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March 14, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Committee,
Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Community Safety Working Group and the [X] undersigned organizations, we urge you to advance a Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations package that prioritizes genuine safety in our communities. The current U.S. approach of prioritizing carceral “safety” solutions is failing to serve this critical goal, while ensnaring socially and economically marginalized people in a traumatizing criminal-legal system. We know that this country can do better — and we believe that a “public health approach” to safety is how we can make this vision a reality.

Adopting a “public health approach” to safety means treating violence as preventable, not inevitable, and addressing root issues through comprehensive, evidence-informed¹ interventions that invest in tailored community priorities and needs. These investments include prioritizing access to food and clean water, healthcare, affordable housing, economic security, quality education, social connection, and other necessities. **To that end, we urge the federal budget to support robust, multi-faceted investments across many areas and sectors that have a proven connection to reducing and preventing violence and harm, as well as holistically increasing safety overall.**

Our country is at a pivotal moment regarding how we approach safety. We can double down on the failed policies of the past, or we can chart a path forward based on a vision backed by empirical evidence, the lived experiences and leadership of communities, and the needs of those who have been most impacted by criminal-legal violence and systemic disinvestment.

¹ By “evidence-informed,” we mean shaped and guided by evidence surrounding programs and interventions that demonstrably enhance safety goals, including evidence that is quantitative, qualitative, rooted in lived and community experience, or otherwise building on programs that are achieving tangible impact on the ground.

This Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations agenda embraces this comprehensive vision — a vision that our community of criminal-legal advocates, public health and housing advocates, grassroots organizations, and allies nationwide believes would create safety in all communities, including those that have been most marginalized. The following sections, while not exhaustive, outline our highest priority safety investments for FY2024.

I. COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION & NON-CARCERAL CRISIS RESPONSE

Over the years, evidence has shown that programs of violence prevention and non-carceral crisis response dramatically improve community safety — even though they have received far less funding than traditional criminal-legal approaches. Fully [80 percent](#) of gender-based violence survivors report being somewhat or extremely afraid to call the police during a crisis. In contrast, many non-police crisis responders have been highly successful at stemming violence. A study of Safe Streets, a Baltimore non-carceral violence prevention program, found that its outreach workers [avoided serious violence in 69 percent](#) of incidents. And robust [research](#) has shown that violence prevention programs in schools significantly reduce violent behavior.

This evidence shows that, to prevent harm *before* it occurs and break the cycle of violence, community violence intervention and non-carceral crisis response are critical responses — as are other programs that prevent and manage crises, including issues related to traffic safety, in ways that do not involve police or flow through criminal-legal institutions.

To that end, we urge Congress to:

- 1) Provide \$5 billion in funding for CDC grants to violence intervention and prevention programs, neighborhood mediation programs, and safe passage to school programs.
- 2) Provide \$500 million to implement and evaluate community violence prevention strategies, including through dedicated Community Violence Intervention (CVI) initiatives, through the CDC's Community and Youth Violence Prevention Program.
- 3) Provide grants of \$10 billion through Health and Human Services accounts like the CDC's Injury Prevention and Control for fully non-carceral community safety initiatives through States, local governments, and community-based organizations.
- 4) Provide \$40 million for the Preventing Violence Affecting Young Lives grant.
- 5) Provide at least \$153 million for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at the CDC for the Social Determinants of Health Accelerator Grant.
- 6) Provide an additional \$30 million to the Department of Health and Human Services for state-planning and pilot-program grants available to States to provide qualifying, non-police, community-based mobile crisis intervention services.

What Is a Public Health Approach to Safety?

A public health approach to community safety includes several defining features, beginning with an acknowledgment that certain communities disproportionately experience violence, and that this inequality is [rooted in](#) racism, economic inequality, and other forms of structural oppression. This means that investments should be prioritized first in communities that experience the greatest burdens of violence, structural disinvestment, racism, and oppression. Informed by local data and context, a [public health approach](#) acts on the root causes of violence across communities by developing [comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that increase community protective factors and decrease the risk of violence](#). Importantly, a public health approach is deeply collaborative and community-driven, extending beyond the purview of governmental public health. A public health approach brings together the [community members most impacted by violence](#) with representatives of different sectors — including healthcare, public health, schools, parks, housing, education, social services, youth development, faith-based institutions, local businesses, and others — to collectively implement strategies based on the priorities and needs of their community.

II. COMMUNITY HEALTH, TREATMENT & HARM PREVENTION

To implement community safety-focused programs, jurisdictions must have an adequate supply of peers and professionals who can provide voluntary, non-coercive services that support physical and mental health — and allow appropriate staffing for non-carceral crisis response and similar programs. Expanding [access to basic healthcare](#) and treatment has been found to reduce crime, as well as save money on legal system expenses.

For too long, this country has taken a punishment and enforcement approach to how we address mental health, substance use, and related issues. The following investments, paired with further public health-centered policy changes, are a first step toward changing this paradigm and truly building a [“care first”](#) society.

To that end, we urge Congress to:

- 1) Provide \$50 million for U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Awards to Support Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Community Health, a grant program authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 that would fund CHW programs to promote health equity in medically underserved areas.
- 2) Provide \$35 million for the CDC and \$25 million for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to continue public health research into firearm injury and mortality prevention.
- 3) Set aside 10% of the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant funding for prevention activities.

III. ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Ensuring that people have access to safe and stable employment with a living wage, social supports and protection, and other forms of financial security, including robust and affordable

public services, is the bedrock of forming safe communities. Not only is economic stability necessary for individuals to meet their physical and psychological needs, [research](#) has shown how vital it is for preventing violence. While our organizations support a wide range of investments into economic opportunity and economic justice, we know that workforce development is particularly important to creating lasting change and impacting safety outcomes for generations to come. Employment training opportunities for youth in particular have [been found](#) to reduce violent crime as much as 43 percent — with long-lasting, positive effects.

Investments in high-quality jobs, youth employment, workforce development, and economic supports for families and vulnerable populations are critical safety interventions. To that end, urge Congress to:

- 1) Provide \$130 million in funding to the Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program, which matches those most impacted by community violence with job opportunities and skills development, setting aside \$30 million for the Growth Opportunities grant which goes specifically to youth and young adult programming.
- 2) Increase to \$30 million funding available through the Workforce Pathways for Youth grant, which gives grants to out-of-school programs for workforce readiness programming, including soft skill development, career exploration, job readiness and certification, summer jobs, year-round job opportunities, and apprenticeships.
- 3) Increase to \$150 million the funding available through the YouthBuild grant, which provides youth without a high-school diploma a combination of vocational training work site experience as well as furthering their education and community leadership skills.
- 4) Increase to \$150 million funding for Reintegration of Ex-offenders, which serves the recently incarcerated and is critical in providing them the services and connections to employers that are needed to ensure that they have access to good jobs. We also urge Congress to increase to \$50 million the set-aside for competitive grants to national and regional intermediaries and maintain FY23 report language encouraging the Department to prioritize grants to national intermediaries and community-based organizations with recognized expertise, as well as nationwide employer partners that will serve populations with multiple barriers to employment and provide wrap-around services to the individuals served.

IV. FAMILIES, EDUCATION & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Investing in children, youth, families, education, and community spaces is essential for both boosting the economy and making communities safer and more stable. Increasing educational attainment [decreases](#) the likelihood that a youth will become ensnared in the criminal-legal system. Improving [school quality](#) reduces the probability youth will become involved in serious crimes or experience incarceration. And increasing investments in counselors, [social and emotional learning](#), and [wraparound services](#) — while reducing the use of school police — will help end the school-to-prison pipeline while helping every child be ready to thrive inside and outside the classroom.

Investing in youth, families, and education is an essential way of making all people safer — and of helping all young people access the future that they deserve. To that end, we urge Congress to:

- 1) Increase to at least \$30 million the funding that is available through Project Prevent Grants to provide voluntary mental health, violence-prevention, and other services.
- 2) Significantly boost funding over current levels for non-law enforcement initiatives under Project AWARE and set aside \$25 million within Project AWARE for grants to improve trauma support services and mental health care for children and youth in educational settings, authorized under the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act.
- 3) Triple the funding that is available through Promise Neighborhoods to ensure access to a pipeline of services supporting children and youth at each stage of their development.
- 4) Increase to at least \$443 million the funding that is available through the Full-Service Community Schools competitive grant program and \$25 million for Integrated Student Supports grants as the Biden administration called for in their FY 2023 budget.
- 5) Increase to at least \$2.1 billion the funding that is available through 21st Century Community Learning Centers.
- 6) Provide \$12 million for the National Center for Education Statistics to administer the School Pulse Panel (SPP), to ensure that the use of Integrated Student Supports or community schools models meaningfully and equitably supports students in academic recovery.

V. SAFE & STABLE HOUSING

Stable, high-quality, affordable housing is a cornerstone of safety. The connection between stable, affordable housing and the prevalence of crime has been [studied for decades](#). At a local level, increasing [access to affordable housing](#) by building more low-income housing units has significantly reduced violent crime. And more specialized housing supports, such as [supportive housing](#) upon re-entry, have been found to reduce re-arrest rates by 40 percent and re-incarceration by 61 percent within the year following release.

Robust funding is needed to combat the rising housing precarity seen across this country. Housing is [plainly unaffordable](#) for many renters, per the guidelines set by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Public housing is one of the [few forms of housing](#) affordable to those with the lowest incomes, and is a crucial source of housing stability for Black and brown communities — and yet, this resource has been [chronically underfunded](#) for decades. Similarly, because of insufficient funding for subsidies to help tenants afford rent on the private market, only about [25 percent of eligible households](#) receive rental assistance. FY2024 is an ideal time to begin making down payments on these much-needed investments.

Ensuring safe, stable, affordable housing is key to keeping all people, families, and communities safe. To that end, we urge Congress to:

- 1) Oppose cuts to federal investments in affordable housing and homelessness, and oppose any policies that would limit access to affordable housing and homelessness services.
- 2) Renew all existing housing voucher contracts, and provide funding to expand the program to reach at least an additional 200,000 people, putting us on the path towards universal rental assistance.
- 3) Provide at least \$4 billion for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants.
- 4) Increase the funding that is available through the Eviction Protection Grant Program to \$100 million.
- 5) Increase funding for capital repairs, ongoing operations, administration, and maintenance of public housing.

VI. ADDRESSING CRIMINAL-LEGAL INJUSTICE

In addition to investing in non-carceral, holistic approaches to community safety, our leaders must prioritize budget decisions that dismantle existing structures in the criminal-legal system that perpetuate injustice. We support diverting people from the criminal-legal system as early as possible — including by providing voluntary, non-carceral pretrial supports and robustly safeguarding the presumption of innocence — and community investments over punitive solutions.

Addressing harmful criminal-legal spending is essential for advancing safety goals. To that end, we urge Congress to:

- 1) Investigate and prohibit federal funds for expanding specialized anti-crime law enforcement units, such as Operation Relentless Pursuit.
- 2) Eliminate the use of federal funds that incentivize law enforcement to engage in traffic enforcement.
- 3) Place limits or conditions on funding appropriated for STOP School violence grants under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act aimed to limit funds going to placing police in schools and surveillance technology.
- 4) Require DOJ to collect data on cases charging offenses with mandatory minimum sentences.
- 5) Require more transparency on DOJ implementation of the Deaths in Custody Reporting Act.
- 6) Develop a funding stream for states to invest in alternatives to pretrial detention.
- 7) Require full implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A).

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our budget priorities. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the appropriate staff to discuss these issues at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, or would like to schedule a meeting to discuss any issue mentioned here, please contact Thea Sebastian, Policy Director, Civil Rights Corps, at

thea@civilrightscorps.org, and Sakira Cook, Vice President of Campaigns, Policy & Government Affairs, at sakira.cook@colorofchange.org.

Sincerely,

Civil Rights Corps

Color Of Change