

# PEOPLE'S RESPONSE ACT

## Congresswomen Cori Bush, Ayanna Pressley, Jan Schakowsky, and Pramila Jayapal

America is in the midst of a national reckoning on community safety.

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 dismantle 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 public safety division within the Department of Human Health and Services — because communities and experts agree that public safety is a matter of public health. It adopts a new 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 new **public safety division within the Department of Health and Human Services** to fund 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;
- Research 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 \$7.5 billion in grant funding to state and local governments, as well as community-based organizations, to **fully fund public safety and improve crisis response**;
- Establishing a \$2.5 billion First Responder Hiring Grant to **create thousands of jobs** and provide funding to state, local, and tribal government, 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 this misguided approach has had devastating and deadly effects, particularly for young people, persons with disabilities, and communities of color. 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.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial for Congress to step up and support 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. I welcome your support on this much needed legislation.

**Endorsements:** *The Drug Policy Alliance, Human Rights Campaign, American Civil Liberties Union, Civil Rights Corps, Color of Change, Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund, Human Impact Partners (HIP), Treatment Advocacy Center, Reale Justice Network, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Movement for Black Lives, Black Lives Matter, The Bail Project, Center for Popular Democracy, National Immigration Project (NIPNLG), Center for Biological Diversity, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, Project South, Center for Media Justice, Voters Organized to Educate, Parents Organized for Public Education, Community Law and Mediation Services of Northern California, Showing Up for Racial Justice, Dignity and Power Now, Zealous, Public Justice Center, Common Justice, Greenpeace US, National Black Worker Center, Freedom Agenda, Mijente, Young Women's Freedom Center, The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, Families for Justice as Healing, Project Turnaround, Aligned Law, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children/ All of Us or None, Community Justice Action Fund, End Police Violence Collective, Equal Justice Under Law, Promise of Justice Initiative, MoveOn, National Employment Project, National Center for Law and Economic Justice, Law Enforcement Action Partnership, Youth Over Guns, Action Center on Race and the Economy (ACRE). [Click here for a full list.](#)*