



## **Community Wellbeing & Neighborhood Safety**

### **Committee Members**

**Dr. Lisa Calderón (Co-Chair)**

**Neal Walia (Co-Chair)**

**Adrienne Maddux**

**Alyssa Nilemo**

**Ankit Bishnoi**

**Dr. Dwinita Mosby Tyler**

**Dr. Robert Davis**

**Lisa Betchey**

**Melanie Kesner**

**Olivia Almaguer**

**Rhoda Pilmer**

**Stephanie Syner**

**Jess Wiederholt**

**Harry Budisidharta**

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## **Guiding Questions**

The Committee of Wellbeing and Public Safety used these guiding questions to shape their community listening sessions and committee work. **The committee's strongest and unanimous recommendation is that an additional city department, as outlined in the report below, be created and funded.**

1. Would the Office of Community Well-Being and Safety (or an alternatively named office) work best as an independent agency, as a standalone sub-department under the Department of Safety, or housed under a different department? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?
2. What potential programs should be included inside an Office of Community Well-Being and Safety?
3. How might we utilize the current structure and budget within various departments to make this a reality without expanding the budget?
4. What are the lessons from other communities that have established Offices of Community Well-Being and Safety? Where have they worked effectively, where have they not worked effectively, and why?
5. How could this department interface with other agencies of the City, including the Office of Children's Affairs, CPD, and Public Safety?
6. How do we ensure that this is a community-led agency that prioritizes community engagement?

## **Overview of CAPS Office**

### **CAPS– Community Alternatives, Partnerships, and Solutions**

**Purpose:** The CAPS Office would embed community-driven safety solutions into the fabric of city government but outside of the criminal legal system. We are also seeking to divert historically marginalized populations away from the criminal legal system for low level offenses where even one day in jail can have lifetime consequences including the loss of jobs, housing and even custody of children — all of which are more expensive to address on the backend.

The CAPS Office will identify the underlying socioeconomic determinants of violent crimes and develop community-centered solutions that keep people safe, rather than punishing them after the damage has already been done.

Currently, at its best, policing is designed to patrol communities with the hope that police presence will deter crime. Second, police investigate crimes that have been committed. Lastly, police apprehend criminals who have committed crimes. The training of law enforcement is centered around these responsibilities. This office would seek to develop solutions that would ease the burden on law enforcement resources because there will be less crimes for them to investigate, and fewer criminals for them to apprehend because of preventative strategies and alternatives to mass incarceration.

**Key Considerations:**

1. Collaborates with the Department of Safety but operates and is funded separately.
2. Start with a customer service and systems navigation orientation
3. Assemble a team of credible messengers with community capital
4. Co-develop solutions through ongoing partnerships with communities
5. Prioritize accountability to community stakeholders and sustainability through diverse funding sources
6. Implement an advisory committee with members from Community Wellbeing Transition Committee and people with lived experience to maintain a community-based focus

**Structure:** CAPS would have a three prong-approach to accomplish its purpose: 1) Alternatives, 2) Partnerships, and 3) Solutions

1. **Alternatives:** This office would function as the primary community-centered think tank for the City, dedicated to developing alternatives to policing and the criminal prosecution system as a means of addressing public safety and increasing public accountability and transparency by
  - a. Creating an equitable infrastructure for nonpunitive and holistic and healing approaches to public safety by addressing violence as a public health issue.
  - b. Promoting proven violence prevention and intervention strategies that are gender-responsive, culturally and linguistically relevant, and trauma-informed.

2. **Partnerships:** The responsibilities of this office includes:
  - a. Facilitating collaboration among city agencies involved in public safety and human services to ensure cohesive implementation of the City's vision and strategic plan for non-law enforcement programs and initiatives related to public safety;
  - b. Identifying and fostering partnerships with nonprofits and community organizations to optimize community resources in alignment with the City's vision and strategic plan for non-law enforcement programs and initiatives on public safety.
  - c. Providing one-stop support to nonprofits and community organizations throughout funding processes to streamline and enhance its efficiency.
  - d. Prioritizing participatory budgeting strategies in grants and funding.
  - e. Supporting the sustainability of new interventions and continuity of investments that strengthen community safety, including gun violence prevention.
  - f. Conducting citywide community engagement and networking activities to co-create policy development and evaluation.
  - g. Elevating the voices and initiatives of historically marginalized, disenfranchised, and displaced communities targeted by police and/or state violence
  
3. **Solutions:** The office would function as a research incubator and laboratory for developing new, community-centered, evidence/research-based, and promising practices initiatives that address public safety and community well-being challenges. Additionally, it would foster a community of learning by sharing the efficacy of proven and promising interventions, including restorative justice, transformative mentorship, universal basic income, etc. Activities include
  - a. Conducting neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis based on a framework informed by social determinants of health that would assess community needs, specific health & crime metrics, opportunities, and community connection/cohesion, which could serve as a blueprint for improving local policy, services, and public investment to advance community wellness and safety.
  - b. Creating a comprehensive strategic plan that could be developed at a structural level helps coordinate & deploy the responses from many city depts/offices, community groups, DPS/higher ed, private sector, etc., depending on the needs of that specific neighborhood.

- c. Once a comprehensive strategic plan is developed, conducting data analysis and community surveys overlaps that data onto each neighborhood map to help prioritize those neighborhoods most in need.
- d. The framework should be research-informed around major domains that impact community wellness & safety like economic stability, educational achievement/opportunity, health/care access, food security, housing stability, etc., and some crime/law enforcement metrics.
- e. Testing ideas and projects, evaluating goals with measurable outcomes driven by community voices.
- f. Reporting outcomes to stakeholders and the public, addressing public safety and community well-being challenges.
- g. Identifying and promoting non-law enforcement and public health-based approaches to gun violence.
- h. Educating the public by cultivating communities of learning.

### **Staffing**

Create a mayoral cabinet-level appointee position with solid leadership authority and the authority to interface with other cabinet-level department heads and the mayor directly. We recommend this position be preserved within the city charter. Additionally, this position will ideally be supported with the following FTEs.

1. Department Executive Director (mayoral appointee and cabinet position)
2. Program Director of Alternatives
3. Program Director of Partnerships
4. Program Director of Solutions
5. Communications Director
6. Grants and Funding Manager
7. (4) Neighborhood Outreach Coordinators - (credible messengers with lived experiences with the identified populations who expand access, resources, and interventions)
8. Administrative Aide

## **Budget and Funding**

### **1. Community Reinvestment**

- a. The Criminal Justice Reform Coalition of Colorado created a funding mechanism at the state level that could be a first-of-its-kind model at the city level. This Community Reinvestment strategy shifted cost-savings from the Department of Safety budget from reducing arrests, jail bed space, court cases, emergency services, etc. These state funds support community-led and community-based safety strategies. The focus of this investment is to help people and communities most impacted by crime and the overuse of the criminal legal system. CCJRC wrote and successfully advocated for the passage of three initiatives currently in effect in Colorado that will provide over \$50 million in state funds over the next few years for reentry, crime prevention, and victim services. (See [CCJRC Community Reinvestment Colorado](#))

### **2. Crime Prevention and Control Commission**

- a. In 2005, following the approval of a jail and courthouse expansion passed by voters, Mayor Hickenlooper created a 33-member Crime Prevention and Control Commission to fund and incubate innovative initiatives to decrease the jail population. The city budget has allocated a yearly average of nearly \$3 million. Created by ordinance, the commission is supposed “to provide initial funding opportunities” to “foster innovation and alternatives in the criminal justice system. However, that mission has stalled for years with programs that need a permanent home to make room for new programs that reduce recidivism. By restructuring the CPCC to clear the backlog, CPCC could once again return to its original function of funding new initiatives until they are incorporated into relevant city departments<sup>1</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

This committee strongly recommends the creation of an Office of Community Alternatives, Partnerships, and Solutions (CAPS). The committee has concluded that the creation of this office would be an asset to the existing work of the Denver Department of Public Safety (DDPS)

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<sup>1</sup> See “[Their Job is to Build Alternatives to Jail in Denver...](#)”

by addressing current needs outside of DDPS’s purview. Additionally, the short-term investment in creating this department would result in significant long-term savings for various city departments tasked with addressing public health and safety by creating safer and healthier neighborhoods and communities across Denver. As found in a city-commissioned study<sup>2</sup>, the creation of this office is widely supported by the public. This office would enhance the city’s ability to prevent violence and create safer neighborhoods and communities through a public health lens that addresses existing system-based crises and inequities. We are eager to support your administration in creating this department and look forward to our continued work towards a safer and more VIBRANT Denver.

## **Appendix A: FOUNDATIONS AND GRANTS**

Many philanthropic organizations provide funding or technical assistance for alternatives to criminalization initiatives for healthier, safer, and more compassionate communities that city government could explore innovative partnerships with, such as:

1. [Atlas Network](#)
2. [Vera Institute](#)
3. [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Family-Based Alternative Justice Program](#)
4. [MacArthur Foundation](#)
5. [Inside Philanthropy](#)

## **Appendix B: ANALYSIS**

### **History**

The impetus for creating this office came from the [Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety](#), a team of over 40 different community organizations, along with elected officials, faith leaders, and youth. This group met over a year and built relationships, had effective dialogue, and drafted recommendations surrounding policing and public safety in our city. To date, this is the largest, most diverse community-led public safety initiative in the nation. The Denver Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety was formed in response to the George Floyd protests as a community-led initiative to develop a comprehensive and sustainable community-based approach to policing and public safety.

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<sup>2</sup> As referenced in Appendix B

Several members of the Community Safety and Wellbeing Transition Team are part of the Taskforce that sought to answer the question, “What is public safety?” This is the fundamental question that the [Taskforce's 112 recommendations](#) attempt to answer.

### **Study Summary and Overview**

Sheila M. Huss, Ph.D. with the University of Colorado Denver, School of Public Affairs, conducted an Assessment of the feasibility of establishing an Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) titled THE FEASIBILITY OF AN OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY IN THE CITY OF DENVER<sup>3</sup>. The academic and evidence-based report was commissioned by the Denver Agency for Human Rights and Community in June 2022 and completed in April 2023.

**Assessment Findings** - The assessment’s findings were consistent with feedback from the three Community Wellness Transition Team community meetings held in Montbello, West Denver, at the Denver Indian Center and Central Denver at Mutual Aid Monday with unhoused residents:

1. Many people supported the establishment of an ONS.
2. They pointed out that there are gaps that exist in the City that this Office could address.
3. They believed that an ONS could partner with City Council and City departments and agencies in their public safety work.
4. They advocated for an ONS as an entity that would have more community engagement than anything the City currently has in place.
5. Community involvement was a priority for almost all interviewees. Many posited that community trust was a requirement for meaningful engagement. Interviewees perceived community members as experts on local public safety and agreed that their expertise should be well-utilized in an ONS.
6. Crime was a big concern, followed by transportation and social harm.
7. This finding was consistent with reports from City Council members, many of whom stated crime and/or transportation-related safety issues were their constituents’ biggest worries.
8. Most respondents would like their communities to be moderately or heavily involved in an ONS and believed a community-City collaboration in an ONS could be effective.
9. Most residents did not believe there was a duplication in services between the City and communities.

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<sup>3</sup> It is our understanding that this report by Dr. Sheila Huss was shared with Mayor-Elect Johnston.



10. Interviewees almost universally agreed that silos between departments and agencies were a huge problem in the City of Denver. Some were optimistic that an ONS could break down those silos, while others were not.
11. Many interviewees recommended that an ONS be a stand-alone office under the Mayor.

### **Appendix C: Additional Resources**

1. <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/alternatives-to-policing-community-violence-intervention-fact-sheet.pdf>
2. [https://cf.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ONSblueprint-121620.pdf?\\_ga=2.242111298.1536158542.1644857769-1888873038.1611763607](https://cf.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ONSblueprint-121620.pdf?_ga=2.242111298.1536158542.1644857769-1888873038.1611763607)
3. <https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/National-OVP-Landscape-Scan-Jan-2022.pdf>
4. <https://www.advancepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AP-Richmond-Impact-2019.pdf>
5. <https://urbanmilwaukee.com/2021/10/13/data-wonk-why-is-milwaukees-murder-rate-increasing/>
6. [https://monse.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/MayorBMS\\_Draft\\_ViolenceReductionFrameworkPlan.pdf](https://monse.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/MayorBMS_Draft_ViolenceReductionFrameworkPlan.pdf)
7. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/105302/implementing-youth-violence-reduction-strategies\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/105302/implementing-youth-violence-reduction-strategies_0.pdf)