

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO DRAFTING YOUR OWN COMMUNITY SAFETY POLICY AT THE LOCAL-LEVEL

A Community Safety Policy is a policy agenda that makes non-carceral, life-affirming safety investments now, as well as institutionalizes these investments so that they are sustained over time. Our Community Safety Policy is modeled on the The People's Response Act, as introduced by Congresswomen Cori Bush, Ayanna Pressley, Jan Schakowsky, and Pramila Jayapal, and The BREATHE Act, created by the Movement for Black Lives and championed by Congresswomen Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib. This policy begins a journey that is essential for shifting our current paradigm—moving the concept of “safety” from a primarily criminal-legal model and funding regime to a new framework that roots safety in public health.

*This guide must be adapted to meet local needs.
See the full local policy guide for a more
comprehensive overview.*



THE STEPS

STEP #1: CREATE A GRANT PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY-LED ORGANIZATIONS

Provide grants to community-led organizations (CBOs) that are implementing non-carceral programs with a “demonstrable connection” to public safety—programs like violence interruption, non-carceral crisis response, behavioral health, supportive housing, housing vouchers, and reentry support. Ensure that this funding includes capacity-building and streamlined reporting/application requirements to ensure that all organizations can benefit.

STEP #2: ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY SAFETY AGENCY THAT CAN OVERSEE NON-CARCERAL SAFETY INVESTMENTS

To administer the CBO grant and ensure that other agencies prioritize non-carceral safety needs, every jurisdiction should have an entity (“Community Safety Agency”) dedicated to non-carceral safety. In some jurisdictions, this entity may be a designated office or agency within the local government; in others, this entity may be independent from government. In either model, the Community Safety Agency should have responsibility for (1) assessing the safety needs of the local community; (2) designing a three-year Safety Action Plan to address those needs; and (3) administering grants to implement the Safety Action Plan. The Agency should also oversee any systems of non-carceral crisis response.

STEP #3: ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD WITH STATUTORY POWER

Local jurisdictions must ensure that the Community Safety Agency is ultimately led by community members, including and especially those people who have been most impacted by criminal-legal harm, their families, and their neighborhoods. To this end, we recommend creating a Community Advisory Board (“Board”) that has teeth to design a process for decision-making during grantmaking, provide final approval of the Safety Action Plan, and monitor the Safety Action Plan’s implementation.

STEP #4: USE A PARTICIPATORY MECHANISM TO CREATE A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN.

The Community Safety Agency should conduct a “Safety Needs Assessment” at regular intervals—not fewer than once every three years—using a participatory process to identify core, systemic needs that are driving criminal-legal contact locally and the underlying needs of individuals who are incarcerated in local jails. Then the Agency should produce a Safety Action Plan that recommends funding priorities based on these identified needs.

STEP #5: CREATE AN INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE.

To ensure coordination between various local agencies, local policymakers might consider creating an interagency task force charged with coordinating, promoting, and otherwise advancing non-carceral safety. The taskforce may afford a crucial opportunity to get the buy-in, support, and insights of agencies that would not otherwise be aligned with non-carceral approaches.

MUST-HAVES OF ANY COMMUNITY SAFETY POLICY

- Ensure robust, ongoing funding for the Division of Community Safety.
- Ensure funding preferences for representative community-led organizations.
- Center individuals impacted by the criminal-legal system.
- Ensure all funding flows have requirements to preserve the non-carceral, non-punitive character of the dollars being spent.

For technical assistance, please reach out to Felicia Gomez with Essie Justice Group at felicia@essiejusticegroup.org and Thea Sebastian with Civil Rights Corps at thea@civilrightscorps.org