

# No More Money for the Police

Redirect it to emergency response programs that don't kill black people.

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Municipalities could change policies so social service workers, not the police, are dispatched for certain kinds of 911 calls. Credit...Michael Appleton for The New York Times

**The only way we're going to stop these endless cycles of police violence is by creating alternatives to policing. Because even in a pandemic where black people have been disproportionately killed by the coronavirus, the police are still murdering us.**

**On Monday, a worker at a store in Minneapolis called 911, claiming that George Floyd had used counterfeit money. The incident ended with a police officer suffocating Mr. Floyd to death, despite his and bystanders' pleas for mercy. Protests have since erupted across the country while the police respond with military-style violence.**

As the case of George Floyd makes clear, calling 911 for even the slightest thing can be a death sentence for black people. For many marginalized communities, 911 is not a viable option because the police often make crises worse. These same communities, who often need emergency services the most, are forced to make do without the help.

More training or diversity among police officers won't end police brutality, nor will firing and charging individual officers. Look at the Minneapolis Police Department, which is held up as a model of progressive police reform. The department offers [procedural justice](#) as well as [trainings](#) for implicit bias, [mindfulness](#) and de-escalation. It embraces community policing and officer diversity, [bans](#) "warrior style" policing, uses [body cameras](#), implemented an [early intervention](#) system to identify problematic officers, receives [training](#) around mental health crisis intervention, and practices "reconciliation" efforts in communities of color.

George Floyd was still murdered. The focus on training, diversity and technology like [body cameras](#) shifts focus away from the root cause of police violence and instead gives the police more power and resources. The problem is that the entire criminal justice system gives police officers the power and opportunity to systematically harass and kill with impunity.

The solution to ending police violence and cultivating a safer country lies in reducing the power of the police and their contact with the public. We can do that by [reinvesting](#) the \$100 billion spent on policing nationwide in alternative emergency response programs, as protesters in Minneapolis have [called for](#). City, state and federal grants can also fund these programs.

Municipalities can begin by changing policies or statutes so police officers never respond to certain kinds of emergencies, including ones that involve substance abuse, domestic violence, homelessness or [mental health](#). Instead, health care workers or emergency response teams would handle these incidents. So if someone calls 911 to report a drug overdose, health care teams rush to the scene; the police wouldn't get involved. If a person calls 911 to complain about people who are homeless, rapid response social workers would provide them with housing support and other resources. Conflict interrupters and restorative justice teams could mediate situations where no one's safety is being threatened. Community organizers, [rather than](#) police officers, would help manage responses to the pandemic. Ideally, people would have the option to call a different number — say 727 — to access various trained response teams.

The good news is, this is already happening. Violence interruption programs exist [throughout the country](#) and they're often led by people from the community who have experience navigating tricky situations. Some programs, like one in [Washington, D.C.](#), do not work with the police; its staff members rely instead on personal outreach and social connections for information about violence that they work to mediate and diffuse. We should invest in these programs, which operate on shoestring budgets, so they have their own dedicated dispatch centers outside of 911.

Dallas is pioneering a new approach where [social workers are being dispatched](#) to some 911 calls that involve mental health emergencies. The program has shown success, and many of the people receive care that they would never have gotten in jails or overcrowded hospitals.

In California, the [Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective](#) deals with child sexual abuse without the police. The collective develops pods — groups of people including survivors, bystanders or people who have harmed in the past — that each pod-member feels they can turn to for support when needed.

Here's another idea: Imagine if the money used to pay the salaries of police officers who endlessly patrol public housing buildings and harass residents can be used to fund plans that residents design to keep themselves safe. The money could also pay the salaries of maintenance and custodial workers; fund community programs, employment and a universal basic income; or pay for upgrades to [elevators](#) and apartment units so residents are not [stuck without gas](#) during a pandemic, as some people in Brooklyn were. The [Movement for Black Lives](#) and other social movements call for this kind of redirection of funds.

We need to reimagine public safety in ways that shrink and eventually abolish police and prisons while prioritizing education, housing, economic security, mental health and alternatives to conflict and violence. People often question the practicality of any emergency response that excludes the police. We live in a violent society, but the police rarely guarantee safety. Now more than ever is the time to divest not only from police resources, but also the idea that the police keep us safe.