

Law Enforcement Views on Safety and Justice

National Survey Reveals Strong
Support for Common-Sense
Safety Solutions

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Alliance for
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Executive Summary



More than 700,000 sworn officers serve police and sheriffs' departments, corrections agencies, probation and parole systems, and federal law enforcement agencies in the United States. The law enforcement officers who patrol our streets, staff our prisons, and monitor people on probation and parole are frontline workers responding to crime and confronting some of our society's most challenging problems – mental health crises, substance use disorder, homelessness, and more.

The challenging conditions many law enforcement officers regularly face take a toll. Officers deal with stress, burnout, and trauma. Despite budget increases, most departments have recently been struggling

with high turnover, low recruitment, and staffing shortages. Many of the challenges associated with the work of law enforcement have increased in recent years, and, as the law enforcement advocacy organization Police1 notes, "support isn't keeping up."¹

Alliance for Safety and Justice commissioned this first-of-its-kind survey to learn about the work experiences and public safety policy preferences of sworn law enforcement officers across the country. The results reveal a foundational truth about public safety policy in America: **Law enforcement officers are overwhelmed by social crises beyond crime and report that neighborhood programs help them do their jobs more safely and effectively.**



Ninety-two percent of law enforcement officers agree that police departments are burdened with a wide range of social problems beyond crime. Only a small fraction – less than 3% in most cities – of the 240 million 911 calls made each year involve violent crime. Far more involve issues related to acute mental illness, substance use disorder, or homelessness. Not only do law enforcement officers report that issues like these place significant burdens on law enforcement agencies, but 9 in 10 report that their departments are not equipped to address these challenges alone.

Overwhelming supermajorities of law enforcement officers report that their jobs would be made safer and easier with support from a range of neighborhood programs that help prevent crisis from becoming crime. For example, more than 4 out of 5 officers agree that street outreach programs would make their jobs safer and would make communities safer. Four out of five also agree that mental health workers improve officer safety in situations where someone is experiencing a psychiatric crisis. Eighty-three percent agree that mental health workers and medics responding to some calls would lighten the burden on their department and allow them to focus their efforts where they are needed most. These results indicate widespread belief among law enforcement officers that various neighborhood programs improve both officer- and community safety.

Survey results also reveal strong support for policies that balance accountability with interventions that work to increase safety and decrease recidivism. For instance, a majority of officers said they prefer “shorter prison sentences and using money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health

interventions, and addiction programs” over “longer prison sentences and maintaining the prison budget to keep people incarcerated for the full length of their sentences.” By a margin of more than 2 to 1, officers said that the best way to hold people who commit crimes accountable is to utilize “options beyond just prison, such as rehabilitation, cognitive behavioral therapy, mental health



Law enforcement officers are **overwhelmed** by **social crises beyond crime** and report that neighborhood programs help them do their jobs more safely and effectively.



interventions, drug programs, restorative justice, or community service” as opposed to just “put[ting] them in prison.” When we asked officers about the most effective way to prevent people from committing repeat crimes, only 1 in 4 said “long prison sentences.” The rest report that job training, employment opportunities, cognitive behavioral therapy, and addiction treatment are more effective strategies.

These survey results come at a moment when many neighborhood programs that prevent crime and address crises are losing public funding or are at risk of being cut. Massive disruptions in federal grant programs and budget cuts have created budgetary shortfalls for many of the community-based organizations that provide these services,

causing many to downsize, reduce operations, or shut down entirely. Shrinking the availability of these programs leaves officers with more problems and fewer solutions.

In 2025, Alliance for Safety and Justice commissioned and released a public opinion survey that revealed extremely strong support for neighborhood-based programs among voters across a range of demographics, including voters across the political spectrum, from Republican to Democrat, and rural to urban. This survey adds the voices of active-duty law enforcement officers to the chorus of Americans who see neighborhood-based programs as essential for reducing burdens on law enforcement, reducing violence, and improving public safety.

“When we **reward rehabilitation** and **move people who’ve earned it from prison beds into proven, community-based supervision and treatment**, we **cut wasteful spending, strengthen public safety**, and **protect the officers** who work in our jails and prisons”

Director Gary Mohr
Director (Ret.), Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
106th President of the American Correctional Association



Key takeaways

1 92% of law enforcement officers agree that “police departments are burdened with a wide range of social problems beyond crime.”

- Our survey found that nearly all law enforcement officers have encountered social crises in their jobs:
 - 91% have interacted with people experiencing homelessness as part of their job;
 - 94% have interacted with people experiencing drug overdoses;
 - 94% have dealt with people attempting suicide; and
 - 99% have interacted with people experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Almost 90% of law enforcement officers agree – and a majority strongly agree – that the needs of people experiencing drug overdoses, homelessness, and mental health crises outstrip what their departments are equipped or able to provide.

2 Law enforcement officers overwhelmingly agree neighborhood programs reduce the burden on their departments, make their jobs safer and easier, and improve community safety.

- 80% agree that community residents trained in street outreach, mediating conflicts, mentoring youth, and diverting problems away from violence would help prevent retaliatory violence, reduce neighborhood incidents, and make their jobs safer and easier in the long term.
- 81% agree that professional mental health workers trained in de-escalation techniques and crisis intervention would make their jobs safer and easier in situations where someone is experiencing a psychiatric crisis.
- 83% agree that teams of trained mental health clinicians and medics responding to welfare checks and suicide threats would lighten the burden on their department and allow them to focus their efforts where they are needed most.



- 83% agree that trained professionals responding to non-injury traffic collisions would reduce officers' paperwork burden and allow them to focus on higher-priority calls.
- 85% agree that online reporting systems for low-level offenses would reduce officers' paperwork burden and allow them to focus on higher-priority calls.
- 90% agree that sobering centers and/or crisis stabilization centers, staffed by trained professionals, would reduce repeated emergency calls and hospital transfers for drug or alcohol overdoses, making officers' work more efficient and safer.
- Support for street outreach programs, mental health experts, and civilian traffic responders is even higher among officers who have experience working with these programs.
- 92% of law enforcement officers identify at least one benefit of mental health clinicians responding to mental health crisis calls. The most common benefit is that mental health clinicians can ensure people who need help get appropriate services and can divert them away from the justice system.

“Anyone who’s served in law enforcement roles in communities experiencing chronic crime problems will tell you the same thing: **we cannot arrest our way to public safety.** **We need partnerships.** Whether that’s mental health crisis assistance, youth programs, or treatment and housing programs, it all adds up to a strong public safety ecosystem, and **it’s the only way to achieve lasting change.** ”

Chief Reneé Hall
Former Chief of Police
Dallas Police Department
Dallas, Texas



3 Majorities of law enforcement officers support common-sense safety solutions.

- A large majority believes that stable families, strong neighborhood safety programs, and more jobs and housing cause crime to go down – not more arrests or longer prison sentences.
- A majority (56%) prefers that governments invest more in preventing crime by strengthening communities over responding to crime with punishment.
- A majority (51%) prefers shorter prison sentences and using money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health interventions, and addiction programs.
- When it comes to holding people who have committed crimes accountable, sworn officers prefer options beyond just putting people in prison by a margin of more than 2 to 1.
- 40% of officers say the most effective way to prevent people from committing repeat crimes is behavioral therapy and/or addiction treatment; 30% say job training and employment opportunities; and 26% say long prison sentences.
- 63% of law enforcement officers prefer policies that allow people who have completed their sentences and remained crime-free to clear their public records to expand job opportunities and housing stability when law enforcement still maintains access.
- Nearly 3 out of 4 law enforcement officers (73%) prefer policies that authorize parole boards to consider early release for people in prison who participate in rehabilitation, education, and job training.

“Policing alone cannot solve every challenge driving violence, mental health crises, addiction, and homelessness. Partnerships with community-based organizations are how we move from reacting to emergencies to actually preventing them. These collaborations are proven public safety strategies – they save lives, reduce violence, and allow officers to focus on what they were hired to do: investigate crime and stop it before it spreads. This report highlights that these programs make our communities safer and protect the wellbeing of first responders on the front lines.”

Chief Tom Synan
Chief of Police, Newtown Police Department
Newtown, Ohio

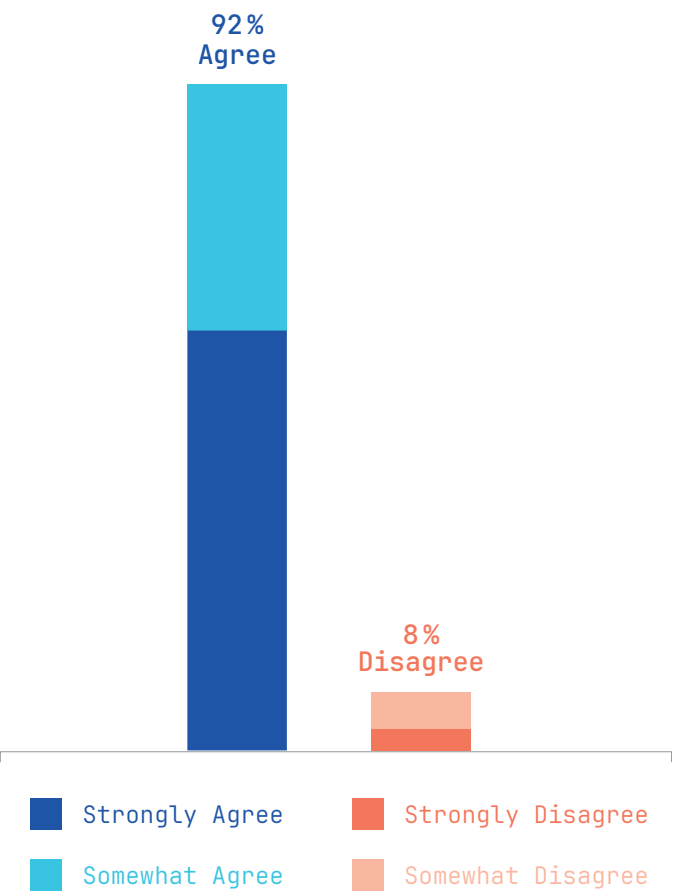


Law enforcement departments are burdened by social problems beyond crime

Law enforcement officers have become America’s de facto frontline workers for a wide range of social problems. Police officers are the default responders to the approximately 240 million 911 calls fielded by emergency dispatchers each year. Only a small percentage of 911 calls – fewer than 3% in most cities – involve violent crime. Far more involve

crises traditionally seen as outside the scope of law enforcement: homelessness, substance use disorder, mental illness, and suicide. Because most cities have no one else to turn to, the task of responding to these crises often falls to law enforcement officers.

Police departments are burdened with a wide range of social problems beyond crime.



Prompt: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Police departments are burdened with a wide range of social problems beyond crime



92% of law enforcement officers agree that “police departments are **burdened** with a wide range of **social problems beyond crime**.”

"From my experience in law enforcement leadership, **real public safety is built by investing in people** – not just policing. This survey shows how important it is to strengthen communities, support officers on the front lines, and **advance solutions that create safer outcomes for everyone**. This is the direction our profession must continue to move toward."

Deputy Chief Melron Kelly
Deputy Chief of Police, Columbia Police Department
Columbia, South Carolina

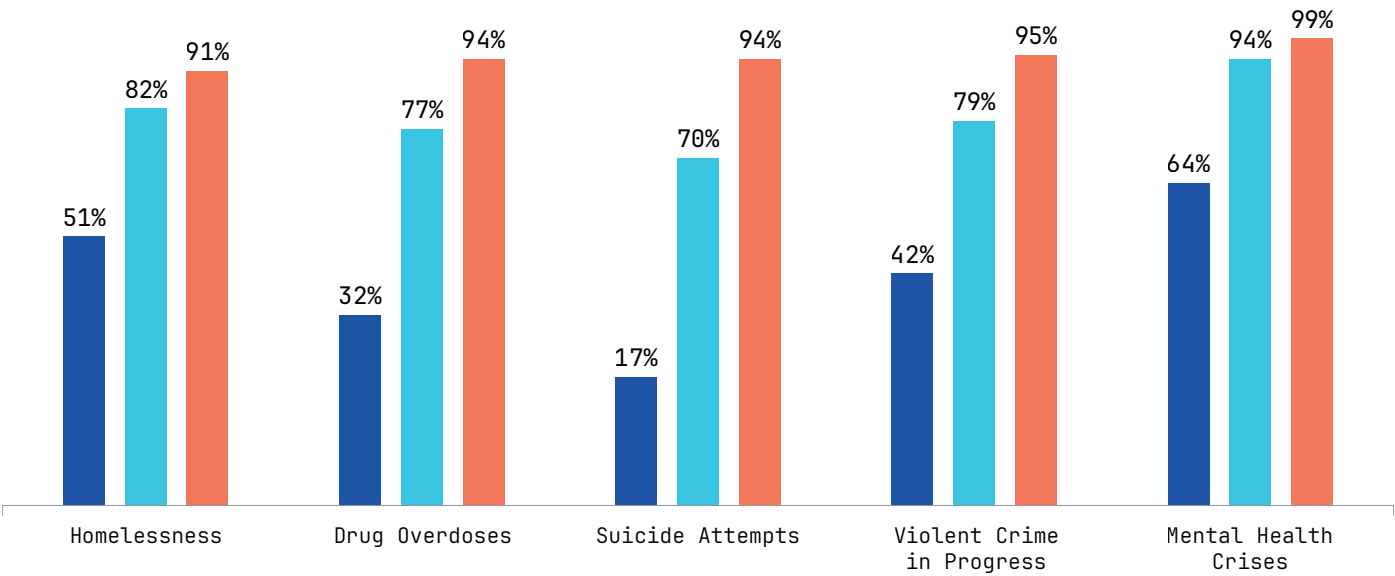


Our survey found that nearly all law enforcement officers have encountered social crises in their jobs: 91% have interacted with people experiencing homelessness as part of their job; 94% have

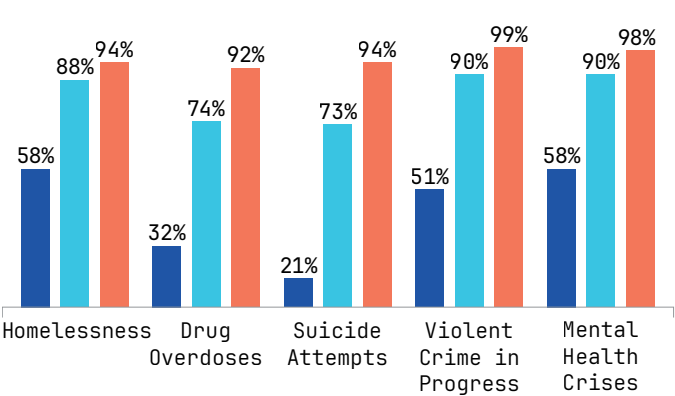
interacted with people experiencing drug overdoses; 94% have dealt with people attempting suicide; and 99% have interacted with people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Nearly all law enforcement officers have encountered behavioral health and social crises in their work

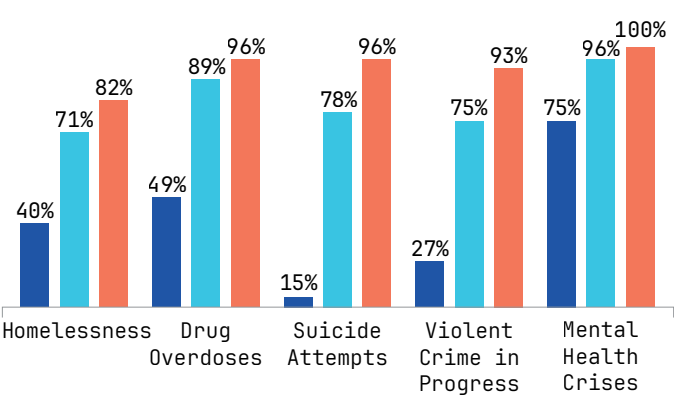
ALL SWORN LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS



PATROL OFFICERS



CUSTODIAL OFFICERS



A few times a week At least a few times a year Ever

Data for these questions were collected through a matrix asking officers to indicate whether their work involved an experience “Never,” “Rarely (once every few years),” “Occasionally (several times a year),” or “Often (several times a week).” Entries were recoded for legibility. The full prompt reads: “The next questions ask about your daily work as a police officer. Please think about your work over the past year. Thinking about your experience, how frequently does your work involve: 1. Drug overdoses; 2. Suicide attempts; 3. People experiencing homelessness; 4. People experiencing mental health crises; 5. Paperwork; 6. Responding to a violent crime in progress; 7. Court appearances/testimony; 8. Traffic enforcement; 9. Responding to traffic collisions (including fatalities and DUIs); 10. Serving warrants; 11. Responding to violent crimes that have already occurred; 12. Responding to property crimes in progress; 13. welfare checks.”

Social crises are an everyday aspect of work for many law enforcement officers. On a weekly basis, more patrol officers deal with homelessness and mental health crises than respond to violent crimes in progress.

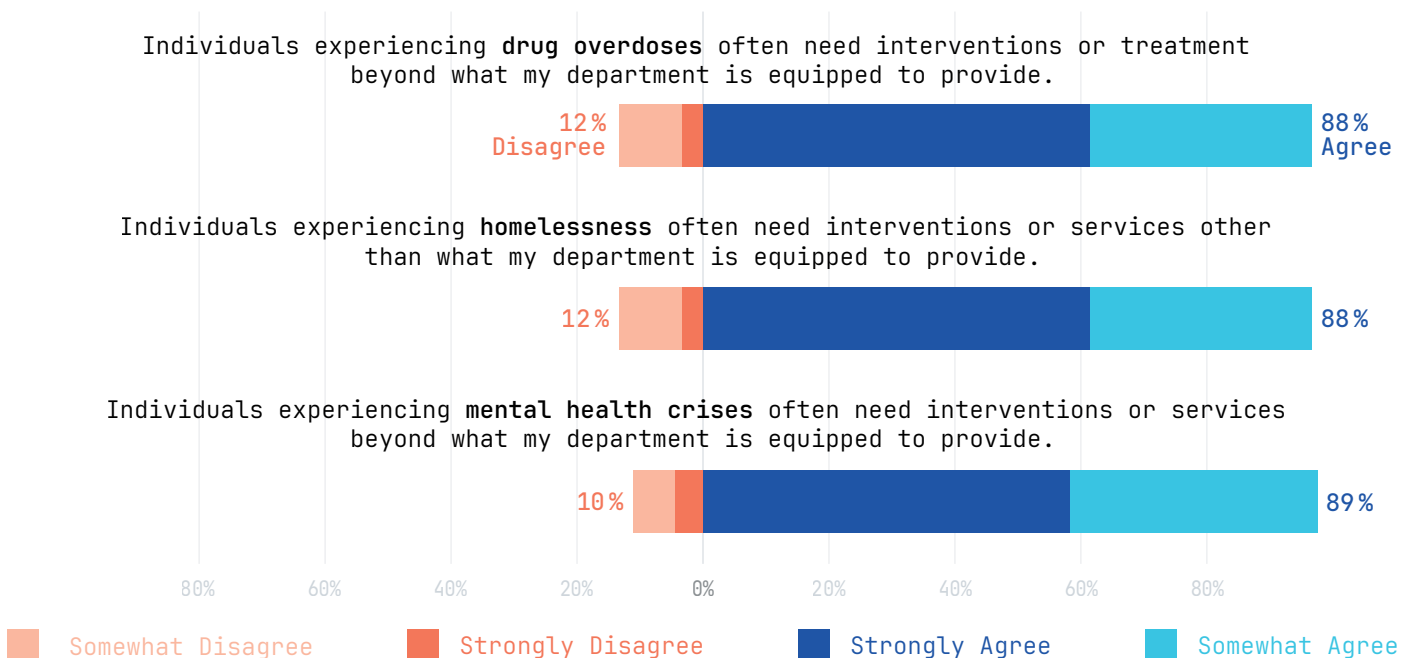
- Nearly 2 out of 3 officers (64%) reported that their work involved people experiencing a mental health crisis a few times a week.
- A majority of law enforcement officers (51%) deal with people experiencing homelessness on at least a weekly basis.
- One in six deal with suicide attempts on a weekly basis or more frequently, and one out of three deal with people experiencing drug overdoses weekly.

Almost 90% of law enforcement officers agree – and a majority strongly agree – that the needs of people experiencing drug overdoses, homelessness, and

mental health crises outstrip what their departments are equipped or able to provide.

Nearly 9 out of 10 sworn officers (89%) agree, and 53% strongly agree, that individuals experiencing mental health crises often need interventions or services beyond what their department is equipped to provide. Likewise, 88% of sworn officers agree, including and 56% who strongly agree, that individuals experiencing homelessness often need interventions or services beyond what their department is equipped to provide. For individuals experiencing drug overdoses, 88% of sworn officers agree, including and 52% who strongly agree that they need interventions or treatment beyond what their department is equipped to provide. Fewer than 1 in 20 sworn officers strongly disagree that people experiencing drug overdoses (4%), homelessness (3%), and mental health crises (4%) need interventions, services, or treatment beyond what their department can provide.

Officers almost unanimously say that their departments are not equipped to handle the social crises that take up so much of their time.



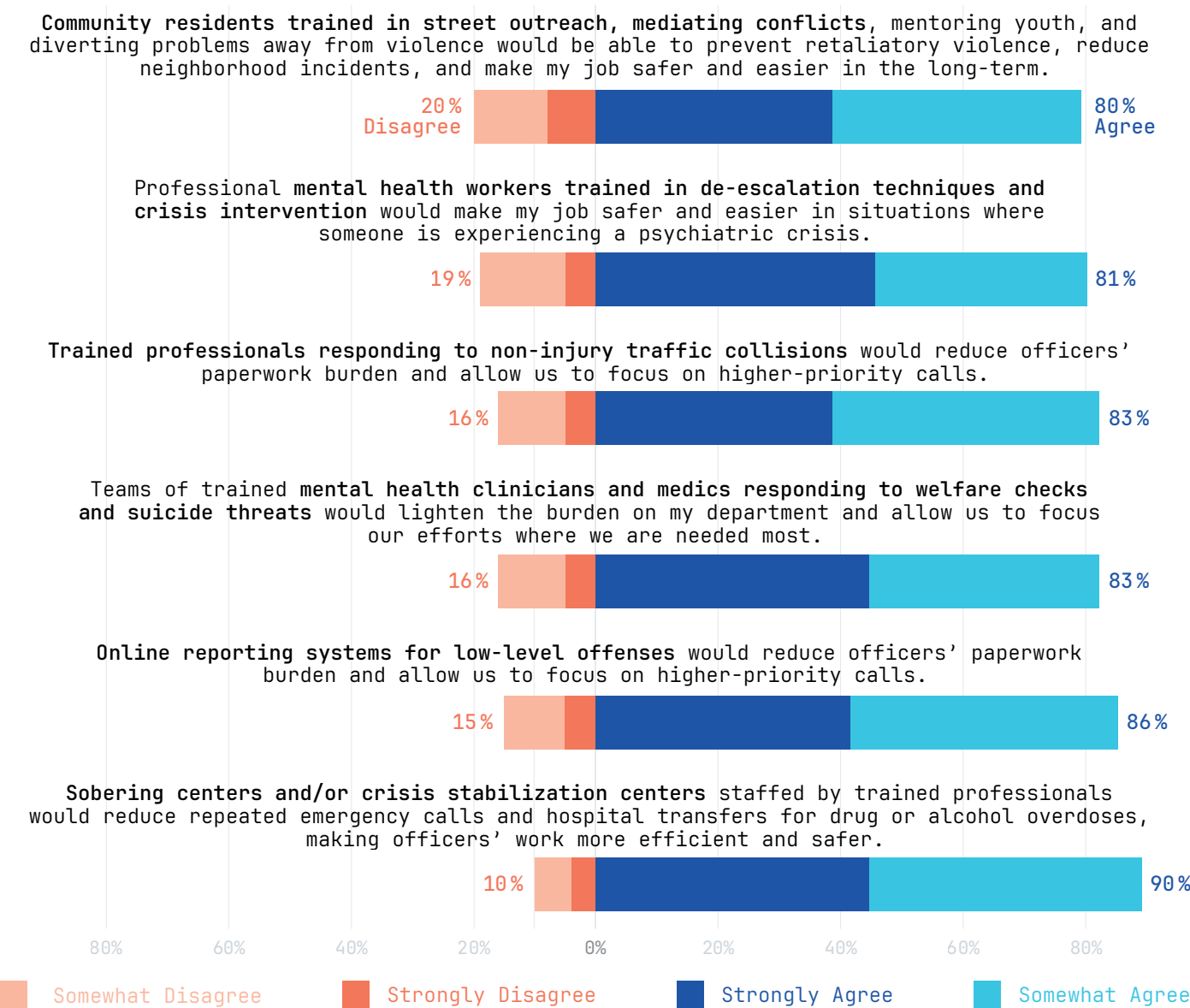
Prompt: The following statements ask about police workloads. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: 1. Individuals experiencing mental health crises often need interventions or services beyond what my department is equipped to provide; 2. Individuals experiencing drug overdoses often need interventions or treatment beyond what my department is equipped to provide; 3. Individuals experiencing homelessness often need interventions or services other than what my department is equipped to provide



Law enforcement officers overwhelmingly support neighborhood-based programs

Support for neighborhood-based programs that address social crises is extremely high among law enforcement officers. We asked officers whether they agree with statements about some of the most promising public safety strategies. Their answers indicated extremely strong support.

Officers overwhelmingly agree that neighborhood-based programs benefit law enforcement and the community



Prompt: Some communities have implemented programs intended to assist law enforcement officers and reduce their workload. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

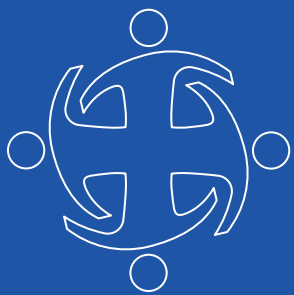
Four out of five law enforcement officers (80%) agree that community residents trained in street outreach, mediating conflicts, mentoring youth, and diverting problems away from violence would be able to prevent retaliatory violence, reduce neighborhood incidents, and make their job safer and easier in the long term.

Eighty-three percent of officers agree that teams of trained mental health clinicians and medics responding to welfare checks and suicide threats would lighten the burden on their department and allow them to focus their efforts where they are needed most. Eighty-one percent of law enforcement agree that professional mental health workers trained in de-escalation techniques and crisis intervention would make their job safer and easier in situations where someone is experiencing a psychiatric crisis.

Eighty-three percent of law enforcement officers agree that trained professionals responding to non-injury traffic collisions would reduce officers' paperwork burden and allow them to focus on higher-priority calls.

Ninety percent of law enforcement officers agree that sobering centers and/or crisis stabilization centers, staffed by trained professionals, would reduce repeated emergency calls and hospital transfers for drug or alcohol overdoses, making officers' work more efficient and safer.

In addition to neighborhood-based programs, 85% of law enforcement officers also agree that online reporting systems for low-level offenses would reduce officers' paperwork burden and allow them to focus on higher-priority calls.



Support for **street outreach programs, mental health experts, and civilian traffic responders** is **even higher** among law enforcement who have experience working with these programs.



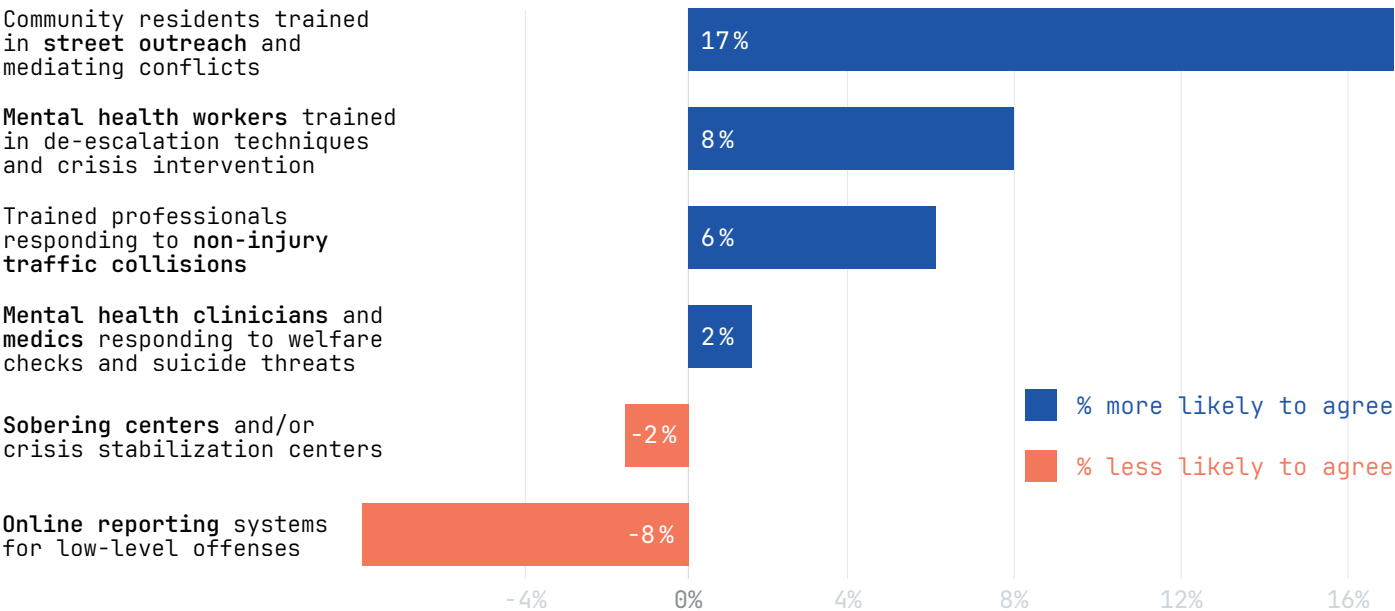
Among law enforcement who have experience working with trained clinicians equipped with de-escalation techniques, 84% agree that clinicians would make their job safer and easier in situations where someone is experiencing a psychiatric crisis compared with 78% of those who do not have experience working with trained clinicians.

When asked if they agree that programs that employ community residents trained in street outreach, mediating conflicts, mentoring youth, and diverting problems away from violence would be able to prevent retaliatory violence, reduce neighborhood incidents, and make their job safer and easier in the long term, 90% of law enforcement who have worked with these programs agree, compared with 76% who have not worked with these programs.

Eighty-two percent of those who have not worked with trained professionals responding to non-injury traffic collisions agree that they would reduce officers' paperwork burden and allow officers to focus on higher-priority calls. A slightly higher percentage of those who have experience with these programs (88%) agree that they would reduce officers' paperwork burden and allow officers to focus on higher-priority calls.

Agreement is overwhelmingly high that online reporting systems for low-level offenses reduce officers' paperwork burden regardless of whether law enforcement have experience with this type of program. Among law enforcement who have experience with these programs, 83% agree, while those who do not have experience with these systems are slightly more likely to agree (87%).

Relative rate ratios of officers with direct program experience vs officers without program experience



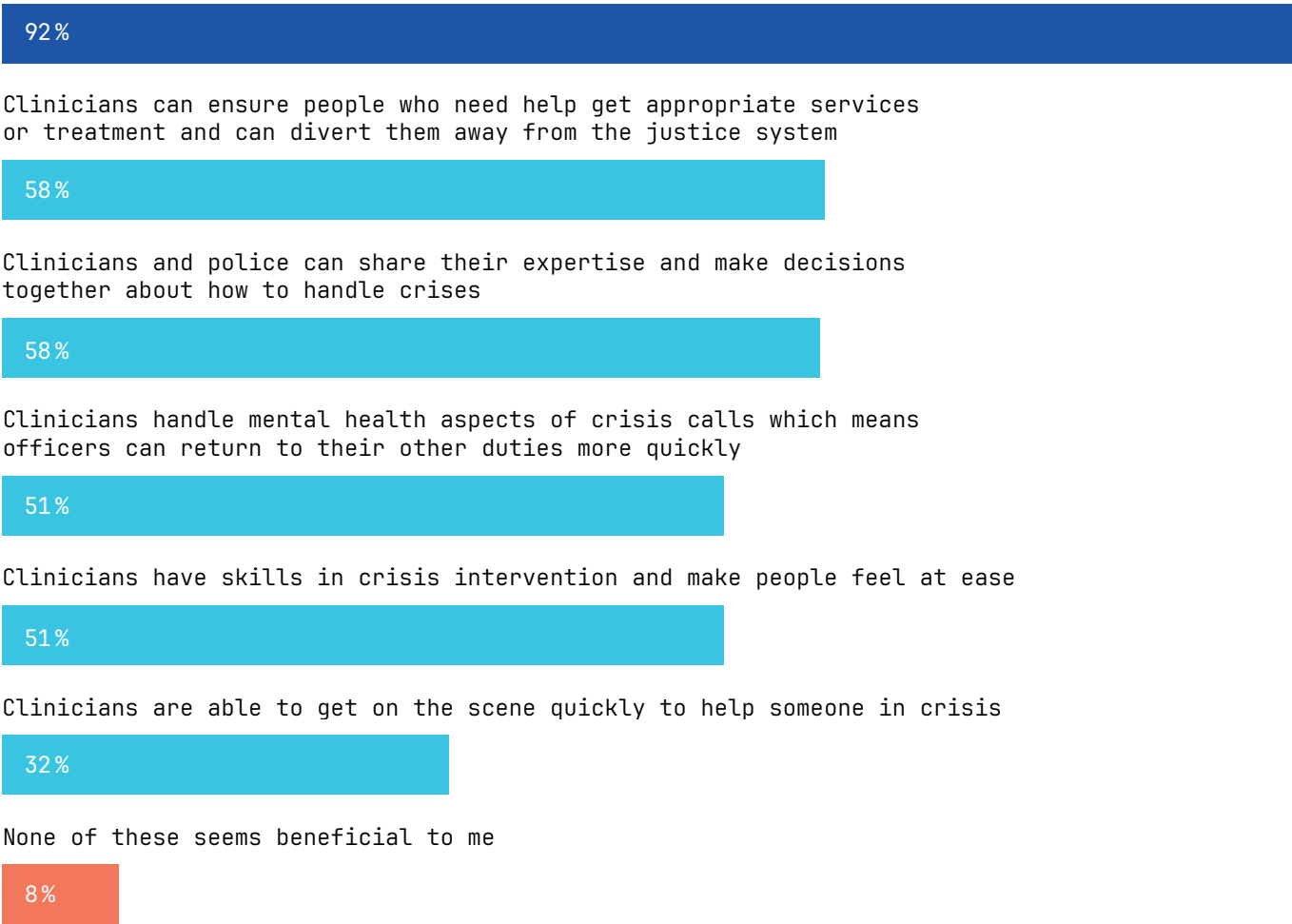
The groups for the relative rates were determined based on responses to a matrix asking: Which of the following do you have experience working with while on duty? (Select all that apply): 1. Trained mental health clinicians or social workers equipped with de-escalation techniques; 2. Trained professionals responding to non-injury traffic collisions; 3. Sobering centers and/or crisis stabilization centers for people experiencing overdoses; 4. Teams of trained mental health clinicians and medics responding to welfare checks and suicide threats; 5. Programs that employ residents trained in street outreach, mediating neighborhood conflicts and mentoring youth; 6. Online reporting systems. Responses found that 53% had experience with trained mental health clinicians or social workers equipped with de-escalation techniques; 26% had experience with trained professionals responding to non-injury traffic collisions; 32% had experience with sobering centers and/or crisis stabilization centers for people experiencing overdoses; 40% had experience with teams of trained mental health clinicians and medics responding to welfare checks and suicide threats; 28% had experience with programs that employ residents trained in street outreach, mediating neighborhood conflicts and mentoring youth; and 24% had experience with online reporting systems.

Fifty-eight percent of law enforcement viewed it as beneficial that clinicians can ensure people who need help get appropriate services or treatment and can divert them away from the justice system. Among law enforcement who had experience working with clinicians trained in de-escalation techniques, the number of respondents who found it beneficial rose to 65%. Fifty-eight percent of all surveyed law

enforcement also found it beneficial that clinicians and police can share their expertise and make decisions together about how to handle crises. A majority of law enforcement viewed it as beneficial that clinicians can handle mental health aspects of crisis calls so officers can return to their other duties more quickly and that clinicians have skills in crisis intervention and make people feel at ease.

Ninety-two percent of law enforcement officers identified at least one benefit of mental health clinicians responding to mental health crisis calls.

Selected at least one benefit of having clinicians responding to mental health crisis calls



Prompt: Interviews with officers who have worked with mental health clinicians in responding to mental health crisis calls have identified the following benefits. Select all that seem beneficial to you. 1. Clinicians have skills in crisis intervention and make people feel at ease; 2. Clinicians are able to get on the scene quickly to help someone in crisis; 3. Clinicians and police can share their expertise and make decisions together about how to handle crises; 4. Clinicians handle mental health aspects of crisis calls which means officers can return to their other duties more quickly; 5. Clinicians can ensure people who need help get appropriate services or treatment and can divert them away from the justice system; 6. None of these seems beneficial to me

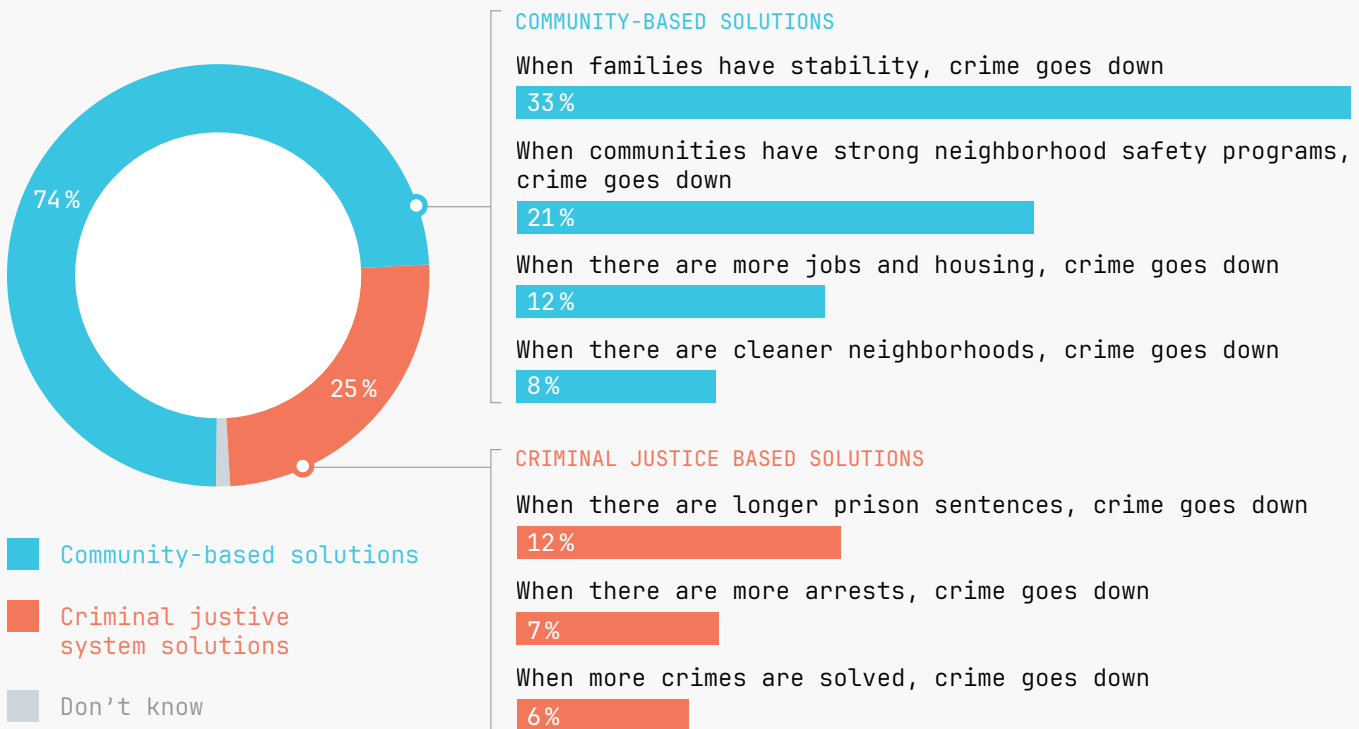


Majorities of law enforcement officers support common-sense safety solutions

A large majority of law enforcement officers believe that stable families, strong neighborhood safety programs, and more jobs and housing cause crime to go down – not more arrests or longer prison sentences.

When asked to choose which of the statements they agree with most, 74% of sworn officers chose neighborhood-based solutions as integral to crime reduction, including 33% who said when families have stability, crime goes down; 21% who said when communities have strong neighborhood safety programs, crime goes down; 12% who said when there are more jobs and housing, crime goes down; and

8% who said when there are cleaner neighborhoods, crime goes down. Collectively, 25% of sworn officers chose solutions carried out by the criminal justice system. Twelve percent said when there are longer prison sentences, crime goes down, 7% said when there are more arrests, crime goes down, and 6% said when more crimes are solved, crime goes down.



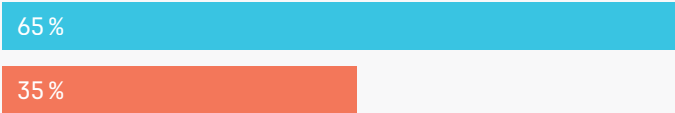
Prompt: Understanding you may agree with more than one, with which one of the following do you most agree? 1. When there are more jobs and housing, crime goes down; 2. When there are longer prison sentences, crime goes down; 3. When there are more arrests, crime goes down; 4. When there are cleaner neighborhoods, crime goes down; 5. When more crimes are solved, crime goes down; 6. When families have stability, crime goes down; 7. When communities have strong neighborhood safety programs, crime goes down; 8. Don't know



A majority (56%) of law enforcement prefers that governments invest more in preventing crime by strengthening communities over responding to crime by punishing people who commit crimes.



CUSTODIAL OFFICERS (N = 55)



PROBATION OFFICERS (N = 22)



SUPERVISORS (N = 56)



PATROL OR FIELD OFFICERS (N = 90)



INVESTIGATORS/DETECTIVES (N = 26)

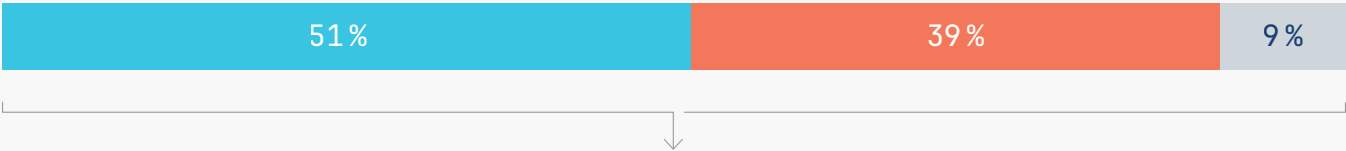
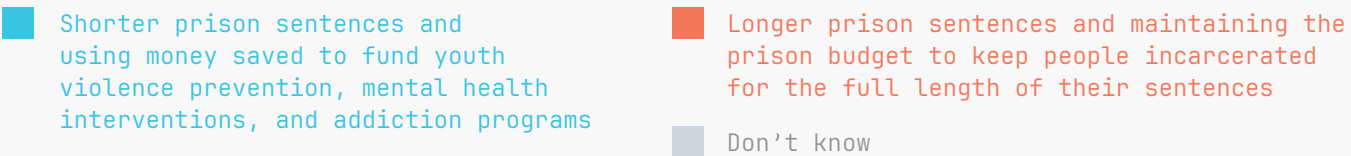


Support for prevention over punishment is especially high among officers working in prisons and jails. **65% of custodial officers** prefer preventing crime by **strengthening communities** while 35% prefer responding to crime by punishing people who commit crimes.

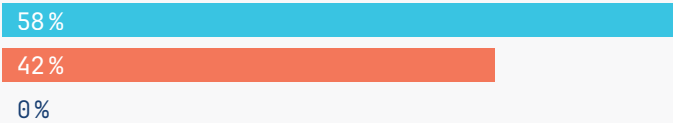
Prompt: Do you prefer that governments invest more in: 1. Preventing crime by strengthening communities; 2. Responding to crime by punishing people who commit crimes



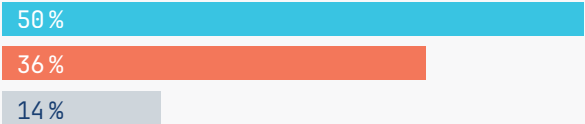
A majority (51%) of law enforcement prefers shorter prison sentences and using money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health interventions, and addiction programs.



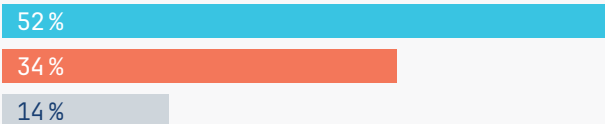
CUSTODIAL OFFICERS (N = 55)



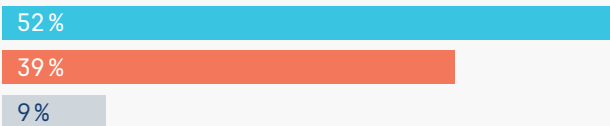
PROBATION OFFICERS (N = 22)



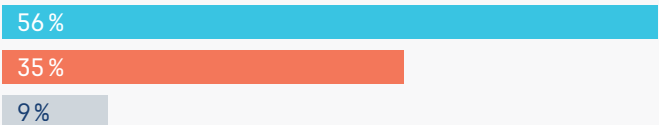
SUPERVISORS (N = 56)



PATROL OR FIELD OFFICERS (N = 90)



INVESTIGATORS/DETECTIVES (N = 26)



Fewer than two out of five law enforcement (39%) prefer longer prison sentences and maintaining the prison budget to keep people incarcerated for the full length of their sentence.

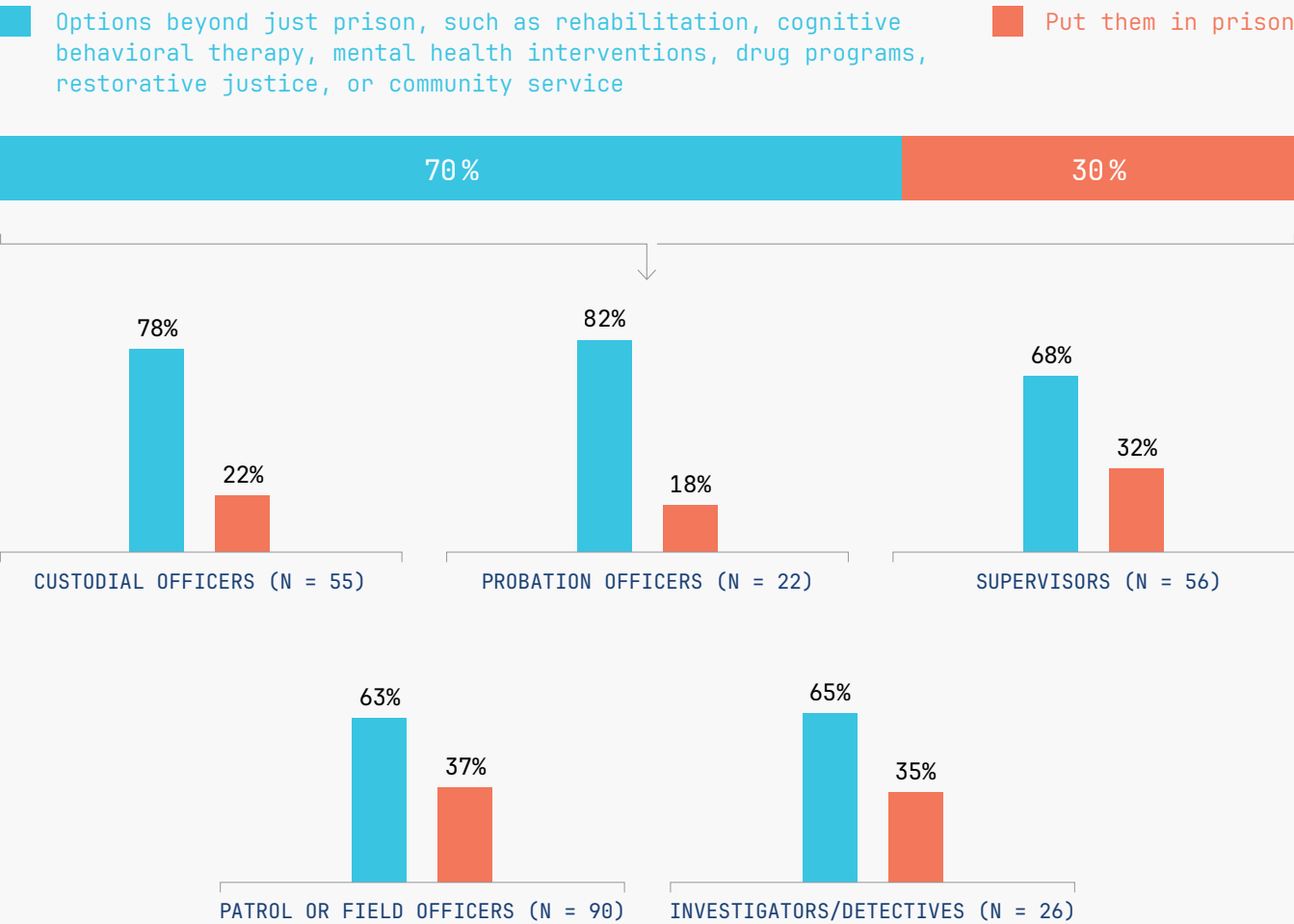
Prompt: Which do you prefer? 1. Shorter prison sentences and using money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health interventions, and addiction programs; 2. Longer prison sentences and maintaining the prison budget to keep people incarcerated for the full length of their sentences; 3. Don't know



When it comes to holding people who have committed crimes accountable, sworn officers prefer options beyond just putting people in prison by a margin of more than 2 to 1.

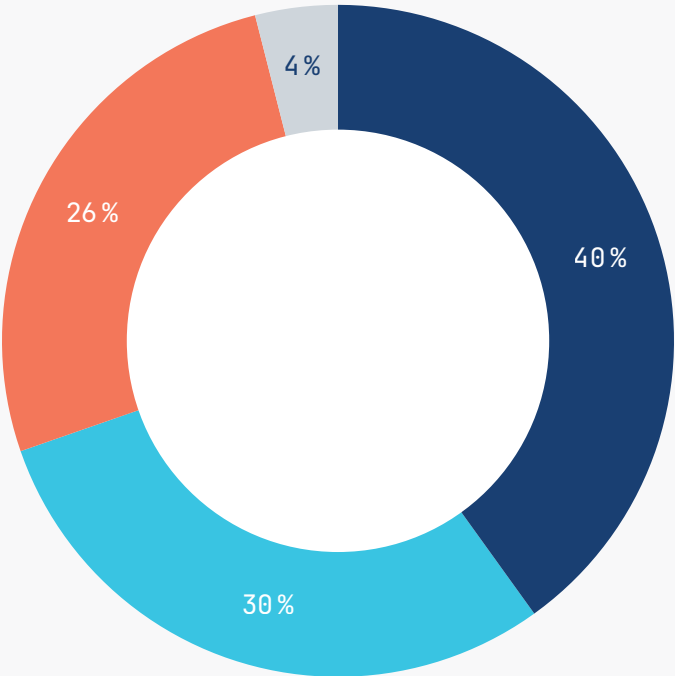
Among all surveyed law enforcement, 70% think the best way to hold people accountable when they commit crimes is with options beyond just prison, such as rehabilitation, cognitive behavioral therapy, mental health interventions, drug programs, restorative justice, or community service. Only 30% of law enforcement think the best way to hold people accountable when they commit crimes is putting them in prison.

Support for options beyond prison is especially high among groups who work most closely with people who may have spent time in jail or prison – custodial officers and probation officers. Nearly 8 out of 10 custodial officers (78%) and 82% of probation officers think the best way to hold people accountable for committing crimes is with options beyond just prison, such as rehabilitation, cognitive behavioral therapy, mental health interventions, drug programs, restorative justice, or community service.



Prompt: When people commit crimes, which do you think is generally the best way to hold them accountable?
1. Options beyond just prison, such as rehabilitation, cognitive behavioral therapy, mental health interventions, drug programs, restorative justice, or community service; 2. Put them in prison

Only 1 in 4 sworn officers (26%) believe that long prison sentences are the best way to prevent people from committing repeat crimes.



- Cognitive behavioral therapy and/or addiction treatment
- Job training and employment opportunities
- Long prison sentences
- Don't know

Prompt: What do you think is the most effective way to prevent people from committing repeat crimes? 1. Cognitive behavioral therapy and/or addiction treatment; 2. Job training and employment opportunities; 3. Long prison sentences; 4. Don't know

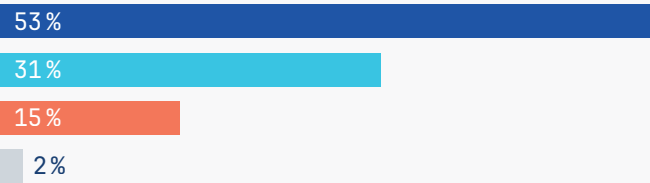


40% of sworn officers think cognitive behavioral therapy and addiction treatment are the **most effective ways**, and another 30% think job training and employment opportunities are the most effective ways to prevent people from committing repeat crimes.

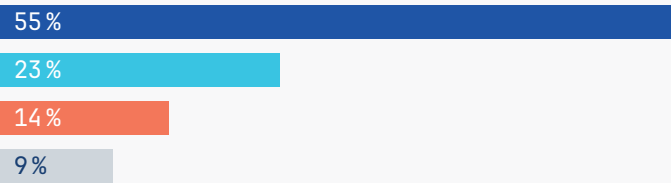


Probation officers and officers who work in prisons and jails are the groups least likely to think long prison sentences are the most effective strategy. A majority of custodial officers (53%) and probation officers (55%) think cognitive behavioral therapy is the most effective strategy.

CUSTODIAL OFFICERS (N = 55)



PROBATION OFFICERS (N = 22)



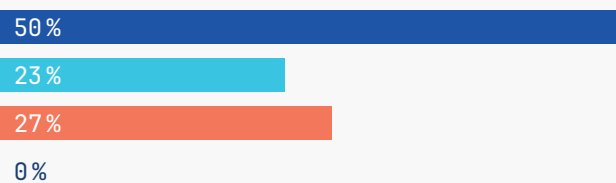
SUPERVISORS (N = 56)



PATROL OR FIELD OFFICERS (N = 90)



INVESTIGATORS/DETECTIVES (N = 26)



- Cognitive behavioral therapy and/or addiction treatment
- Job training and employment opportunities
- Long prison sentences
- Don't know



Fewer than 1 in 6 custodial officers (15%) and 1 in 7 probation officers (14%) think that long prison sentences are the most effective way to prevent people from committing repeat crimes.

Prompt: What do you think is the most effective way to prevent people from committing repeat crimes? 1. Cognitive behavioral therapy and/or addiction treatment; 2. Job training and employment opportunities; 3. Long prison sentences; 4. Don't know



For people who have completed their sentences and remained crime-free, 63% of law enforcement prefer policies that allow them to clear their public records to expand job opportunities and housing stability when law enforcement still maintains access to records.



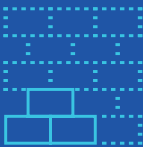
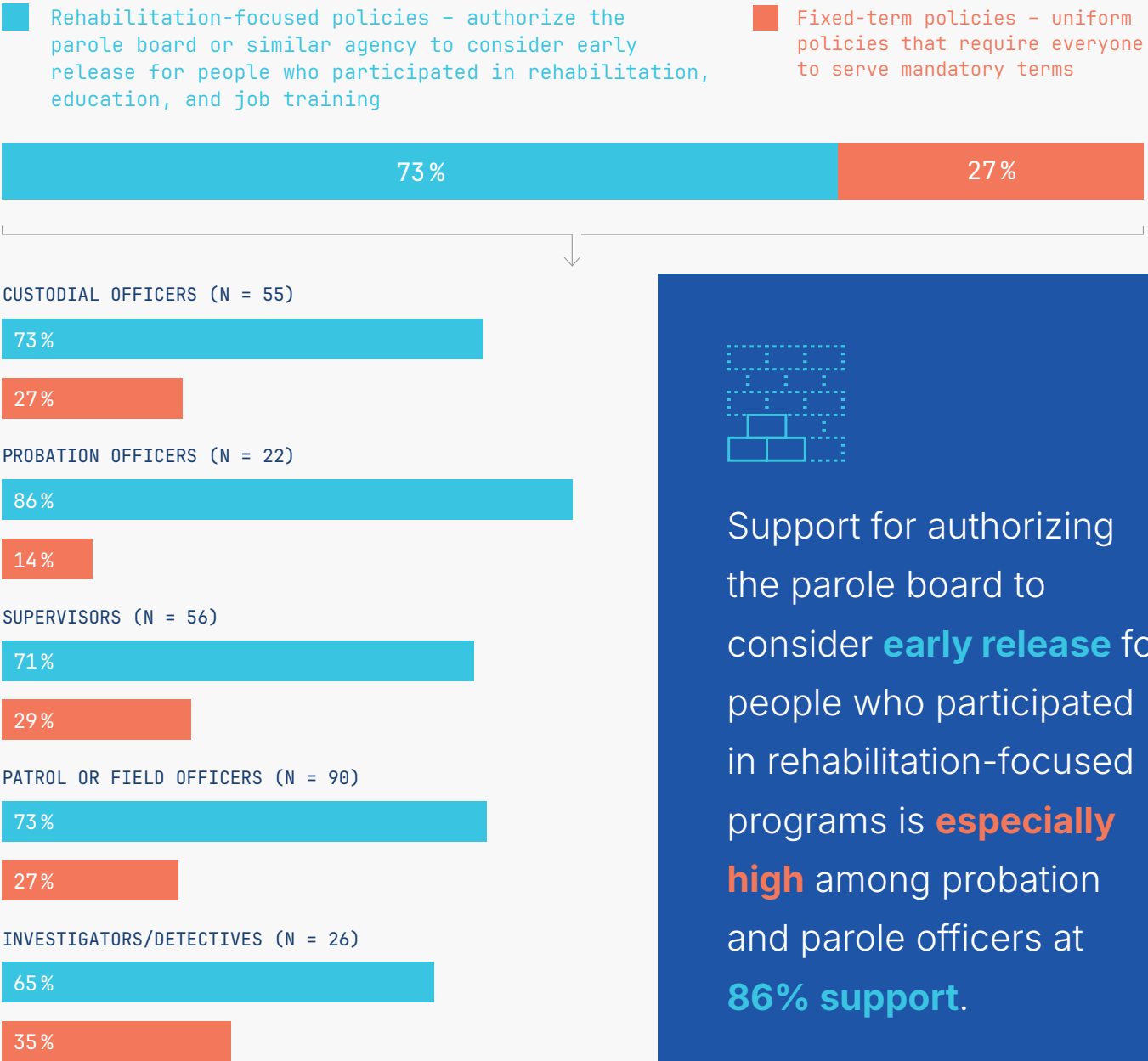
Support for record clearance is strong across the different law enforcement roles surveyed and highest among probation officers and patrol or field officers with nearly **7 out of 10** (68%) preferring record clearance.



Prompt: For people who have completed their sentences and remained crime-free, which do you prefer: 1. Policies that allow them to clear their public records to expand job opportunities and housing stability. Law enforcement would still maintain access; 2. Policies that allow records to appear on background checks for employment or housing



For people in prison who are going to be released, nearly 3 out of 4 sworn officers (73%) prefer policies that authorize the parole board to consider early release for people who participated in rehabilitation, education, and job training.



Support for authorizing the parole board to consider **early release** for people who participated in rehabilitation-focused programs is **especially high** among probation and parole officers at **86% support**.

Prompt: For people in prison who are going to be released, do you prefer: 1. Rehabilitation-focused policies - authorize the parole board or similar agency to consider early release for people who participated in rehabilitation, education, and job training; 2. Fixed-term policies - uniform policies that require everyone to serve mandatory terms



Conclusion & Recommendations: Views Shaped by Experience



Law enforcement officers' views of public safety are shaped by their experiences as the first responders to much more than crime; they are the de facto first responders to America's crises of mental health, substance use disorder, and homelessness-related issues. Direct experience matters. Nearly all law enforcement have experience with these social crises and that experience informs their views on what works in public safety.

This survey demonstrates that law enforcement officers believe that the growth of a strong ecosystem of neighborhood programs, diversion programs, and alternatives to traditional responses to crime

would benefit public safety and help law enforcement do their jobs.

Officers with direct experience working with the range of programs that can prevent violence, reduce neighborhood crises, and reduce recidivism report very strong support for these programs. Officers who have worked with violence interruption programs are more likely to report that these programs promote safety, as are officers who have worked with mental health workers trained in de-escalation tactics. Custodial officers have extensive experience working with people who have been sentenced to long prison terms, and – even more than their other

law enforcement colleagues – they support shorter prison sentences and using money saved to fund youth violence prevention, mental health interventions, and addiction programs. The officers whose work most puts them in contact with people who may have an old record – field, patrol, and probation or parole officers – exhibit the strongest support for record clearance policies. Custodial officers and probation or parole officers support early release policies for people who participated in rehabilitation, education,

and job training at notably high rates – 73% and 86%, respectively. Just 15% of custodial officers say that long prison sentences are the best way to prevent people from committing repeat crime; many more identify cognitive behavioral therapy, addiction treatment, job training, and employment opportunities to be more effective.

The results of this national survey of law enforcement officers point to three clear policy recommendations for public officials.

1 To build a stronger public safety infrastructure and reduce burdens on law enforcement, scale up public investments in the range of neighborhood programs that can prevent crisis from becoming crime.

As the de facto front-line responders to social crises involving mental health, substance use disorder, and homelessness, law enforcement officers bear the stresses of an unbalanced and fragmented public safety infrastructure. In many communities, the burdens associated with social crises fall on law enforcement departments for the simple reason that the range of neighborhood programs that would help either do not exist or lack the resources to meet the need. All of us stand to benefit from a stronger public safety infrastructure that includes neighborhood organizations working to mentor youth, interrupt cycles of violence, respond to people dealing with psychiatric or housing crises, help victims, and address substance use disorders. These programs are essential safety programs that reduce burdens on law enforcement and improve safety for all.

2 To prevent existing neighborhood programs from closing down, provide emergency financial support for violence prevention, mental health, diversion and other community-based programs that are struggling to stay afloat.

Many of the programs that make our communities and officers' jobs safer need emergency support to continue operations and maintain staff. When programs shut down or experience reductions, officers face disruptions to their work, and communities must grapple with additional instability. Maintaining existing programs that are preventing crime cycles should be a top public safety priority for public officials at the local, state, and federal level.



3 To reduce recidivism and save public safety dollars, expand common-sense criminal justice policies that focus on prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Like the general public, law enforcement officers prefer criminal justice policies that can prevent violence and repeat crime, and create incentives for people exiting the justice system to safely re-integrate and succeed. Policymakers should implement policies preferred by law enforcement officers, such as:

- 1 record change policies that allow people with old records to clear their old criminal records to expand eligibility for employment and housing stability
- 2 policies that authorize parole boards to consider early release for people who participated in rehabilitation, education, and job training
- 3 policies that pursue accountability through options beyond prison, such as rehabilitation, cognitive behavioral therapy, mental health interventions, drug programs, restorative justice, or community service

Methodology

Alliance for Safety and Justice commissioned Centiment to conduct this survey, which took place from October 21 to November 25, 2025. Centiment utilized their online panel to recruit respondents. The survey was distributed to people living in the United States whose data on file with Centiment indicated that they worked in the public sector. The survey asked screening questions that identified people who currently work in law enforcement as sworn officers. People who worked in law enforcement but in legal or prosecutorial roles, administrative roles, support roles, or any role other than a sworn officer were screened out. Out of the 3,793 people who began the survey, 3,515 were screened out because they did not work in law enforcement or did not currently work as sworn officers. One additional person was screened out because they indicated that they worked as a probation aide, a role that is generally not held by sworn law enforcement officers. The size of the final sample was 277 people. The margin of error due to sampling for the full sample with a 95% confidence interval is $\pm 5.9\%$. The margin of error for subpopulations is larger.

The sample included sworn officers working for all types of law enforcement agencies, including police and sheriffs' departments, correctional agencies, probation and parole departments, transit and airport police departments, federal law enforcement agencies, and agencies that are part of the Department of Homeland Security. The sample included patrol officers (n = 90), custodial officers (n = 55), supervising officers (n = 56), and detectives and investigators (n = 26). The category of probation and parole officers (n = 22) was constructed during analysis to account for an oversight in survey design and includes all officers who work for probation or parole agencies other than those who indicated that they were supervisors as well as nine people who work for corrections agencies who identified as patrol or field officers. (Many wrote that they were probation or parole officers in the "other" field provided, though some entered "patrol officer.") Twenty-eight officers working as tactical or SWAT team officers (n = 10), traffic enforcement officers (n = 10), school resource officers (n = 7), and one self-described "Special Police Officer" were categorized



as “other.” Results for “other” officers are included in the overall results but, because they have such varied roles, are not highlighted in sections where we

present results according to role. Full responses and the replication code are available at the Open Science Framework at osf.io/sxfqd/.

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MLA Just Safe. (2026). Law enforcement views on safety and justice: National survey reveals strong support for common-sense safety solutions, <https://justsafe.org/resources/law-enforcement-views-on-safety-and-justice>.

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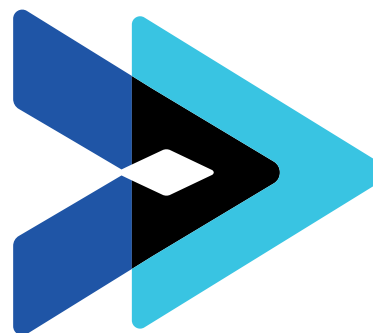


Endnotes

- 1 Police1, What Cops Want in 2025 (May 2025), 4, <https://www.police1.com/what-cops-want>.
- 2 This is the first survey that recruits sworn law enforcement officers directly, bypassing the agencies for whom they work and the groups that represent them, such as unions or police benevolent societies. Prior surveys by the Pew Research Center and Police1, exclusively recruited respondents through law enforcement agencies or benevolent societies. This survey used an online panel to recruit participants outside of professional channels. For more information about the survey design, see the methodology. For information about other surveys, see Rich Morin, Kim Parker, Renee Stepler, and Andrew Mercer, *Behind the Badge: Amid Protests and Calls for Reform, How Police View Their Jobs, Key Issues and Recent Fatal Encounters Between Blacks and Police* (Pew Research Center, January 2017), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/>; and Police1, What Cops Want in 2025 (May 2025), <https://www.police1.com/what-cops-want>. For other surveys of law enforcement, see Maurice Chammah, "We Surveyed U.S. Sheriffs. See Their Views on Power, Race and Immigration," *The Marshall Project* (October 18, 2022), <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/10/18/we-surveyed-u-s-sheriffs-see-their-views-on-power-race-and-immigration> and National Fraternal Order of Police, 2023 Critical Issues in Policing Survey (2023), <https://fop.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2023-Survey-report-FINAL.pdf>.
- 3 National Emergency Number Association, "911 Statistics" (n.d.) , <https://www.nena.org/page/911statistics>.
- 4 Brian Larkin, Survey of Likely Voters on Safety Services Ninety Percent of Likely Voters Support Federal Funding for Violence Prevention, McLaughlin and Associates, Commissioned by the Alliance for Safety and Justice (September 2025), <https://justsafe.org/resources/survey-likely-voters-safety-services-1/> and Brian Larkin, Survey of Likely Voters on Safety Services Shows Republican and 2024 Trump Voters Support Federal Funding for Violence Prevention Programs and Victim Services, McLaughlin & Associates, Commissioned by the Alliance for Safety and Justice (September 2025), <https://justsafe.org/resources/survey-likely-voters-safety-services-shows-republican-and-2024-trump-voters-support-0/>.
- 5 National Emergency Number Association, "911 Statistics" (n.d.) , <https://www.nena.org/page/911statistics>.
- 6 Vera Institute for Justice, *911 Analysis: Our Overreliance on Police by the Numbers* (April, 2022), <https://www.vera.org/publications/911-analysis>.
- 7 Brian Larkin, Survey of Likely Voters on Safety Services Ninety Percent of Likely Voters Support Federal Funding for Violence Prevention, McLaughlin and Associates, Commissioned by the Alliance for Safety and Justice (September 2025), <https://justsafe.org/resources/survey-likely-voters-safety-services-1/> and Brian Larkin, Survey of Likely Voters on Safety Services Shows Republican and 2024 Trump Voters Support Federal Funding for Violence Prevention Programs and Victim Services, McLaughlin & Associates, Commissioned by the Alliance for Safety and Justice (September 2025), <https://justsafe.org/resources/survey-likely-voters-safety-services-shows-republican-and-2024-trump-voters-support-0/>.

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