

Equity of Wealth and Health  
*Ensure all residents are provided  
equal protection and support by  
law enforcement agencies and  
within the justice system*



Photo courtesy of Connor Gleason, Curry College



## Recommendation: Ensure all residents are provided equal protection and support by law enforcement agencies and within the justice system

Ensuring safety for all residents of the region requires a mix of solutions, many of which involve creating the right economic, health and social conditions that confront the legacy of structural racism and allow people to thrive. We recognize that Black residents and other people of color are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system and are more likely than White residents to be the victims of violence by police, to be arrested or cited, and to face stiffer sentences for similar offenses. These recommendations therefore aim to address such disparities, through a variety of changes in policy, practice, and funding priorities. We are committed to work with our partners and allies in both government and in our communities, who have been instrumental in crafting these recommendations, to continue to push for meaningful and equitable public safety policies.

At the same time, we recognize the urgency to advance violence prevention initiatives and alleviate the social, economic, and physical toll violence has in the region, and especially in communities of color. The need to address the epidemic of gun violence in the United States is long overdue, and meaningful change will require leadership at all levels of government. These changes must be coupled with supporting existing and successful violence prevention state programs like the Senator Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiative and Safe and Successful Youth Initiative, which have been touted as models by the Giffords Law Center. Violence prevention programs must not only consider enforcement tactics, but also require a community based and prevention approach in order to be successful and sustainable.

However, programs that address public safety practices and violence prevention will not, on their own, achieve our public safety goals. Making our communities safer for everyone will require many other complementary changes in public policy. For example, access to transitional jobs for youth and young adults is a key tool to address economic insecurity, which is a driver of violence. We must therefore maintain and expand funding for successful jobs programs in our region.<sup>1</sup> Affordable housing and housing stability are essential tools to lower recidivism rates and to make reintegration into society after incarceration easier. Housing stability and community reinvestment are correlated with improved social cohesion, which is believed to be a key determinant of community safety and rates of violence.<sup>2</sup> Access to affordable mental health care is also critical to

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1 Washington Post, "Chicago gave hundreds of high-risk kids a summer job. Violent crime arrests plummeted." Dec 8, 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/12/26/chicago-gave-hundreds-of-high-risk-kids-a-summer-job-violent-crime-arrests-plummeted/>

2 <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/collective-efficacy-taking-action-improve-neighborhoods>.

ensuring individuals receive the support they need before crises escalate and police are called. Many of these themes are addressed in other recommendations in MetroCommon.

While these policy changes are critical, they cannot happen in the absence of comprehensive police reform. Following the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor in 2020, the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus led efforts to address systemic racism and police brutality. In response, the Governor filed legislation to address some (though not all) of the key issues, and the Legislature subsequently passed [S.2963, An Act Relative to Justice, Equity and Accountability in Law Enforcement in the Commonwealth](#), which the Governor signed it into law as the [Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020](#). MAPC was actively engaged in this debate, along with our Metro Mayors and North Shore coalitions. While we were pleased to see some of our initial recommendations included in the final piece of legislation, there were also important provisions missing that are included as part of these MetroCommon recommendations.

The following recommendations aim to make the region safer and fairer for all its residents, but we recognize there are many topics relating to safety not addressed here that are also important – bail reform, domestic and sexual violence, use of facial recognition technology, and the privatization of police and security services are just a few other areas that should be further explored. These recommendations similarly do not tackle issues around disaster/emergency preparedness and response which, as the COVID pandemic has shown, are critical to protecting area residents. Some of these recommendations are addressed in **“Prepare for and respond to the threats of climate change.”** and **“Reverse the rising rate of chronic diseases, particularly among populations experiencing health inequities.”** The policies chosen here relate to priorities expressed by regional stakeholders and align with some of the current programming MAPC is currently undertaking. This agenda is likely to be broadened over time, in continued partnership with these stakeholders and allies.

## Strategy 1

Develop innovative models for public safety response and intervention that rely less often on fully armed law enforcement officers as the only or primary responder.

Cities around the country and the world have been pursuing alternative public safety approaches and interventions that promote de-escalation, reduce violence, and seek to address the underlying causes of incidents. In some cases, these models look to deploy non-police personnel where appropriate and divert people from enforcement and prosecution by providing them resources and support versus arrest. Expanding these models could allow police more time to focus on higher priorities and areas where the risk of violence is most pronounced. Such reforms include expanding use of the co-responder models, which enable police forces

to respond to calls alongside behavior and mental health professionals. Further recommendations relating to mental health support are available in Action 2.3 in **“Improve quality of life and reverse the rising rate of chronic diseases, particularly among populations experiencing health inequities.”**

At the same time, additional changes are needed to reduce the likelihood a crisis response or public safety intervention will turn violent. While individual police departments have made progress in this regard, and the actions presented below build upon some of these local efforts, national trends reveal there is still work to be done. A study of death due to lethal force by law enforcement shows that in nearly 25 percent of cases in which lethal force was used by a law enforcement officer, the case was directly related to concerns about a person’s mental health or substance-induced disruptive behavior.<sup>3</sup> This study further demonstrates disparate outcomes by race – while most victims were white (53 percent), victims were found to be disproportionately Black (32 percent). Black victims were also more likely to be unarmed than victims of other races. Being more selective about when there is need for armed officer response is a step toward alleviating these disparate outcomes, while enabling local police departments to use their resources more efficiently and effectively.

- ▶ **Action 1.1: Support and provide incentives for municipalities to adopt a spectrum of alternative dispatch, co-response, and alternative response models.** Models nationwide have demonstrated the effectiveness of alternative response methods to crisis intervention and dispatch response by reducing incidents of violent encounters, issuing fewer citations, and providing better wraparound services and follow up interventions. Effective examples rely on collaboration among law enforcement agencies, community leaders and organizations, and social service partners, in creating co-responder models where police response and intervention is supplemented or substituted by social service, mental health, or other professionals. As municipalities take local actions<sup>4</sup> like reviewing police budgets, assessing allocation of funds, and re-evaluating responsibilities that are currently performed by police, this action can help address all three of these issues. Some communities in MAPC’s region already have begun to implement co-response models and additional resources should be provided to strengthen these efforts. To be successful, communities should have multi-disciplinary teams and staff that can identify cases where service referrals can be made and assist individuals to find supports that would benefit them. Cities and towns participating in these efforts should convene to share best practices and identify areas for investment so that such effective practice(s) can be expanded.

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3 [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(16\)30384-1/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(16)30384-1/fulltext).

4 <https://www.mapc.org/news/massachusetts-municipal-leaders-pledge-to-take-action-on-systemic-racism/>

**Best/emerging practice:** Models nationwide, like [CAHOOTS](#) (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) in Eugene, Oregon; [MACRO](#) (Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland) in Oakland, California; and [STAR](#) (Support Team Assisted Response) in Denver, Colorado, have demonstrated the effectiveness of alternative response methods to crisis intervention and mental health intervention. Many municipalities in Massachusetts have begun to explore such models, including [Northampton](#) and [Cambridge](#). The **Town of Winthrop** created its [CLEAR](#) (Community and Law Enforcement Assisted Recovery) Program, to offer an intra-departmental and community-team based approach to connect people struggling with substance use disorders to recovery resources. The program uses police data to identify people in the community with such needs who are then contacted directly by police and social service partners to offer them support. The City of [Lynn](#) also recently allocated \$500,000 for an unarmed response team that is based off the CAHOOTS model.

- ▶ **Action 1.2: Explore opportunities for police to engage residents and respond to incidents without firearms more often.** Police forces in other parts of the world often have officers conduct a range of work without carrying firearms. This could reduce the potential for deadly interactions, build trust and de-escalate certain situations. The Commonwealth and cities and towns should examine areas where unarmed enforcement could be implemented, such as transit fare evasion, traffic violations, and other civil infractions. It should be recognized that the prevalence of firearms in the United States makes it dangerous and difficult to achieve this action at scale, even as rates of gun violence in Massachusetts are well below the national average. For a more transformative shift in the prevalence of armed police forces in the United States, it is essential that the federal government pursue stricter gun control measures at the national level.

**Best/emerging practice:** London’s Metropolitan Police overwhelmingly comprises “bobbies on the beat,” who do not carry firearms – and whose priority is to deescalate and diffuse conflicts. This dates back to the founding of Metropolitan Police based on the principle of “policing by consent,” or policing based on mutually devised and agreed upon principles between the public and the select few who are tasked with enforcement. The approach helps promote transparency, accountability, and greater trust between police forces and the public. While this differs from the framework under which policing in the United States developed, this rethinking could be a model to assess when devising opportunities to use non-armed police units to respond to non-violent or low-risk calls.

- ▶ **Action 1.3: Ensure police officers across the Commonwealth receive the highest quality training with respect to engaging and supporting individuals with mental/behavioral health needs.** The implementation of co-response and alternative response mechanisms will not eliminate the need for law enforcement officers to receive more advanced training on the topics of trauma-informed care, substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health emergencies, which officers will likely continue to confront. The Commonwealth should provide adequate resources for such training and facilitate collaboration between the Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC) and state agencies such as the Department of Public Health and Department of Mental Health to improve the quality of training.
- ▶ **Action 1.4: End state and local deputization by federal immigration enforcement agencies.** Allowing local and state law enforcement to be deputized into immigrant enforcement efforts is a critical misuse of limited police resources. Furthermore, agreements between Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local police departments like the U.S. Immigration and National Act 287(g) program, which enables the Department of Homeland Security to deputize selected state and local law enforcement officers to enforce federal immigration law, create more mistrust between the community and law enforcement. Massachusetts is the only state in New England with such agreements in place. Residents are less willing to report crime and cooperate with investigations if they suspect local police departments are cooperating with federal immigration enforcement efforts, inhibiting effective community policing. This also has a negative toll on the quality of life and physical and mental health of our immigrant communities: a 2013 study found that 70 percent of undocumented immigrants surveyed indicated they were less likely to report if they were a victim of a crime.<sup>5</sup>

## Strategy 2

Reduce instances of police misconduct and/or misuse of power and provide greater transparency.

In 2020, the Massachusetts Legislature took an important step forward with the passage of Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020: An Act relative to justice, equity, and accountability in law enforcement in the Commonwealth. The law addresses several aspects of police transparency and accountability, including creating a mandatory certification process for police officers, requiring a court order when conducting a facial recognition search except in emergency situations, and placing strict limits on the use of no-knock warrants. While these are all important measures towards a more accountable system, there is still a lot more that needs to happen to uphold accountability and to create a more transparent public safety system. Now that this bill has been signed into law, the Commonwealth should maintain the momentum that helped pass this legislation to see these reforms through and enact deeper, more systemic change. To do so will require confronting the root causes of systemic racism that are evident in our public safety system but also permeate across all sectors of our society.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE\\_COMMUNITIES\\_REPORT\\_FINAL.PDF](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF).

- ▶ **Action 2.1: Provide resources to implement policies and practices enacted in Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020 and pursue further reform.** Even before the most recent law, a 2019 report by the State Auditor found that police departments throughout the state had not met the Commonwealth’s training requirements.<sup>6</sup> It is essential that the Commonwealth provide the budgetary, financial and personnel resources necessary to ensure compliance with new laws, standards and training requirements and seek meaningful consequences for failing to do so. Further reforms to policing that should be pursued include clearer definitions around use of force, requiring decertification findings to be referred to independent prosecutors, loss of all or part of pension benefits in certain circumstances if officer is found guilty of misconduct, and reforms to the arbitration system to ensure that misconduct results in timely and effective discipline and dismissal where warranted.
- ▶ **Action 2.2: Reform the Civil Service exam and recruitment process to pursue greater diversity and more thorough vetting of future law enforcement officers.** The current Civil Service recruitment system is a barrier to forming police forces committed to anti-violence and reflecting the diversity of Greater Boston. The use of a single exam to provide a list of potential police recruits is not sufficient to properly vet candidates. The Special Legislative Commission to Study and Examine the Civil Service Law should recommend legislation that allows any community to take their police departments out of the civil service system by a simple majority vote of their Town Meeting or City Council, without requiring legislative approval. That legislation should also ensure that leaving the civil service is not considered a working condition change that triggers renegotiation of collective bargaining agreements.
- ▶ **Action 2.3: Require police departments to consolidate and make data relating to police involvement and arrests and other metrics publicly available in a specified data standard.** The 2020 police reform bill already includes language requiring that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and DPH collect information relating to police arrests, police-involved injuries, and deaths. However, the law does not specify the way in which data is published or reported. Some of the data sets shared should be disaggregated by categories including but not limited to age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This data will help inform recommendations about non-armed policing and analyze other patterns to understand more fully trends in policing and crime. As a complementary strategy, the Commonwealth could develop a standard community survey that could measure the public’s trust in law enforcement.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/news/auditor-bump-calls-for-expanded-resources-and-accountability-for-municipal-police-training-in>.

**Best/emerging practice:** Citizens are overwhelmingly supportive of police worn body cameras.<sup>7</sup> Governor Baker and the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security have established a five-year, \$20 million program for municipal departments to equip police officers with body cameras. While not a panacea for transparency, body camera footage can provide for officers' security, training, accountability, and community trust. Additionally, body camera footage can support the successful implementation of Actions 1.3, 2.1 and 2.3. The Law Enforcement Body Camera Task Force created under [Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020](#) is establishing its recommendations now, and we hope it addresses concerns relating to footage tampering, sustainable funding for providing cameras, access to recordings, and privacy. MAPC is able to help municipalities procure police body cameras.

► **Action 2.4: Standardize and disaggregate data collected by law enforcement agencies to share with other public safety partners more easily like EMS and public health entities.** Public safety and public health entities are both working to address the opioid crisis and other substance abuse challenges, but they collect and report different sets of data that shed further light on the impact of this crisis on our cities and towns. The Commonwealth should create a data sharing standard for police to use when sharing data with EMS and other public health entities. This data sharing would facilitate better coordination across jurisdictions to respond more effectively to calls such as opioid overdoses, and to direct civilians to appropriate follow up services. This data should not be made available to the public and should be held to highest information privacy and security standards.

**Best/emerging practice:** In 2018, state officials created the Pennsylvania Opioid Overdose Network, which is a central repository for law enforcement entities and public health officials to use to track overdoses, naloxone administration, and investigative drug information.<sup>8</sup> ODIN is now used by more than 1,300 agencies in all 67 counties in Pennsylvania, including 1,000 municipal police departments. This information has been used to help identify overdose hotspots and assess what resources are needed to give residents the support they need. Locally, communities such as Chelsea and Medford, have created what are called HUB-models, where the police department convenes municipal, social service and health care parties every week to consider effective post-incident supports for individuals who suffer from mental health or substance use disorders. Information shared at HUB-meetings is protected appropriately to ensure individual privacy and is not used for further police enforcement but to connect people to needed services.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cato.org/policing-in-america/chapter-4/police-body-cameras>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/data/overdose-information-network-data-current-county-state-police/>.



## Strategy 3

Reduce incarceration and recidivism rates in the region, with a particular focus on at-risk youth.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with about two million people (or nearly 1% of the U.S. adult population) in prison at any given time. This is largely a result of specific policy decisions made by federal and state governments, with the War on Drugs catalyzing a rapid rise in incarceration rates that continue to impact Black people disproportionately. While Massachusetts has among the lowest incarceration rates in the country, these disparate impacts are the same: Black people comprise seven percent of the total population in Massachusetts, but 18% of the Commonwealth's jails and 27% of its prisons.<sup>9</sup> While Massachusetts has seen a decline in its total prison population (down 20 percent since 2000) and jail population (down ten percent since 2000), incarceration rates have been on the rise since mid-2020, signaling a potentially troubling trend.<sup>10</sup>

The pervasive social, economic, and public health impacts of mass incarceration cannot be overstated. Being in prison exacerbates a host of chronic health conditions, including asthma, hypertension, and diabetes, and worsens mental health. These stressors have dire consequences: former prisoners are 12 times more likely than the general public to die of any cause in the 2 weeks following release and 129 times more likely to die of a drug overdose.<sup>11</sup> Impacts extend beyond the individual, too. Research has shown that, when accounting for social costs (such as childcare, foregone wages, and increased criminality of children with incarcerated parents), the true cost of incarceration in the U.S. is close to \$1 trillion, about half of which is borne by families of the incarcerated and their communities.<sup>12</sup> Efforts to reduce recidivism and provide more resources to at-risk youth, coupled with broader reforms to our criminal justice system, can help alleviate the intergenerational burdens of incarceration and create the conditions that allow more people to thrive.

- ▶ **Action 3.1: Reduce prosecuting many low-level misdemeanors and continue to enact sentencing reforms that recognize that long-term incarceration for non-violent crimes can be counterproductive and exacerbate racial disparities in criminal justice.** Not prosecuting low-level misdemeanor offenses, such as shoplifting, disorderly conduct, and petty theft, not only keeps people out of the criminal justice system, but also reduces likelihood of reoffending. This policy has been implemented by Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins and a study of its impacts showed that individuals who were not fully prosecuted (i.e., did not have the case go beyond arraignment or conviction) were less likely to reoffend in the following two years.<sup>13</sup> Additional DA offices in the Commonwealth should pursue similar policies to expand these benefits across the region. As an alternative, the parties should consider mediation, diversion efforts or other dispute resolution techniques to address such infractions.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-massachusetts.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/people-in-jail-and-prison-in-2020.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031811-124614>.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/iajre/the\\_economic\\_burden\\_of\\_incarceration\\_in\\_the\\_us.pdf](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/iajre/the_economic_burden_of_incarceration_in_the_us.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28600>.

- ▶ **Action 3.2: Expand and provide more funding for programs, such as treatment and harm reduction support, that support individuals with underlying mental health and substance use disorders and diverts people from the criminal justice system.** While estimates vary, mental health challenges are pervasive in the criminal justice system. Approximately 20 percent of inmates in jails and 15 percent of inmates in state prisons have a serious mental illness. The psychological toll of being imprisoned will only exacerbate any mental health challenges an individual may have been experiencing prior to their incarceration. Experiencing mental health challenges is not a crime, and there needs to a critical rethinking of how resources are allocated to support individuals in need of treatment, both within the population at large and among incarcerated individuals.

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health has provided funding for local Police-Based Jail Diversion Programs (JDP) since July 2007, and these funds have been used to support first responder police training, local police-based projects, and local resources for diversion.<sup>15</sup> The Commonwealth should continue to increase funding for this program, and consider opportunities to enhance coordination with other mental health treatment and harm reduction programs that are similarly working to provide more mental health support to residents.

- ▶ **Action 3.3: Expand re-entry programs that provide supports and services to youth and other individuals coming out of the justice system.** In order to determine successful strategies, the Commonwealth should fund professional evaluations of state, local, and private programs that aim to help former inmates to find jobs, stable housing, and treatment to see what local efforts are working. Harvard University’s Institute of Politics 2019 report titled Successful Reentry: A Community Level-Analysis recommended efforts focusing on addressing “health, employment, housing, skill development, mentorship and social networks, as these factors have the most significant impact on reentry success.”<sup>16</sup> One example to consider is the now defunct Boston Reentry Initiative.<sup>17</sup> Launched in 2001, the Boston Reentry Initiative was an interagency effort between the Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department, the Boston Police Department, the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the District Attorney’s Office to support male inmates between the ages of 17 and 30 at the highest risk of committing violent offences upon their release from jail. The program entailed providing mentoring services, case management, social service assistance, and vocational development to program participants, and was found to have a measurable impact in reducing likelihood of reoffending. The program lost federal funding in 2017, but its successes should provide a framework to launch similar programs in the Commonwealth.

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14 <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/backgrounders/how%20many%20individuals%20with%20serious%20mental%20illness%20are%20in%20jails%20and%20prisons%20final.pdf>.

15 <https://www.mass.gov/doc/fy2019-annual-report-on-jailarrest-diversion-grant-program/download>.

16 [https://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/sources/program/IOP\\_Policy\\_Program\\_2019\\_Reentry\\_Policy.pdf](https://iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/sources/program/IOP_Policy_Program_2019_Reentry_Policy.pdf)

17 <https://youth.gov/content/boston-massachusetts-reentry-initiative-bri>.

- ▶ **Action 3.4: Broaden the expungement of records for youth with juvenile court records.** A criminal record can present a barrier for youth who are looking to get a job, receive financial aid for higher education, and receive professional licensure in some professions. Expungement allows youth to begin their lives as adults with a clean slate. This is particularly important in the case where low-level misdemeanor offenses continue to be prosecuted (see Action 3.1). While the [Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020](#) addresses a subset of these cases, current laws still include arbitrary limits on number of offenses and timeline for expungement. The Legislature should build upon these changes and revisit these limits on expungement eligibility and the feasibility of automatic expungement in certain circumstances. In a similar vein, the Legislature should also pursue legislation like Illinois<sup>18</sup>, which prohibits sharing fingerprints of minors with FBI databases.
- ▶ **Action 3.5: Raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 20 years old and consider further age increases in future years.** Studies have shown that recidivism rates are lower for individuals processed in juvenile courts versus adult criminal courts.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, keeping more cases out of the adult system can reduce crime and help emerging adults to exit the criminal justice system and not return. The Department of Youth Services (DYS) system could currently absorb 18-year-olds without additional funding or new facilities; the agency would need to reorganize their funding and programming to do so. As it further transitions to take on young people up to 20, an evaluation of funding and facility capacity would be worthwhile. However, one of the benefits of the juvenile system is that as many as half of its participants are in the community, and community-based programs are much more cost effective than adult prisons. Since Massachusetts raised the age to include 18-year-olds, caseloads in the system actually went down<sup>20</sup>. Overall, raising the age will likely save money, reduce pressure on facilities and produce better outcomes for those engaged.

**Best/emerging practice:** The state of Vermont raised the age for juvenile jurisdiction to include 18- and 19-year-olds by 2024.<sup>21</sup> The new law includes certain exceptions for serious violent crimes that would be handled in adult criminal court. Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction can be done in a step-by-step process over the next five years to reach 19 from the current 17, enabling the youth justice system to transition effectively.

**Action 3.6: Create and fund a new state budget line item for youth diversion programs by examining and researching data to determine which offenses should have diversion mandates.** Currently, no state entity that provides guidance or technical assistance on how to shape effective programs. Instead, youth diversion efforts are left to the discretion of police, clerk magistrates, district attorneys, and judges. Some DA offices, including the Middlesex DA and the Cape and Island DA, have advanced their own programs. A report from the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board found that there is wide variation in diversion program and policies across the

18 <https://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/Illinois-Prohibits-Sending-Juvenile-Arrest-Records-to-FBI-SB-1030.pdf>

19 <https://digitalcommons.newhaven.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=criminaljustice-facpubs>.

20 <https://www.sentencing-project.org/publications/bringing-more-teens-home-raising-the-age-without-expanding-secure-confinement-in-the-youth-justice-system/>

21 <https://www.juvjustice.org/blog/1174>

state, and this lack of standardization is likely exacerbating inequitable outcomes in our criminal justice system. To confront these challenges, the Legislature should fund a new budget line item to create a statewide youth diversion program. A state youth diversion entity should provide guidance and standards for such programs and offer technical assistance to help new programs get started and enable sharing of best practices. These guidelines and standards should be informed by data as to which offenses are most appropriate for diversion. Other examples to look to when establishing a statewide framework include the Juvenile Diversion Policy of the District Attorney of Johnson County, Kansas, and the Court Designated Worker Program in Kentucky.<sup>22, 23</sup>

## Strategy 4

Ensure that police departments and community-based organizations have the necessary resources to work together to prevent crime and support at-risk individuals.

Violent crime and the threat of violent crime takes a serious mental toll on individuals and communities. Academic achievement, for example, is negatively impacted by exposure to violence, as instances of local violence can often weigh on the minds of children as they approach cognitive assessments, reducing test scores in a statistically significant way.<sup>24</sup> Studies have also linked exposure to violence to health problems such as trouble sleeping, asthma, obesity, and high blood pressure.<sup>25, 26, 27</sup> Nationally, violent crime has declined in almost every major American city from its high point of the early 1990s, although most recent data shows that homicides and shootings rose particularly as COVID-19 restrictions started to ease. In the City of Boston, the murder rate fell by more than 50% between 1993 and 2014. The significant gun violence reductions Boston has witnessed since the late 1990s have improved quality of life in many of its neighborhoods. Community-based strategies were an important part of that story but so were aggressive policing tactics focused particularly in communities of color. In some cases, these approaches created their own victims and deepened perceptions of policing as inherently biased. Avoiding a return to the levels of violent crime observed the 1980s and 1990s is vital to the future of our region and should be achieved through strengthened community-based interventions and targeted policing aimed at the small number of people most responsible for violence.

- ▶ **Action 4.1: Increase funding for programs that take a community-centered approach to reducing gang and youth violence, including the Senator Charles E. Shannon Jr. Community Safety Initiative and the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative.** The Charles E. Shannon, Jr. Community Safety Initiative is an annual grant program that funds regional and multi-disciplinary approaches to combat gang violence through both suppression and prevention activities. Specifically, the Shannon Grant encourages applicants to “propose programs that target geographical locations that demonstrate high levels of gang violence”. The Legislature should increase annual

22 <https://da.jocogov.org/juvenile-diversion>.

23 <https://kycourts.gov/Court-Programs/Family-and-Juvenile-Services/Pages/Juvenile-Services.aspx>.

24 <https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/107/26/11733.full.pdf>.

25 Sternthal MJ, Jun HJ, Earls F, Wright RJ (2010) Community violence and urban childhood asthma: A multilevel analysis. *Eur Respir J* 36:1400–1409.

26 Heissel JA, Sharkey PT, Torrats-Espinosa G, Grant K, Adam EK. Violence and Vigilance: The Acute Effects of Community Violent Crime on Sleep and Cortisol. *Child Dev.* 2018;89(4):e323-e331. doi:10.1111/cdev.12889.

27 Functional connectivity in central executive network protects youth against cardiometabolic risks linked with neighborhood violence. Gregory E. Miller, Edith Chen, Casey C. Armstrong, Ann L. Carroll, Sekine Ozturk, Kelsey J. Rydland, Gene H. Brody, Todd B. Parrish, Robin Nusslock. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Nov 2018, 115 (47) 12063-12068; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1810067115.

funding for both the Shannon Grant and the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI), two programs that dedicate resources to the places and people who need them the most. Eligible uses of program funds should remain flexible to meet specific community needs, and any requirement that recipients of funding contribute to a statewide gang database should be reevaluated, in the context of collateral consequences of a gang label. Additionally, there should be enhanced and expanded opportunities for regional collaboration within these programs.

- ▶ **Action 4.2: Increase funding for state and federal-level programs that provide funding for collaborative efforts among police departments, nonprofits, community organizations, and others.** This includes federal grants from the Department of Justice, like the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program. Several MAPC communities received federal grants through the JAG program, which provides critical funds to municipalities for crime prevention, mental health programs, drug treatment, victim assistance and witness protection programs.

## Strategy 5

Provide increased resources and education for reentry into society. Investments in reentry programs are a key strategy for reducing recidivism.

There are several reentry programs in operation in Massachusetts today. The Massachusetts Parole Board operates several regional reentry centers across the state. Staff help former inmates to obtain food assistance, renew a driver's license, find work, open a bank account, among other activities. The District Court of Massachusetts also offers the Court Assisted Reentry Effort (CARE), designed for individuals with substance abuse history, and the Reentry: Empowering Successful Todays and Responsible Tomorrows (RESTART) program, which entails a weekly support court session and cognitive behavioral therapy. In addition to more resources to strengthen these programs, the Commonwealth should look to other means of ensuring home communities obtain the resources they need to support reentry, and that formerly incarcerated persons are treated with dignity as they reenter society.

- ▶ **Action 5.1: Change how inmates are counted in the US Census so that it is based on home address of the incarcerated individual, not the location of the incarceration facility.** Currently, people incarcerated are counted in the community where the facility is located, which ultimately leads to a higher count in that location and therefore more funding, since population counts are used in funding formulas. In many instances, these correctional facilities are located in wealthier and rural municipalities. Instead, inmates should be counted based on their home address, which will help to generate resources that are often needed by communities heavily impacted by the criminal justice system. Those additional resources might even support reentry efforts.

- ▶ **Action 5.2: Restore the right to vote to individuals incarcerated on felony charges and standardize education and outreach to all incarcerated individuals about their voting rights.** In Massachusetts, people convicted on felony charges temporarily lose their right to vote during their sentence. The right to vote is restored upon release from prison if they re-register to vote. Restricting one's ability to vote does not advance reentry efforts and has negative rehabilitative consequences. In fact, disenfranchisement in Massachusetts happened relatively recently – legislation passed in 2002 through a ballot initiative. The Commonwealth should reverse course and restore the right to vote for individuals incarcerated on felony charges. Voting rights and criminal justice advocates point to examples of returning citizens not voting after they were incarcerated (regardless of the charge), because there is little information made available specifically regarding re-registering to vote upon release. Currently, Maine, Vermont, and Washington D.C. allow individuals with felony charges to vote in elections even while they are incarcerated.