

End Militarized Policing, Invest in Real Public Safety

Endless war and military violations of human rights are rooted in a specific mindset based on coercion, domination, and dehumanization. Excessive and violent policing drinks from the same source. Stopping systemic racism in police forces across the U.S. requires dealing with the problem at root and branch by enacting legal reforms, reversing the militarization of policing, and divesting funds from police forces prone to violence.

Militarization at Home Increases Police Violence

- Streets that were deserted during the early days of Coronavirus lockdowns now look like war zones. The DOD's 1033 Program, which authorizes the Defense Department to send military equipment and weapons to local police departments, has been on full display as heavily armed cops and armored vehicles patrol the streets and crack down on protests over police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Oscar Grant, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, and far too many others to name. Julián Castro, former Secretary for Housing and Urban Development, [explained best](#)¹ that “as long as our police arm up like a combat force, they’ll act like it.”
- [Studies have shown](#)² a “positive and statistically significant relationship between 1033 transfers and fatalities from officer-involved shootings ... [R]esearch suggests that officers with military hardware and mindsets will resort to violence more quickly and often.”
- Georgetown Law professor Paul Butler, [pointed out](#)³ the difference between the militarized response to peaceful demonstrations about police brutality with protests against coronavirus restrictions earlier this year. “Unarmed people, many of whom are people of color, protest police brutality and are met with police brutality — flash grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets. But when armed, mainly white protesters stormed the Michigan state capitol, the police just let them be.”
- Tear gas and pepper spray are chemical weapons that have no place in law enforcement. The CDC has described these agents as “[poison](#)”⁴ and medical experts have [raised concerns](#)⁵ they may increase the spread of COVID-19. The Chemical Weapons Convention restricts the use of these riot control agents as a method of warfare and its time to ban their use against people exercising their first amendment rights.
- President [Trump has threatened](#)⁶ to send “thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers” and successfully pushed the U.S. military to use its equipment to threaten and intimidate peaceful protesters.

Changing Law and Police Culture to Protect Black Lives

- Reckoning with the long history of racial injustice in policing means addressing a culture of militarization that goes far beyond military hardware. It means demilitarizing communities and ending practices that encourage police to act like an occupying military force with the community treated like the enemy. These confrontational tactics include no-knock warrants, “broken windows” policing, chokeholds, “stop and frisk”, aggressive drug enforcement as part of a “war on drugs”, as well as discriminatory fines, fees and bail policies.

¹ Johnson, Jake, *With Militarization of Cops on Full Display, Senator Plans Amendment to End Transfer of Military Equipment to Local Police*, Common Dreams, June 1, 2020

² Delehanty, Casey, Jack Mewhirter, Ryan Welch, and Jason Wilks, *Militarization and police violence: The case of the 1033 program*, Sage Journals, June 14, 2017

³ Zhou, Li, Kainaz Amaria, *These photos capture the stark contrast in police response to the George Floyd protests and the anti-lockdown protests*, Vox, May 27, 2020

⁴ *Facts About Riot Control Agents*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 4, 2018

⁵ Singh, Maanvi, *Teargas and pepper spray will accelerate spread of Covid-19, doctors warn*, The Guardian, June 6, 2020

⁶ Gibbons-Neff, Thomas and Eric Schmitt, *Pentagon Ordered National Guard Helicopters’ Aggressive Response in D.C.*, The New York Times, June 6, 2020

- “[Qualified immunity](#)”⁷ and the “reasonable” standard for use of force foster a “shoot first ask questions later” culture and ultimately can lead to acts of murder with impunity. Without ending these legal standards, accountability for misuses of force is impossible.

Divest and Invest: Moving the Money for Real Public Safety

- Just as we need to move the money from the bloated Pentagon to real human security needs, we must divest funds from excessive policing and mass incarceration and invest in education, non-punitive drug treatment, restorative justice services, and housing and employment programs.
- A 2017 report [gives a framework](#)⁸: “Invest/divest, campaigns which advocate for investments in supportive services and divestment from punitive institutions, challenge the very roots of mass criminalization and inequity. They demand elected officials and decision makers acknowledge that the lack of investment in communities of color and the over-investment in their criminalization is emblematic of governmental disregard for Black and brown life.”
- The report also shows that living wage measures, access to community health services and treatment, educational opportunities, and stable and affordable housing are far more successful in reducing crime than police or prisons.
- Police budgets are [consistently high](#)⁹ across cities in the United States, with up to 20% to 45% of discretionary funds allocated to the militarized policing systems described above.
- We need to move the money both locally and nationally simultaneously. Pentagon bloat and militarized national security policies don’t protect us from pandemics or climate change. Cutting Pentagon spending can help fund local health and human services programs that keep communities truly resilient against disasters, disease and the coming climate catastrophe.

Steps Members of Congress Can Take

- **Cosponsor [H.R. 7221](#), introduced by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY)**, to prohibit law enforcement officers from using chemical weapons in the course of policing activities.
- **Cosponsor [H.Res. 988](#) introduced by Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA)**, to condemn acts of brutality, racial profiling, and the use of excessive force by law enforcement officers, as well as calls for the end of militarized policing practices.
- **Cosponsor legislation to restrict, or better yet eliminate, the 1033 program and end DHS grants used for military equipment for police departments.** This includes the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act ([H.R. 1714](#) and [S. 3931](#)), as well as new legislation being introduced by Rep. Velázquez to end the 1033 program.
- **Cosponsor the Justice in Policing Act of 2020, [S.3912](#) introduced by Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) or [H.R. 7120](#) introduced by Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA)**, to hold law enforcement accountable for misconduct in court, improve transparency through data collection, and reform policing.
- **Cosponsor [H.Con.Res. 100](#), introduced by Rep. Barbara Lee’s (D-CA)**, on the creation of a “Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Commission.”
- **Cosponsor [S. 3902](#) introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)**, to amend the Insurrection Act to curtail violations against the civil liberties of the people of the U.S.
- **Make statements opposing President Trump’s threat to deploy U.S. military force** on protests in our communities and support legislation to oppose the use of the U.S. military to respond to protests.
- **Support calls to move funding from police departments to reinvestment in communities** to address their broader public safety needs.

⁷ Schwartz, Joanna C., *Suing police for abuse is nearly impossible. The Supreme Court can fix that*, The Washington Post, June 3, 2017

⁸ *Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining Safety & Security in Our Communities*, The Center for Popular Democracy, July 4, 2017

⁹ Neuhauser, Alan, *Cities Spend More and More on Police. Is It Working?*, U.S. News, July 7, 2017