

PEOPLE'S RESPONSE ACT

Representatives Cori Bush, Pramila Jayapal, Summer Lee, Morgan McGarvey, Ayanna Pressley & Jan Schakowsky

The current approach to public safety is not working — for children, for families, and particularly for Black and brown communities that have been devastated by mental health crises, substance use health crises, and criminalization. We must end our public safety system's instinct to criminalize and replace it with an instinct to provide care.

The People's Response Act emphasizes an inclusive, holistic, and health-centered approach to public safety by creating a Division on Community Safety within the Department of Health and Human Services — because communities and experts agree that public safety is a matter of public health. It is a central component of a movement that embraces an affirmative approach to public safety that will save lives, and build systems of care that are rooted in improving the well-being of all communities. This approach must be equitable, health-centered, and preventative to stop violence and harm before it occurs while ensuring that every community has what it needs to flourish.

The People's Response Act takes this much-needed step by:

- Creating a **Division on Community Safety within HHS** to fund, conduct, and coordinate research, technical assistance, and grant programs related to non-carceral, health-centered investments in public safety;
- Launching a **federal first responders unit that will support states and local governments** with emergency health crises;
- Promoting alternative approaches to public safety, including **coordination of research and policies** that are being implemented across HHS and other agencies to center health-based and non-carceral responses throughout the federal government;
- Providing \$11 billion in grant funding to state and local governments, as well as community-based organizations, to **fully fund public safety and improve crisis response**; and
- Establishing a \$2.5 billion First Responder Hiring Grant to **create thousands of jobs** and provide funding to state, local, and tribal governments, as well as community organizations, to hire emergency first responders such as licensed social workers, mental health counselors, substance use counselors, and peer support specialists, in an effort to improve crisis response and increase non-carceral, health-based approaches to public safety.

Far too often, our existing, misguided approach has had devastating and deadly effects, particularly for young people, persons with disabilities, and Black and brown communities. People with untreated mental health disorders are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter than people without mental health disorders who are approached or stopped by law enforcement. Nearly 1 in 4 people killed by law enforcement officials have had a mental health disorder. Every community deserves to feel safe, and the traditional system of response fails to deliver the adequate, health-based response our communities need during a time of crisis.

But lawmakers, advocates and the broader public are embracing evidence-based approaches to public safety. Now more than ever, it is crucial for Congress to step up and support these new inclusive, holistic, and health-centered approaches to dealing with crises that will reduce harm and truly keep our communities safe. State, local, and tribal governments across the country are already implementing innovative strategies to prevent violence, reduce harm, and improve the wellbeing of every community, especially Black and brown communities.

The People's Response Act provides the resources and assistance to scale up these efforts and truly transform public safety in the United States. It would reframe how we think about and respond to crisis situations in this country with an approach that meets the demands and needs of our communities and this moment.

Endorsements: American Friends Service Committee, A Bella LaFemme Society, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, Berkeley Free Clinic, Black Lives Matter, Center for Constitutional Rights, Center for Policing Equity, Civil Rights Corps, Color of Change, Elephant Circle, Equal Justice USA, Human Rights Watch, Illinois Alliance for Reentry & Justice, Justice Strategies, March for our Lives, MomsRising, Movement for Black Lives, National Council of Jewish Women, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Newtown Action Alliance, Partners in Health, Public Justice Center, Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, Washington Defender Association.