



# Community Safety, Justice, & Wellbeing Practice Area

The Urban Institute (Urban) is a leading nonprofit research organization dedicated to developing evidence-based insights that improve people's lives and strengthen communities.

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Urban's Justice & Safety Division houses research, policy and technical assistance professionals with expertise on a wide range of community safety strategies.

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The Community Safety, Justice, & Wellbeing team conducts rigorous research and evaluation and offers technical assistance to the field. Its members have years of experience with a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods,

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The **Community Safety, Justice, and Wellbeing** (CSJW) Practice Area gathers insights, recommends effective policies, and shares best practices to tackle crime and make our neighborhoods safer. We're keenly aware of the harms that can come from traditional justice measures, and study better and more compassionate solutions, including grassroots, community-driven initiatives that offer new ways to promote safety, boost community bonds, and improve overall wellbeing.

## Our Research and Policy Expertise

The CSJW Practice Area is part of the Urban Institute's *Justice & Safety Division*, which works to inform solutions to crime and safety challenges. By conducting rigorous research and policy analysis, we provide data, insights, training, and technical assistance to communities directly affected by issues of safety and justice.

Members of our practice area bring decades of expertise on a range of topics related to community safety and wellbeing, including community violence prevention and intervention, policing, traffic safety, pretrial systems, prosecution and defense practices, and youth and family justice. We work across disciplines, including with Urban's other policy divisions, to identify how communities achieve safety and justice outside of the criminal legal system through policies and services that promote stability and wellbeing for people and the neighborhoods they live in.

## Community-Engaged Research

Community-engaged research refers to the practice of explicitly including the input, participation, and reflections of the people and communities most affected by the issue studied—from the design stage of a project to the final recommendations developed from evidence. For our portfolio on community safety, justice, and wellbeing, this means drawing upon the insights of those who have experienced community violence and/or the criminal legal system. We recognize that communities are experts in their own lived experiences and that their involvement in research is key to crafting effective, sustainable solutions to local problems.

## KEY AREAS OF CSJW RESEARCH, POLICY AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORK

**Gun Violence Reduction.** We have conducted extensive work on gun violence for more than a decade, and worked from the evidence base on gun violence reduction to deliver policy guidance and technical assistance. This work has included evaluation of interventions to address gun violence, analysis to better understand the community-level costs of gun violence, exploration of the deep mistrust of law enforcement in communities most burdened by gun violence that challenges co-production of public safety, and community-engaged research efforts to bring the insight of those most impacted by gun violence to bear on crafting solutions to it.

- Community Violence Intervention Research and Evaluation Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Center (current)
- Municipalities Reimagining Community Safety Initiative (current)
- Evaluation of Oakland's Measure Z (current)
- Evaluation of California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) Funded Programs (current)
- Impact of Criminal Justice and Community-Based Interventions on Gun Violence Reduction (current)
- [A Research-Based Practice Guide to Reduce Youth Gun and Gang/Group Violence](#)
- [Evaluation of the Chicago Violence Reduction Strategy](#)
- [Evaluation of Gunshot Detection Technology to Aid in the Reduction of Firearms Violence](#)
- Public Surveillance Cameras and Crime
- [Engaging Communities in Reducing Gun Violence: A Road Map for Safer Communities](#)
- [Implementing Gunshot Detection Technology: Recommendations for Law Enforcement and Municipal Partners](#)
- [Guns on College Campuses](#)
- [The Effect of Gun Violence on Local Economies](#)

**Policing Programs, Trainings, and Community Trust in Police.** We work with community organizations, local leadership, and police departments to study and develop recommendations on policing reform, policing programs and technology, public surveillance, and relationships between police and their communities. We have analyzed policing practices in dozens of cities nationwide, including Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Oakland and Washington, DC.

- Community-Police Reconciliation Evaluation (current)
- Oakland Measure Z Evaluation: Oakland Police Department (current)
- Justice Visualization Collaborative
  - [San Antonio police budget visualization](#) (produced by CI:Now with support from Urban)
  - [Understand the DC Police Budget](#) (developed by the DC Fiscal Policy Institute with Urban support)
- [Evaluation of the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice](#)
- [Procedural Justice in Homicide and Shooting Scene Response](#)
- [Mistrust and Ambivalence between Residents and the Police](#)
- [The Los Angeles Community Safety Partnership](#)

**Approaches to Safety & Justice Outside the Criminal Legal System.** We have conducted extensive work on community-engaged approaches to safety and justice, helping build the evidence base as these strategies gain broader recognition and delivering policy guidance and technical assistance. This has included evaluation of community-led violence interruption strategies, alternatives to policing/crisis response, and exploration of the agencies and community-based organizations that work to reduce these harms and promote community safety outside the traditional criminal legal system.

- Oakland Measure Z Evaluation: Department of Violence Prevention (current)
- Oakland California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) Grant Program Evaluation (current)

- Public Investment in Community-Driven Safety Initiatives
- Alternative Crisis Response in Denver
- Federal Investment in Community-Driven Public Safety
- Community Engagement Strategies to Advance Justice Reform: Implementation Lessons from Buncombe County, North Carolina, Cook County, Illinois, and New Orleans
- Assessment of the Orange County Homeless and Mentally Ill Outreach and Treatment Services
- New Programs for and Approaches to Justice System Challenges
- New York City's Wounded Healers: A Cross-Program, Participatory Action Research Study of Credible Messengers
- Strengthening Community-Based Service Capacity through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative

**Prosecution, Defense, & Pretrial Justice.** Our pretrial and adjudication process work has explored how prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges make decisions, and how those decisions impact fairness and effectiveness in the criminal legal process, and affect the lives of all individuals involved.

- Census of Prosecutor Offices, 2023 (current)
- An Exploration of Prosecutorial Discretion in Plea Bargaining in Philadelphia
- Collecting and Using Data for Prosecutorial Decision-making
- Assessing a Social Worker Model of Public Defense
- Evidence, Sexual Assaults, and Case Outcomes: Understanding the Role of Sexual Assault Kits, Non-Forensic Evidence, and Case Characteristics, 2015-2017
- Pretrial Strategy for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases: An Innovation Fund Case Study from Buncombe County, North Carolina
- Road Map to Pretrial Reforms
- The Justice Reinvestment Initiative: Experiences from the Local Sites

**Diversion and Restorative Justice.** Our work examines approaches that decisionmakers at the front end of the criminal legal system use to deliver accountability while mitigating the negative impacts of system involvement. In particular, our work has shed light on how restorative justice has been applied within criminal legal system settings to encourage accountability, help survivors heal, and prevent future harm.

- Evaluation of the DC Office of the Attorney General's Restorative Justice Program (current)
- Increasing the Use of Restorative Justice Models for Serious and Violent Offenses (current)
- The Restorative Justice and Diversion Program: Colorado 20th Judicial District Attorney's Office
- The Restorative Justice Partnership: Yolo County District Attorney's Office
- Stopping Trends of Repeat Incarceration with Diversion and Education: Office of the DeKalb County District Attorney
- Exit Strategy, the Sex Industry Diversion Program: Caddo Parish District Attorney's Office
- Prosecutor-Led Diversion Strategies in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin
- Implementing Restorative Justice in Rhode Island Schools

**Justice for Youth, Emerging Adults, and Families.** We study initiatives and services for justice-involved youth under the age of 18 as well as "emerging adults" between the ages of 18-25, including alternatives to detention, mediation, conflict resolution, parental training, and other services for families of justice-involved young people.

- Deinstitutionalization of Youth for Runaway and Truancy Status Offenses (current)
- Understanding the Implementation and Impact of Credible Messenger Mentoring on Youth Across Settings (current)
- A Guide to Community Strategies for Improving Emerging Adults' Safety and Well-Being

- “We Carry Guns to Stay Safe”: Perspectives on Guns and Gun Violence from Young Adults Living in Chicago’s West and South Sides
- Evaluation of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program
- Youth Justice Reform in Milwaukee: Lessons Learned and Next Steps
- Strategies for Reducing Criminal and Juvenile Justice Involvement
- Understanding Research and Practice Gaps in Juvenile Justice Early Insights
- Local Validation of SPEP™ Ratings of Juvenile Justice Program Effectiveness
- The Juvenile Diversion Initiative: San Diego County District Attorney’s Office (San Diego, California)
- Implementation and Sustainability of Juvenile Reentry Programs in Second Chance Act Sites
- Keeping Youth Out of the Deep End of the Justice System: A Developmental Evaluation Overview of the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Deep-End Reform
- Promoting a New Direction for Youth Justice: Strategies to Fund a Community-Based Continuum of Care and Opportunity

**The Community Safety, Justice, & Wellbeing Practice Area is led by senior policy fellow, Jesse Janetta. Reach him at [JJannetta@urban.org](mailto:JJannetta@urban.org)**