



COMMUNITY JUSTICE  
ACTION FUND

# POLICY AGENDA

**a comprehensive, holistic, and grassroots  
policy framework is driven by communities  
of color directly impacted by violence.**

EXCELLENCE

RAYVON

JORDAN

EMMETT

OUR  
MATTER!

DAVIS

JORDAN E.

OSCAR

TAMIR

# POLICY AGENDA

**Community Justice Action Fund's comprehensive, holistic, and grassroots policy framework is driven by communities of color directly impacted by violence.**

Gun violence disproportionately impacts people of color. Our communities demand public policies that will protect them from gun violence, whether from shootings in the streets or weapon use in the home. The Community Justice Action Fund (CJAF) centers the voices of the people who are closest to the gun violence that occurs across the country every single day; these voices cry out for a policy agenda that will achieve peace and community healing, not mass incarceration and over policing.

The criminal legal system has done more than enough harm to communities of color, it is not the solution. Gun violence in communities of color is one symptom of a complex system of disadvantage; any solution must address not only the symptoms, but also focus on the disease itself. Community Justice's policy agenda is a community-led, public health and ecological systems approach to ending gun violence.

Successful gun violence prevention requires building and strengthening the systems that empower community leadership and protect marginalized people, as well as reducing the factors and root causes that increase the risk of violence. The public health perspective can allow policy makers to see the intersections where risk factors and environmental root causes overlap and where communities can intervene to prevent multiple forms of violence at once.

The following policy agenda priorities are derived from community-based experts in violence prevention, informed by the best evidence currently available.

1

**Invest in Proven Strategies to Prevent Shootings and Homicides**

2

**Dismantle Institutions and Structures That Fuel Gun Violence**

3

**Stop Gender-Based Gun Violence**

# 1

## Invest in Proven Strategies to Prevent Shootings and Homicides

Firearm homicides are the leading cause of death for Black males ages 15-34<sup>1</sup>

Firearms are the second leading cause of death for Black females ages 15-24.<sup>2</sup>

**Challenges:** Leaders and organizers on the frontlines of everyday gun violence are doing incredible work with miniscule resources. Violence interrupters, street outreach workers, hospital responders, activists, and others have the experience and the tools to prevent violence, but working a fraction of the funding of other public safety professionals. Despite advances in promoting the public health approach, law enforcement is still seen as the primary agent of public safety, with community leaders playing a background role, if any, in the policy response to violence prevention. Too many violence prevention workers are fighting many epidemics with little to no funding or support.

**Opportunities:** Community-based organizations and several government agencies nationwide have developed various models and strategies to end gun violence. Investments in, and supporting trained, culturally appropriate violence prevention workers has worked in cities as far apart as New York City and Richmond, CA. Violence prevention workers with relevant life experience are central to these efforts, as they have the credibility to directly engage with people most likely to commit acts of serious violence.

Relevant supportive services for the high-risk population has proven essential, especially when they are available when and where necessary - in the street, in the hospital, in the home - at any hour of the day.

**Solutions:** There are a number of successful violence prevention strategies and programs already being implemented. Each one of the strategies can be effective on its own, but they are not mutually exclusive and in fact, they can be even more impactful when implemented in combination with each other. Federal, state, and local governments must make the necessary investments to prevent shootings and homicides.

### Concrete solutions Include:

- Establish Offices of Violence Prevention\*<sup>^</sup>
- Employ cognitive behavioral therapy programs for those at the highest-risk for gun violence\*<sup>^</sup>
- Provide robust survivor support services\*<sup>^</sup>
- Fund violence interruption and street outreach programs \*<sup>^</sup>
- Support hospital-based Intervention initiatives\*<sup>^</sup>
- Provide mental health resources to address trauma and prevent suicide\*<sup>^</sup>
- Employ ecological systems approaches to shift the cultures of communities highly impacted by gun violence\*

\*Executive authority/leadership

<sup>^</sup>Legislation (includes authorization and/or appropriation)

### Models of Success:

- [Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention](#)
- [The HAVI](#)
- [Advance Peace](#)

<sup>1</sup>Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) WISQARS 10 Leading Causes of Death, United States 1999-2018.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.

## 2

# Dismantle Institutions and Structures That Fuel Gun Violence

States with Stand Your Ground laws are more likely to favor a white defendant over a Black victim than a Black defendant over a white victim.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1977 the cost of policing has tripled, to nearly \$115 billion.<sup>4</sup>

**Challenges:** Everyday gun violence in communities of color doesn't happen in a vacuum. There are institutional and structural pillars in our society upholding a system that fuels violence across the country. Shootings are often viewed only as senseless actions by individuals violating the law; not taken into account are the ways that law and policy allow - and in some cases, foster - gun violence. Research shows that there is a correlation between community violence and trust in law enforcement; people may be more likely to engage in retaliatory gun violence if they don't trust the police and don't believe that law enforcement can protect them.

Stand your ground and castle doctrine laws empower individuals to take the law into their own hands, often with deadly consequences for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. The criminal legal system is not broken in its oppressive nature - that is how it is designed.

**Opportunities:** It is not enough to call for reform, we must dismantle the institutional and structural pillars that uphold the system and enact new policies that value the human dignity and worth of all people. We must rethink how the state works with communities to achieve public safety, not relying on traditional law enforcement to solve social problems. We must pass laws that reflect the statement "black lives matter" and make it a reality.

**Solutions:** Cities and states have started passing meaningful legislation to dismantle structural pillars of oppression, but the work is just beginning and there is much more to be done. At all levels of government - federal, state, and local - policymakers must ensure real accountability for law enforcement when an act of harm is committed. Law enforcement agencies must be refocused on saving lives and reducing harm. Similarly, non-law enforcement individuals must be held to account for gun violence and not allowed to use the legal system as a shield.

### Concrete solutions include:

- Reallocate funding from law enforcement to community and social services to enable the conditions for long-term violence prevention<sup>^</sup>
- Make use of force and disciplinary data more publicly available<sup>\*,^</sup>
- End Stand Your Ground and Castle Doctrine laws<sup>^</sup>
- End qualified immunity for police officers<sup>^</sup>
- Hold gun dealers, manufacturers, and owners accountable when one of their weapons harms someone<sup>\*,^</sup>

\*Executive authority/leadership

<sup>^</sup>Legislation (includes authorization and/or appropriation)

### Models of Success:

- [City of Austin transforms police budget to invest in community services](#)
- [New York State repeals law giving qualified immunity to police officers](#)
- [Coalition fights expansion of Stand Your Ground in Ohio](#)

<sup>3</sup> #StandWithOhio Coalition Launches National Campaign to Demand Ohio Gov. DeWine Reject Stand Your Ground Law

<sup>4</sup> "While Crime Fell, Costs of Cops Soared." Bloomberg Businessweek June 4, 2020

# 3

## Stop Gender-Based Gun Violence

Over 50% of Black female homicides are related to intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>5</sup>

Transgender women of color are four times more likely to experience gun violence than cisgender women.<sup>6</sup>

**Challenges:** The national conversation on gun violence often focuses either on Black male homicide, or on the perpetrators of mass shootings (who are almost always men). As a result, gun violence prevention programs and resources are geared toward these populations. Left out of many violence prevention efforts are lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, trans and gender non-conforming people - despite having a higher risk of being harmed. Domestic and intimate partner violence, particularly against women of color, is often overlooked. Gun laws do not sufficiently reflect the reality that every year, more than 600 American women are shot to death by intimate partners—roughly one every 14 hours.

When an abuser or stalker has access to firearms, the victim's risk of death increases by 500%.<sup>7</sup> Although a variety of state and federal laws prohibit the possession of firearms by persons convicted of certain violent crimes or subject to protective orders, most states continue to rely on the honor system instead of proactively ensuring that people relinquish their weapons once they are prohibited from owning them.

**Opportunities:** Studies show that laws requiring abusers to turn in guns upon being prohibited from possessing them are linked to a 16% reduction in intimate partner gun homicides.<sup>8</sup> Identifying and acknowledging the need for safe space initiatives led by lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, trans and gender non-conforming people is critically important. Also important is recognizing that gender-based violence may not look the same in every community, therefore centralizing the voices and perspectives of those at risk of harm is the only way to meaningfully end gender-based gun violence.

**Solutions:** We need laws that expand restrictions on people who have been convicted of domestic violence from owning guns to include people who have been convicted of any violent misdemeanor, and we must ensure that dating partners are included in the policy.

We must also ensure that domestic violence laws do not further criminalize women of color, who are disproportionately impacted by violence in America. Survivor support services that cater to the unique needs of women of color, inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, trans and gender non-conforming people, must receive the resources they need to be successful.

### Concrete solutions include:

- Keep guns away from people who stalk, abuse, or otherwise harm women and LGBTQ people.
- Enforce hate crimes laws\*
- Modernize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) to focus on community-based violence prevention instead of a carceral methods<sup>^</sup>
- Give full funding for the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and empower state VOCA Administrators to meet the needs of their survivor communities<sup>^</sup>
- Envision policy that funds domestic violence and sexual violence community organizations, rather than solely funding SVU police units<sup>^</sup>
- Provide robust funding for tribal nations facing an epidemic of sexual violence and femicide<sup>^</sup>

\*Executive authority/leadership

<sup>^</sup>Legislation (includes authorization and/or appropriation)

### Models of Success:

- Georgia enacts hate crime legislation encompassing sexual orientation, gender identity and expression
- Prevention Institute pilots Safety Through Connection in California to expand the types of organizations and agencies involved in the prevention of intimate partner violence.
- California adopts clear, mandatory, and enforceable firearm relinquishment laws

<sup>5</sup> "Domestic Violence and the Black Community" National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<sup>6</sup> "Preventing Gun Violence." YWCA

<sup>7</sup> Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study, 93 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1089-1097 (July 2003).

<sup>8</sup> M. Zeoli, et al., "Analysis of the Strength of Legal Firearms Restrictions for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Their Associations With Intimate Partner Homicide," American Journal of Epidemiology 187, no. 11 (2018): 2365–2371.



# COMMUNITY JUSTICE ACTION FUND

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