133; Sharkey, P. et al. “Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime.” *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 82(6). 2017. Pgs. 1214-1240; Heller, S. et al. “Thinking Fast and Slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Vol 132(1). 2017. Pgs. 1-54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjw033>.

^{viii} See, e.g., “From Pain to Progress: Confronting the Struggle on the Front Lines of America’s Gun Violence Crisis.” *Amnesty International*. June 2021. <https://heroes.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Amnesty-EGVReport-V5.pdf>; “Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence.” *Arnold Ventures and the John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence*. Nov. 2020. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AV20201109.pdf>; “Investing in Intervention.” *Giffords Law Center*. Feb. 2018. <https://giffords.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Investing-in-Intervention-02.14.18.pdf>.

^{ix} See, e.g., NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund & Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. “Advancing An Alternative to Police: Community-Based Services for Black People with Mental Illness.” July 6, 2022.

<https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-LDF-Bazelon-brief-Community-Based-Services-for-MH48.pdf>; Whittenberg, Tyler, and Alcantara, Jessica. “Police in public schools harm students, leading to far-reaching socioeconomic inequalities alongside less safe schools.” *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*. April 19, 2023. <https://equitablegrowth.org/police-in-public-schools-harm-students-leading-to-far-reaching-socioeconomic-inequalities-alongside-less-safe-schools/>; Frolik, Cornelius. “Dayton mediation unit de-escalates disputes that used to go to police.” *Dayton Daily News*. Aug. 19, 2024. <https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/dayton-mediation-unit-de-escalates-disputes-that-used-to-go-to-police/E4ARZ5Q5UREZFHOVFD5EYEMZKE/>; Kajeepeta, Sandhya. “Safe Roads for All: A Community-Centered Public Health Approach to Traffic Safety.” *NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. Thurgood Marshall Institute*. Oct. 2024. <https://tminstituteldf.org/safe-roads-for-all/>.

^x See, e.g., Smith, Jonathan, et al. “Investigation Report and Recommendations regarding Elijah McClain.” *City of Aurora, Colorado*. Pgs. 18-19. Feb. 22, 202. [https://cdn5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_1881137/File/News%20Items/Investigation%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://cdn5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_1881137/File/News%20Items/Investigation%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20(FINAL).pdf) (911 caller described Elijah McClain as “sketchy” and “suspicious”).

^{xi} See, e.g., Eberhardt, Dr. Jennifer L., et al., “Seeing Black: Race, Crime, and Visual Processing.” *J. of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 8(6). 2004. Pgs. 876-93. <https://web.stanford.edu/~eberhard/downloads/2004-SeeingBlackRaceCrimeandVisualProcessing.pdf>. See also Payne, Brian Keith. “Prejudice and Perception: The Role of Automatic and Controlled Processes in Misperceiving a Weapon.” *J. of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 81(2). 2001. Pgs. 181-92. <http://web.missouri.edu/~segerti/capstone/PayneBias.pdf> (finding that exposure to Black faces facilitated the categorization of crime-relevant objects).

^{xii} See Sawyer, Wendy, and Wagner, Peter. “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2025.” *Prison Policy Initiative*. March 11, 2025. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2025.html>; “Race and ethnicity.” *Prison Policy Initiative*. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/race_and_ethnicity/#:~:text=Percent%20of%20people%20in%20prison,who%20are%20Black%3A%2048%25%20%2B (noting that in 2023, while Black people made up only 13 percent of the population of the United States, they comprised 40 percent of people in jails and prisons, and 48 percent of people serving life, life without parole, or “virtual life” sentences).