



III.

Keep Communities Safe with a New Paradigm of Public Safety

PLANK 13:

Invest in people and communities first.

[The United States spends an estimated \\$182 billion annually on mass incarceration](#) while dramatically underinvesting in the education, health, housing, environmental justice, and other needs that people have. These misplaced spending priorities do not advance public safety. Indeed, they prevent far too many communities — especially Black, Brown, Indigenous, low-income, and other communities that have experienced systemic disinvestment — from accessing the basic resources that actually keep families safe.

We must advocate for the United States to invest resources in jobs, physical and mental health treatment, social supports, affordable housing, and all the other community-based programs that both help communities to stay safe and to thrive. A world that invests in art, music, housing, health, and basic needs is a world that prioritizes true public safety.

State Policy Priorities

Improve the knowledge base about preventative investments

- Compile and, as necessary, commission research on how upstream investments — including investments in health care access, neighborhood stabilization, school quality, environmental quality, and access to affordable housing — serve to reduce crime and otherwise increase community safety. Then, use this research to create guidelines that better align budgetary priorities with safety goals while minimizing criminal-legal harm.

Supports and fully involve people impacted by the criminal-legal system

- Expand funding categories within existing grant programs or create new funding for programs to increase civic engagement for justice-impacted people.
- Authorize and fund mechanisms that link people involved in the criminal-legal system who are uninsured (including individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid) to community health centers and programs that provide mental health and substance use disorder services, harm reduction services, and linkage to social services.
- Support the allocation of resources toward educational, employment, and housing opportunities for incarcerated individuals and returning citizens, including a Reentry Housing Voucher program to provide housing vouchers to individuals being released from local, state, or federal criminal-legal facilities to ensure that people exit incarceration into safe, stable, accessible, and affordable housing.
- Prioritize — as part of a broadened, deepened, community-led reimagining of what “safety” is — investments that provide basic safety and security to all people. These investments include, though are certainly not limited to, investments in:
 - Neighborhood safety, including streetlights, public transportation, green spaces, accessibility and accommodations, and other investments to remediate years of under-investment;
 - Health safety, including access to health care, child care, high-quality nutrition, vacation and sick days, and a child benefit that ensures children’s needs are met;
 - Educational safety, including access to high-quality teachers and classrooms, counselors, social-emotional learning programs, trauma-informed care, and material supports (*i.e.*, connections to food, housing, clothing, and other supports as necessary);
 - Environmental safety, including access to clean air, clean water, pollution-free communities, freedom from climate-related disasters, public spaces for recreation, well-lit streets and recreational spaces, safety-informed urban design, and public transit;

- Economic safety, including access to basic income, high-quality jobs that pay a living wage, and workplace protections;
- Housing safety, including access to social and affordable housing, freedom from housing discrimination, and access to homeownership — especially for those communities who have faced historic discrimination, including redlining; and
- Inclusive communities, including investments in non-carceral programs and services that advance:
 - Racial justice, including reparations and other accounting for previous harms;
 - Gender justice, including anti-discrimination measures and survivor-centered supports for women and LGBTQ people;
 - Religious justice, including resources to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim bias;
 - Disability justice, including resources to address discrimination pervading transportation, housing, education, health, and other spaces; and
 - Immigrant justice, including measures that prevent discrimination and protect survivors, children, and the most vulnerable immigrant groups.

Reinvest and reallocate money to spur criminal-legal change

- Create a framework for calculating the “savings” (*i.e.*, spending reductions reasonably connected to) associated with shrinking the state criminal-legal system and, with this money, invest directly in those communities who have most been impacted by imprisonment, probation, parole, and other forms of criminal-legal harm. Such investments should go toward non-carceral, non-punitive investments that are selected, in each community, by a participatory process.
- Pass legislation that will support and fund the repurposing of closed correctional facilities for community use.

Support the people and communities most harmed by the current system

- Support statutory, funding, and administrative reforms that invest in communities harmed by mass incarceration and incentivize shifts at the state and local levels to reallocate resources to programs devoted to decarceration, health care, and well-being rather than those that encourage mass criminalization and incarceration.
- Dramatically expand services for survivors, healing supports, and victims’ compensation, as discussed in **Plank 15: Rebuild communities and support survivors.**

Federal Policy Priorities

End funding flows that are fueling criminal-legal harm

- Acknowledge the role that federal funding plays in fueling harmful police policies and practices like excessive force, profiling, lack of data collection, reporting on police community interactions, and militarization. Eliminate federal funding flows that are perpetuating these harms and leverage existing federal funding to ensure that state and local governments enact policy changes to end these abusive and discriminatory policing practices.

Rebalance federal spending to prioritize non-carceral safety

- Repeal and replace the harmful provisions in the 1994 Crime Bill with non-carceral investments in communities, as determined through [“Peoples’ Assemblies”](#) that draw input from directly affected communities nationwide.
- Redirect all Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) funding towards investments outside of the criminal-legal system that increase safety and well-being (e.g., non-carceral social services, supports, and community-led programs).
- Create and fund a large-scale national subsidized employment program that targets youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system. To support the near-term economic recovery and provide much-needed long-term investment into historically oppressed communities, the federal government must develop and implement a permanent national subsidized employment program that targets youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system and other people who have been marginalized, displaced, left out, or left behind in the economy.
- Prioritize federal funding streams for state and local efforts that will reimagine safety by shifting resources away from criminalization and policing and toward upfront investments in social services and programs.
- Robustly fund investments in social and affordable housing, including Section 8 vouchers, new emergency housing vouchers, Community Land Trusts, and other programs that can ensure safe, affordable housing for all.
- Ensure the presidential budget redirects resources away from programs that focus on criminalization and toward upfront investments in non-carceral supports, services, and community-led programs, and acknowledge the role that federal funding plays in instigating harmful police practices like excessive force and militarization.

- Prioritize — as part of a broadened, deepened, community-led reimagining of what “safety” is — investments that provide basic safety and security to all people. These investments include, though are certainly not limited to, investments in:
 - Health safety, including access to health care, child care, high-quality nutrition, vacation and sick days, and a child benefit that ensures children’s needs are met;
 - Educational safety, including access to high-quality teachers and classrooms, counselors, social-emotional learning programs, trauma-informed care, and material supports (*i.e.*, connections to food, housing, clothing, and other supports as necessary);
 - Environmental safety, including access to clean air, clean water, pollution-free communities, freedom from climate-related disasters, public spaces for recreation, well-lit streets and recreational spaces, safety-informed urban design, and public transit;
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 - Disability justice, including resources to address discrimination pervading the transportation, housing, educational, health, and other spaces; and
 - Immigrant justice, including measures that prevent discrimination and protect survivors, children, and the most vulnerable immigrant groups.

Improve the knowledge base about preventative investments and non-carceral safety

- Compile and, as necessary, commission research on how upstream investments — including investments in health care access, school quality, environmental quality, and access to affordable housing — serve to reduce crime and otherwise increase holistic safety. Then, use this research to determine how budgetary priorities could best serve to advance safety goals while minimizing criminal-legal harm.
- Launch a listening tour to develop a new, holistic conception of what safety is, asking people in all 50 states the basic question: “What is safety to you?” Use this listening tour to develop a new definition of safety that should be used to guide federal government-wide budgeting and programmatic decisions.

Reinvest and reallocate money to spur criminal-legal change

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Robustly support people impacted by the criminal-legal system

- Increase the amount for which the Department of Labor’s federal bonding program indemnifies employers who hire individuals with criminal records, or who otherwise qualify for bonding from its current level (ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 per bond), to \$25,000 for all bonds.
- Pass and fund legislation that would create community resource centers to assist returning residents as they leave custody, as well as individuals who have already returned to the community, such as the bipartisan One Stop Shop Community Reentry Program Act (H.R. 981). Community resource centers would provide comprehensive, holistic services related to housing, employment, education, health, and assistance with navigating government processes and bureaucratic hurdles.