



# REFUNDING COMMUNITIES

A Pathway Forward to Real Public Safety

A REPORT BY THE NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



## THE NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Established in 1999 by Alan V. and Amy Lowenstein, the Institute's cutting-edge racial and social justice advocacy seeks to empower people of color by building reparative systems that create wealth, transform justice and harness democratic power – from the ground up – in New Jersey. Known for our dynamic and independent advocacy aimed at toppling load-bearing walls of structural inequality to create just, vibrant and healthy communities, we are committed to exposing and repairing the cracks of structural racism in our foundation that erupt into earthquakes in communities of color. The Institute advocates for systemic reform that is at once transformative, achievable in the state and replicable in communities across the nation.

Ryan P. Haygood, President & CEO  
Andrea McChristian, Law & Policy Director  
Yannick Wood, Director of Criminal Justice Reform  
Brooke Lewis, Associate Counsel (primary author)

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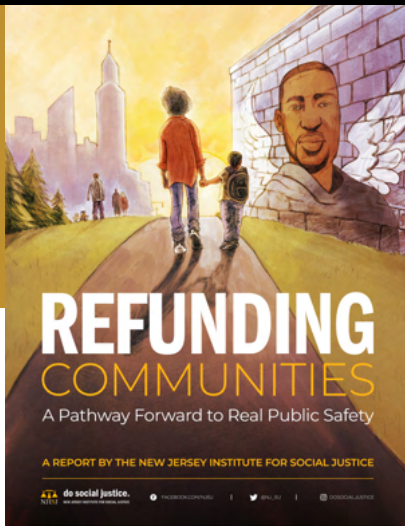
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\*Deceased

### NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

60 Park Place, Suite 511  
Newark, New Jersey 07102-5504  
973-624-9400



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the months following the murder of George Floyd, people across the country protested, determined to finally create a system of police accountability. In response to this call, many cities and states passed legislative reforms.

New Jersey must also create a culture of accountability through passing foundational police reform legislation—including banning chokeholds, eliminating qualified immunity and empowering civilian review boards with subpoena powers. New Jersey must also create a statewide policy protecting the First Amendment rights of people like Darnella Frazier who record police conduct. These measures are necessary and readily achievable.

Yet, while holding police accountable is necessary for public safety, it is not enough. A successful public safety strategy also requires meaningful investments in the community resources that keep people safe without law enforcement intervention. *Refunding Communities: A Pathway Forward to Real Public Safety*, a report by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, explores the ways New Jersey can make meaningful investments in community-based public safety systems. Specifically, this report argues that the way forward to real public safety requires New Jersey to engage in the following two community-centered paths forward:

## **1. Strengthening Community-Based Responses**

- a. *Create a behavioral health first responder pilot program*
- b. *Make deep investments in community-based violence prevention programs and other effective community-based responder programs*

## **2. Increasing Funding for Community-Based Resources**

- a. *Invest in restorative justice*
- b. *Invest in school resources*
- c. *Invest in supportive housing*

# Introduction

***Nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds.***

That is the amount of time former police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's neck.<sup>1</sup> For nearly five of those minutes, Mr. Floyd desperately cried out for help, and for nearly another four, he was completely unresponsive.<sup>2</sup> As Mr. Floyd was being murdered, three other officers did nothing to help him.<sup>3</sup>

But for the bravery of recording bystanders like seventeen-year-old Darnella Frazier,<sup>4</sup> Mr. Floyd's murder would have likely stood, as it was originally considered, a "medical incident."<sup>5</sup> Outraged communities across the country took to the streets to protest Mr. Floyd's killing, along with the law enforcement killing of countless others, determined to finally build a system of accountable policing.

In the months following these protests, at least 30 states and the District of Columbia passed legislative police reforms.<sup>6</sup> For example, New Mexico,<sup>7</sup> Colorado<sup>8</sup> and New York City<sup>9</sup> eliminated qualified immunity, a practice that has historically prevented victims of police brutality from seeking legal redress.<sup>10</sup> Other states – including New York and California – banned law enforcement chokeholds.<sup>11</sup>

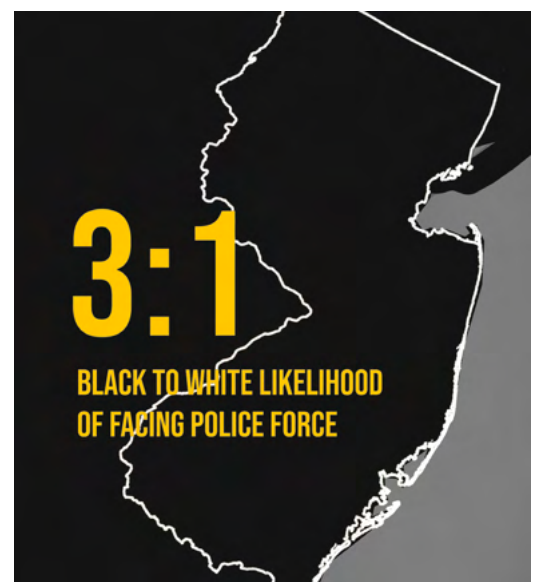
Despite these efforts, nearly 1,000 people were killed by police nationwide in the last year, an annual number that remains largely fixed, despite growing advocacy for police accountability.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the 24 hours following the Derek Chauvin trial verdict, at least six people were killed by law enforcement.<sup>13</sup> This onslaught of police violence disproportionately impacts Black people, who experience 21 percent of all police interactions, despite being only 13 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Black men are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white men, and Black women are 1.4 times more likely to be killed by police than white women.<sup>15</sup>

The persistence of racialized police violence, in the face of these reforms, makes it clear that in addition to building a system of accountability in policing, we must also fundamentally reimagine our public safety systems. As *The Washington Post* wrote:

We should think about public safety the way we think about public health. No one would suggest that hospitals alone can keep a population healthy, no matter how well run they might be. A healthy community needs neighborhood clinics, health education, parks, environments free of toxins, government policies that protect the public during health emergencies, and so much more. Health isn't just about hospitals; safety isn't just about police.<sup>16</sup>

This conversation is especially relevant here in New Jersey, where our criminal justice system is plagued by some of the nation's worst racial disparities. A Black person in New Jersey is three times more likely to have the police use force against them than their white counterparts.<sup>17</sup> New Jersey is also home to the worst incarceration racial disparities in the nation, with Black adults being over 12 times more likely to be incarcerated than white adults,<sup>18</sup> and Black youth nearly 18 times more likely to be locked up than white youth.<sup>19</sup>

And yet, unlike other states, New Jersey's legislature has yet to pass foundational police accountability legislation in the wake of George Floyd's murder.<sup>20</sup> As of October 2021, New Jersey lawmakers have failed to ban law enforcement chokeholds,<sup>21</sup> eliminate qualified immunity<sup>22</sup> or permit civilian complaint review boards to have independent subpoena power.<sup>23</sup> In fact, one of New Jersey's modest legislative victories, a law requiring New Jersey officers to wear body-cameras,<sup>24</sup> was diminished by the subsequent passage of a fast-tracked bill giving police a special right to review body-camera footage before completing reports or making official statements;<sup>25</sup> this bill is currently sitting on Governor Murphy's desk.<sup>26</sup>



# The Way Forward:

## Refunding Communities in the Garden State

It is past time for New Jersey to create a system of police accountability that will build trust in Black communities and other communities of color. The Institute has stood at the forefront of building this system of accountability in New Jersey – with a particular focus in Newark. As a member of the federal Independent Monitoring Team overseeing the Newark Consent Decree process, the Institute has, through community surveys, public meetings and ongoing community feedback, facilitated community-driven transformation of the Newark Police Division, including the creation of sixteen new policies. These policies codify reforms across areas including stops, searches, and arrests; use of force; community policing; bias-free policing; the First Amendment right to record police and more. While significant work still lies ahead, the transformation of the Newark Police is already being felt throughout the community. During the 2020 protests in response to the murder of George Floyd, Newark stood in stark contrast to cities across the country – and to the Rebellion of 1967 – with its peaceful response to demonstrators.<sup>27</sup> Remarkably, Newark also had no officer-involved shootings in 2020.<sup>28</sup>

Building upon the successes of Newark, New Jersey must listen to the calls of communities across the state and pass foundational police accountability legislation, including completely banning law enforcement chokeholds, ending qualified immunity and affording civilian complaint review boards subpoena power. The New Jersey Office of the Attorney General must also take steps to protect recording bystanders like Darnella Frazier who seek to hold law enforcement accountable. Specifically, the Attorney General should issue a statewide policy prohibiting officers from intimidating or discouraging people from filming or otherwise infringing on the First Amendment right to record police conduct. These measures are necessary – and readily achievable – to hold law enforcement accountable in New Jersey.

Holding police accountable is necessary, but not enough. In addition to a system of accountability, New Jersey must also make deeper investments in the community-based systems that keep people safe without law enforcement intervention. The focus of this report will be to begin to reimagine public safety in New Jersey through two community-centered paths forward: (1) strengthening community-based responses and (2) increasing funding for community-based resources.

## Strengthening Community-Based Responses

First, New Jersey should prioritize well-funded community-based responses to address public safety concerns. People with untreated, severe mental illness are killed at alarming rates during police interactions<sup>29</sup> and many calls to police are health-related, not criminal.<sup>30</sup> In New Jersey, community members, including a military veteran,<sup>31</sup> have been killed by police while experiencing mental health complications. New Jersey can improve its public safety and preserve valuable law enforcement resources through creating a community-based behavioral health first responder pilot program in locations throughout the state. “Behavioral health” is a broad term frequently used to refer to “the promotion of mental health, resilience and wellbeing” as well as “the treatment of mental and substance use disorders.”<sup>32</sup> This report will discuss community-based approaches to addressing mental health crises specifically as well as other broader behavioral health concerns.

Furthermore, beyond establishing behavioral health first responders, New Jersey should expand its existing community-led violence prevention programs. There are already successful community-led violence prevention programs in New Jersey, such as the Newark Community Street Team, which send trained interventionists to de-escalate community conflicts.<sup>33</sup> These types of programs offer communities an important opportunity to resolve conflicts and prevent violence without law enforcement intervention.

## Increasing Funding for Community-Based Resources

Second, outside of creating and expanding community responder programs, New Jersey should meaningfully increase investment in community resources that promote safety, especially in Black and Brown communities that have experienced systemic divestment.<sup>32</sup> Research shows that properly funded community assets, such as parks, schools, housing and access to quality healthcare are known to help keep communities safe.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, restorative justice systems, like those in Oakland and Chicago, are a valuable resource for communities to resolve conflicts outside the criminal justice system while reducing recidivism.<sup>36</sup> However, despite the important role these community resources play in creating safe communities, New Jersey’s public safety budgets often exclusively fund police and other law enforcement measures, despite law enforcement spending having little or no correlation with public safety outcomes.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, people working on the front lines of community-led response teams report that more community-based resources are needed to sustain public safety.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, creating strong community-based public safety systems will require meaningful investments in community-based resources.



# Strengthening Community-Based Responses

New Jersey should strengthen its community-based responses through investing in behavioral health first responders and community-led violence prevention programs. Lawmakers should pass legislation creating a behavioral health first responder pilot program in select cities, and state and local budgets should robustly fund community-based violence prevention programs. Furthermore, state and local budgets should support community-based resources that promote safety, such as restorative justice programs, school-based resources, including nurses and counselors, and supportive housing. These initial steps will give communities more opportunities to address mental health crises and violence prevention needs without law enforcement intervention.

## ***A. The Challenge***

Too many cases of police violence result from calls for service involving people experiencing behavioral health crises. While such situations should be handled by trained behavioral health professionals, factors like underfunded community-based behavioral health care and dwindling access to inpatient beds have inadvertently put police officers on the front lines of responding to these circumstances.<sup>39</sup> The Treatment Advocacy Center, a national non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating barriers to the successful treatment of severe mental illness, reports that people living with untreated, severe mental illness are approximately 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter, making up about one in four fatal law enforcement interactions.<sup>40</sup>



Here in New Jersey, Maurice Gordon, an unarmed Black man, was killed by a state trooper during what many believe was a mental health crisis.<sup>41</sup> Later, Gulia Dale III, a Black military veteran believed to be experiencing a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder episode, was killed by police after his family called for help.<sup>42</sup> Most recently, the United States Supreme Court rejected an appeal of a lower court's ruling that allowed a New Jersey state trooper to be covered by qualified immunity.<sup>43</sup> That trooper fatally shot Willie Gibbons, a man who the trooper knew was reportedly suffering from a mental illness.<sup>44</sup> Gibbons was pointing a gun at his own head.<sup>45</sup>



*Protests erupted across the U.S. in 2020 as police violence against Black communities was recorded and spread across social media.*

Recognizing the need to improve law enforcement's response to behavioral health, New Jersey initiated a Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) Pilot Program in Atlantic City, Paterson, Trenton, Millville and with the New Jersey State Police in Trenton.<sup>46</sup> This training provides "law enforcement officers and mental health professionals with knowledge and skills that allow them to respond to the individual in psychiatric crisis in a manner that minimizes the potential for injury."<sup>47</sup> However, while officers nationally perceive better outcomes after receiving CIT training, there is mixed evidence that the training actually leads to better outcomes in practice.<sup>48</sup> Beyond CIT training, some police departments, including the Newark Police Division,<sup>49</sup> Bridgewater Police Department<sup>50</sup> and Stafford Police Department,<sup>51</sup> work with social workers and other behavioral health professionals to support police in responding to mental and behavioral health calls for service. While these initiatives are an encouraging step toward improving law enforcement's interactions with vulnerable communities, New Jersey can do more to de-center law enforcement from mental and behavioral health responses.

Even in situations not involving behavioral health, some people do not feel comfortable calling the police for help.<sup>52</sup> Black, Latina/Latino, LGBTQIA and other communities too often fear that calling the police will escalate conflicts or otherwise put themselves in danger<sup>53</sup> – and thus respond to community conflicts or other public safety challenges without calling the police.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, one study showed that 32 percent of U.S.-born Latina/Latino residents would rather contact a community or church member to report a crime and 50 percent of Latina/Latino residents born outside the U.S. would prefer to do the same.<sup>55</sup> To achieve the best public safety options for all communities, New Jersey must explore community-led responses.

## ***B. The Solution***

New Jersey should develop a behavioral health first responder program and expand the use of community-based violence prevention programs. To decrease the danger that can result from unnecessary contact between community members and police and to alleviate strain on valuable law enforcement resources, some cities have implemented community-led behavioral health responder systems. These types of response systems send unarmed, community-based responders and resources to address non-violent emergencies like mental health crisis, addiction, homelessness and other health and behavioral crises. There are several programs – including those in Oregon, Colorado and New York – that can be useful guideposts to New Jersey as it seeks to develop behavioral health first responder systems in communities throughout the state.

One of the nation's most longstanding non-police first responder systems is the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) program in Eugene, Oregon, which has been operating for more than 30 years.<sup>56</sup> The CAHOOTS program provides an unarmed, community-based crisis response team that handles calls for service related to “mental illness, homelessness, and addiction.”<sup>57</sup> Instead of police, the CAHOOTS program sends a two-person team,<sup>58</sup> and is available 24-hours a day.<sup>59</sup> In about 24,000 calls for service over the course of a year, the CAHOOTS crisis response team requested police assistance in only 150 cases, less than one percent of the time.<sup>60</sup> Notably, the CAHOOTS program is also cost-effective, saving the city of Eugene about \$8.5 million each year.<sup>61</sup>

Inspired by the success of the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, Oregon, Denver developed the Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) Program, which similarly provides community-centered crisis response.<sup>62</sup> The STAR program is a collaboration between Caring for Denver Foundation, Denver Police Department, Mental Health Center of Denver (MHCD), Denver Health Paramedic Division, Denver 911 and additional community resources.<sup>63</sup> The program was initially housed within the Denver Police Department, but has plans to be moved to the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment.<sup>64</sup> During the six-month pilot from June through November 2020, the STAR program responded to 748 calls, with none requiring police assistance.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the CAHOOTS and STAR programs, New York City recently launched the Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD) pilot program.<sup>66</sup> This pilot was launched on June 6, 2021<sup>67</sup> and operates in East Harlem and parts of Central and North Harlem.<sup>68</sup> In its first month, the pilot responded to 107 emergency behavioral health calls.<sup>69</sup> One of the goals of the B-HEARD program was to prevent the need for people experiencing mental health crises to be transported to the hospital.<sup>70</sup> This goal appears to be effectively addressed, with only 50 percent of calls responded to by B-HEARD requiring hospital transfer compared to 82 percent of calls responded to by law enforcement.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond these behavioral health first responder programs, there are a variety of community-led violence prevention programs that keep communities safe without police. For example, programs using the street outreach model take a public health approach to reducing violence by providing crisis response services along with long-term services to people and communities impacted by violence.<sup>72</sup> Programs, like CURE Violence<sup>73</sup> and Save Our Streets,<sup>74</sup> send outreach workers or “violence interrupters” with lived experiences to mediate conflicts in their neighborhoods.<sup>75</sup> These programs have proven to be highly effective at preventing violence, with a 2017 evaluation of the Cure Violence program in two New York City neighborhoods showing a 37 percent decrease in gun injuries and a 63 percent decline in shooting victimizations compared to two comparable neighborhoods.<sup>76</sup>



New Jersey is also home to successful community-based violence prevention programs, including the Newark Community Street Team (NCST). The NCST is a community-based violence prevention program that has proven highly effective in achieving community safety. The NCST was created by community members in 2014 and, in taking a health-based approach to violence prevention, employs a variety of methods to prevent and mediate potential violence, including using high-risk interventionists.<sup>77</sup>

High-risk interventionists are community members and impacted people who are trained to respond to disputes.<sup>78</sup> Following the implementation of the NCST, Newark crime rates began rapidly falling, reaching a 30-year low for homicides and a 50-year low for overall crime in 2019.<sup>79</sup> Beyond the NCST, there are several other successful community-based violence prevention programs throughout New Jersey, including the Paterson Healing Collective<sup>80</sup> and Jersey City Anti-Violence Coalition Movement.<sup>81</sup>



*Newark crime rates reached a 50-year low.*

At the state level, Governor Murphy has proposed allocating \$10 million toward community-based violence prevention programs.<sup>82</sup> The state is also using \$20 million of federal money to invest in hospital-based violence prevention programs, where highly-trained workers meet with survivors of violence in a hospital setting to help break the cycles of violence.<sup>83</sup> While these initial investments are a promising start, more support will be needed to sustain meaningful community-based violence prevention.

### **C. Implementation in New Jersey**

#### **1. New Jersey should pass legislation creating a statewide behavioral health first responder pilot program.**

New Jersey can begin to reduce the number of calls to the police and shrink law enforcement's footprint in communities by developing a statewide behavioral health first responder program. As a first step, New Jersey should create a statewide pilot program in select cities and municipalities, modeled after the best practices identified through the the CAHOOTS, STAR and B-HEARD programs, to respond to mental health crises and other calls related to behavioral health. Through legislation, New Jersey can identify cities and municipalities most in need of a behavioral health first-responder program and begin a pilot program in those selected locations. The development of each program should be community-led and tailored to meet the needs of each individual community. In particular, the program should fund initiatives to recruit and train community members to become responders and be designed to work collaboratively with community-based violence prevention and other community-based responder programs. Once the pilot is complete, the program can further expand throughout the state.

#### **2. New Jersey should expand funding for existing community-based violence prevention programs and other effective community-based responder programs.**

Both state and local governments should ensure that community-based violence prevention is robustly funded. The state should continue to build on its initial investment in community-based violence prevention programs. At the local level, cities and municipalities should also look for opportunities to support and expand community-led violence prevention programs. In 2020, the City of Newark announced it would allocate 5 percent of its public safety budget (about \$12 million) to support the work of community-based violence prevention programs.<sup>84</sup> Notably, an evaluation by the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership found that the ongoing success of the NCST relies on additional funding and support.<sup>85</sup> In particular, the NCST staff will need greater financial stability, health benefits and opportunities for upward mobility in order to keep doing this important work.<sup>86</sup> Both NCST staff, as well as the people and families served, also need more services to address the traumas experienced.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, to build on the success of programs like the NCST, the state and cities across New Jersey should make deep investments in creating and supporting community-led violence prevention programs.



# Increasing Funding for Community-Based Resources

New Jersey should make deeper investments in the community resources that promote safety. Across the nation, leaders and lawmakers are revising their sizable public safety budgets – which have traditionally focused on funding pure law enforcement – to also include meaningful investments in communities. New Jersey can meet this moment by using public safety funding to make meaningful community investments. To begin, these investments should include fully funding and implementing the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program;<sup>88</sup> ensuring all students receive proper educational support through counselors, nurses and mental health services; and providing supportive housing, particularly for people experiencing behavioral health challenges.

## **A. The Challenge**

National data shows no clear correlation between law enforcement spending and crime rates.<sup>89</sup> Yet, communities across the country, including in New Jersey, continue to heavily fund law enforcement, often at the expense of other valuable community resources and services.<sup>90</sup> Studies show that investments in quality healthcare,<sup>91</sup> suitable housing,<sup>92</sup> education<sup>93</sup> and a clean environment<sup>94</sup> are critical to preventing crime and creating safe neighborhoods. Thus, to truly and sustainably transform public safety, New Jersey budgets should make meaningful and strategic investments in community resources outside of law enforcement.

Our nation spends a lot of money on policing. In 2017, state and local governments spent a total of \$115 billion on law enforcement.<sup>95</sup> According to a study of fiscal year 2020 adopted budgets by the Vera Institute of Justice, New York City spent an astounding \$11,036,298,140 on policing and related costs, while Los Angeles spent \$1,735,493,169.<sup>96</sup> Here in New Jersey, for the same year, the City of Newark spent \$207,955,896 on policing.<sup>97</sup> It is time to use some of these substantial public safety resources to make deep investments beyond traditional law enforcement initiatives.

## B. The Solution

Reimagining public safety should include reimagining how we spend our dollars to keep communities safe. Cities across the nation have started to recognize the need to redirect public safety funding toward supporting and maintaining schools, parks, hospitals and other social services. To this end, leaders and lawmakers in major cities across the country, including New York City,<sup>98</sup> Los Angeles,<sup>99</sup> Boston<sup>100</sup> and San Francisco,<sup>101</sup> have pledged to use public safety funding to invest in resources beyond policing to keep communities safe. As mentioned, here in the Garden State, the City of Newark pledged to redirect 5 percent (about \$12 million) of its public safety budget toward community-based violence prevention.<sup>102</sup>

Beyond the recent government-led initiatives to redirect law enforcement funding to other community resources, there have been a number of longstanding grassroots campaigns calling for investment in communities. In Chicago, for example, the youth-led campaign, *No Cop Academy*, calls on Chicago's City Council to redirect \$95 million away from a new police training academy and toward investments in housing, health-care, schools and jobs.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, in New York City, *Young People's School Justice Agenda* is a campaign to divest from the school to prison pipeline and the over-policing of young people and instead invest in programs, such as restorative justice.<sup>104</sup>

Here in New Jersey, advocacy groups have been calling for funding to be reallocated away from the criminal justice system toward community resources. Beginning with the launch of the *150 Years is Enough Campaign* to close New Jersey's youth prisons, the Institute has been a statewide leader in the effort to close New Jersey's broken youth prisons and reinvest in communities. The campaign has achieved a number of successes, including the closure announcement of two of New Jersey's youth prisons, New Jersey becoming the first state in the nation to test all of its incarcerated youth for COVID-19 and the release of over 100 young people from our state's youth facilities in response to the virus. The Institute has also



*New Jersey Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver signs the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program bill (S2924) into law.*



*Institute Law & Policy Director Andrea McChristian speaks at the signing of the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program bill.*

advocated for reinvestment in restorative justice practices. Restorative justice focuses on resolving conflicts and harms by engaging people who have been harmed, people who have harmed, and, when possible, family and community members through dialogue and consensual resolution instead of punishment.<sup>105</sup> The Institute, along with its partners, championed the *Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program Bill* which was signed into law and reallocates over \$8 million to create two-year restorative justice pilot programs in Newark, Trenton, Camden and Paterson.<sup>106</sup> Lawmakers also passed legislation that will create a pilot program for restorative justice in public schools.<sup>107</sup>

Along with advocacy for restorative justice, there is a growing, youth-led movement to re-allocate funding for police in schools toward other educational resources, like school nurses and counselors. Between 2008 and 2020, New Jersey has provided \$2.5 billion in security aid to local schools.<sup>108</sup> Yet, there is no conclusive evidence that police presence in schools keeps kids safer.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, heightened school security makes students feel less safe and leads to more suspensions and arrests.<sup>110</sup>

Make the Road New Jersey, an advocacy organization working for the rights of immigrant, working class and Latina/Latino communities,<sup>111</sup> has led a campaign to remove police from schools and reinvest those funds into hiring more school nurses and counselors.<sup>112</sup> The Institute has partnered with Make the Road for multiple rallies in support of this movement.<sup>113</sup>



*The Institute partnered with Make the Road for a youth rally in Newark's Lincoln Park. (May 4, 2021)*

### **C. Implementation in New Jersey**

#### **1. New Jersey should continue to invest in restorative justice.**

New Jersey should re-evaluate its local and state public safety budgets to ensure that meaningful investments are made into community resources that support public safety, including its emerging restorative justice programs. In particular, New Jersey should ensure the restorative justice hubs outlined in the Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program are fully funded and implemented in Newark, Trenton, Camden and Paterson. New Jersey should continue to fund the establishment and expansion of restorative justice programs in New Jersey communities to provide a space to resolve conflicts without law enforcement intervention.

#### **2. New Jersey should shift funding from school police to support school resources like nurses and counselors.**

New Jersey communities should support efforts to reallocate law enforcement funding toward resources that will support education and mental health in schools. Counselors, nurses and other support staff are critical to assisting students who are experiencing stress, illness or trauma.<sup>114</sup> Moving forward, to truly transform public safety outcomes for young people, New Jersey needs to properly invest in school resources like counselors, nurses and mental health services.

### 3. New Jersey should invest in community resources to support people with behavioral health challenges, particularly supportive housing.

As previously stated, community-based response teams have noted that there are not enough community resources to support sustainable public safety. Basic needs, such as housing, are a prerequisite to addressing behavioral health problems, including mental illness and substance abuse disorders.<sup>115</sup> Yet, people with mental health challenges frequently struggle to obtain suitable housing,<sup>116</sup> leaving them exposed to repeated contact with law enforcement and the criminal justice system.<sup>117</sup>

New Jersey state and local budgets should allocate robust funding for housing, particularly for people with mental and behavioral health challenges. Investing in housing, instead of policing strategies, is one of the most humane and cost-effective ways to address behavioral health challenges.<sup>118</sup> Considering the lack of affordable housing in New Jersey,<sup>119</sup> our state must go above and beyond to ensure our vulnerable communities receive sufficient support in obtaining safe and stable housing.<sup>120</sup> The Governor signed legislation that will add \$20 million to the state's Special Needs Housing Trust Fund, which provides funding to create housing for people with disabilities.<sup>121</sup> New Jersey – at both the state and local level – must continue to invest in supportive housing that can support people with behavioral health challenges, including mental illness and substance use disorders.

# CONCLUSION

New Jersey should adopt policies that will help to build a system of accountable policing – including banning chokeholds, eliminating qualified immunity and creating strong civilian complaint review boards. New Jersey should also reimagine what it means to keep communities safe by deeply investing in community-led responder systems to address behavioral health and violence prevention needs, as well as important community resources like restorative justice, school-based resources and housing. These two important steps will help New Jersey take meaningful strides toward refunding communities and create pathways to real public safety.

# Endnotes

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