For nearly a decade the Workers Center for Racial Justice (WCRJ) has held critical conversations with tens of thousands of local community members impacted by anti-Black policing, to learn more about their visions of what public safety could look like in their own neighborhoods, on their own terms. Through these powerful exchanges, Chicago residents have resoundingly articulated a shared belief that true neighborhood safety can not be achieved through increased funding to law enforcement, but rather through inclusive public investment in programs that foster equity and opportunity for all. In particular, community members have called for a large scale expansion of human services, affordable housing, mental health resources, and youth programs, as a means to achieve universal safety and liberation in our city.

WCRJ’s recent analysis of city data confirms what local communities have long attested. By investigating municipal budgets, public safety metrics, police dispatch records, and citywide human service needs, our research reveals that Chicago’s exorbitant funding to local law enforcement has served to undermine public safety and exacerbate long-standing systems of racialized disinvestment, inequality, and injustice.

Guided by community perspectives and a wide range of municipal data, WCRJ has crafted an informed and strategic policy proposal to promote equitable public safety in Chicago. The three year plan calls for a series of funding reductions to the Chicago Police Department (CPD), as well as concurrent budget increases to vital social services and public health programs. The proposal also provides for a newly established Community Safety Unit to provide residents with emergency public safety dispatch services, outside of law enforcement.

In the weeks and months ahead, WCRJ will work to leverage the collective power of community behind this achievable plan to build truly safe and free neighborhoods through fair and inclusive reinvestment.
Despite a steady decrease in citywide crime rates over the past three decades, Chicago has continuously increased funding to police. The city’s per capita spending on law enforcement is now more than two and a half times the rate in 1964, adjusting for inflation. Chicago’s per capita police funding is 38% higher than the average large city.

Exorbitant public payouts to CPD have resulted in a steady influx of officers on city streets. In 2018, with more than 13,000 police among its ranks, Chicago employed the highest number of officers per capita of the nation’s ten most populous cities.

The astounding size of the city’s police force has had devastating implications for communities targeted by systems of anti-Black harassment and brutality.

CHICAGO POLICE SPENDING TRUMPS THAT OF OTHER U.S. CITIES

ELEVATED POLICE FUNDING DOES NOT PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY

Despite tremendous taxpayer investments, CPD has failed to effectively promote public safety within the city. Chicago’s crime rate exceeds that of demographically comparable cities that spend far less on law enforcement. Moreover, the department’s clearance rates for murder, robbery, and assault are significantly lower than that of other large U.S. police agencies.

Rather than fostering community safety, excessive police funding further entrenches systems of racial injustice in Chicago. Generations of systemic, anti-Black police surveillance, abuse, and violence have only served to exacerbate the symptoms of structural inequality, racialization, and disinvestment that underpin disparities in neighborhood safety.
EXORBITANT POLICE SPENDING DRAWS RESOURCES AWAY FROM VITAL CITY SERVICES

In 2019, Chicago allocated a staggering $1.67 billion to the police department, which represented over 40% of the city’s total operating budget.

Exorbitant spending on law enforcement imposes austerity conditions on critical public programs, including family and support services, affordable housing, and public health. In 2019, less than 4% of the city budget was directed towards social welfare services.

PUBLIC SERVICES ARE DANGEROUSLY UNDERFUNDED

Excessive funding to CPD draws public resources away from vitally needed public safety services, such as mental health, social services, and youth programs. Such mismanagement of taxpayer dollars perpetuates austerity conditions which, in turn, exacerbate structural inequality and erode public safety.
HOW DOES THE CITY OF CHICAGO PRIORITIZE INVESTMENTS IN ITS WORKFORCE?

- 13,000+ police officers
- 75 social, homeless, and veteran services providers
- 130 child & youth services workers
- 101 mental & behavioral health, substance use workers
- 22 service providers for people with disabilities
- 4 domestic violence staff

Workers Center for Racial Justice
In 2018, Chicago’s Office of Emergency Management fielded an average of 8,000 police dispatch calls per day. Despite the high volume of police service requests, the city reported a daily average of only 75 incidents of violent crime. This discrepancy indicates that the overwhelming majority of 911 police dispatches pertain to situations outside of the purview of emergency law enforcement.

Thousands of police calls a day stem from traffic incidents, mental health emergencies, and urgent human services needs. In such cases, armed officers are not necessary and often directly undermine public safety, according to local residents.

Thousands of daily 911 dispatch calls do not pertain to imminent violent crime, but rather reflect unmet human or public service needs. Armed police officers are often less effective in addressing such circumstance, and can escalate public safety crises.

In order to improve the city’s emergency response, Chicago must replace a significant number of dispatch officers with on-call professionals, including traffic responders, crisis workers, mental health providers, and human services employees, who would be better equipped to respond to many public safety emergencies.
In order to advance an equitable and just system of public safety in our city, WCRJ proposes a three year phased reduction in taxpayer funding to the police department, and a concurrent increase in allocations to key community service programs.

Initial public divestment from the police department would amount to $300 million dollars in FY 2021, relative to FY 2020 funding levels. Police spending cuts would increase by an additional $300 million in each of the following two fiscal years, to ultimately arrive at a FY 2023 police budget that is $900 million less than that of FY 2020. Cutting the police budget in half over a three year period would bring Chicago’s per capita law enforcement spending just under the current average among the nation’s top ten most populous cities.

WCRJ also proposes increased investments in city programs that provide long term public safety support. Over the next three years, we recommend a graduated hike in annual funding to the Housing, Public Health, and Family and Support Services departments. By FY 2023 the total additional funding distributed across these respective departments would amount to a $700 million increase, relative to FY 2020 levels.

Additionally, we call for the establishment of a citywide Community Safety Unit (CSU), which would provide residents with emergency dispatch services to address urgent public safety crises. This program, which would be fully independent of CPD, would be tasked with assisting in circumstances that do not necessitate law enforcement, including, but not limited to, mental health situations, human service needs, traffic incidents, and administrative public safety reporting.

We propose an initial CSU investment of $100 million in FY 2021 to (1) hire a third party consultant to expeditiously audit the city’s current police emergency response system, assess the public safety needs of the city, collect community comments, and issue directives for implementing an alternative emergency response program, and (2) fund CSU operations beginning in July 2021. Annual appropriations to the CSU would continuously increase, reaching $200 million by FY 2023.
# Proposed Budget Changes Relative to FY20 Spending

Over the next three fiscal years, WCRJ recommends a series of reductions in police department spending, along with a commensurate increase in funding to the city’s existing supportive services and proposed Community Safety Unit. The table below reflects annual allocation changes relative to the FY 2020 budget.

## Budget Projections with Proposed Redistributions

The table below reflects the budget in five key public safety funding areas for the current fiscal year, as well as adjusted allocations over the next three fiscal years, following WCRJ’s public safety reinvestment proposal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 2020</th>
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<td>−$200 Million</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

![Budget Projections with Proposed Redistributions]

*Workers Center for Racial Justice*
Chicago Police Spending Trumps that Of Other Cities
Injustice Watch: Chicago has nearly tripled per capita police spending since 1964
U.S Census Bureau: The 15 Most Populous Cities July 1, 2018
New York City Council: Report to the Committee on Finance and the Committee on Public Safety on the Fiscal 2018 Executive Budget for New York Police Department
City of Los Angeles: Budget Fiscal Year 2017-18
City of Chicago: 2018 Budget Overview
City of Houston: Fiscal Year 2018 Adopted Budget
City of Phoenix: 2017-18 Phoenix Summary Budget
City of Philadelphia: The Mayor’s Operating Budget in Brief for Fiscal Year 2018
City of San Antonio: Fiscal Year 2018 Adopted Operating & Capital Budget
City of San Diego: Fiscal Year 2018 Adopted Budget
City of Dallas: Annual Budget Fiscal Year 2017-18
City of San Jose: 2017-2018 Adopted Operating Budget
FBI Uniform Crime Reporting: Full-time Law Enforcement Employees by City, 2018

Elevated Police Funding Does Not Promote Public Safety
FBI Uniform Crime Reporting: Percent of Offenses Cleared

by Arrest or Exceptional Means by Population Group, 2018
Chicago Police Department: 2018 Annual Report

Police Spending Draws Resources Away from Vital Services
Center for Tax and Budget Accountability: Chicago Budget Tool

Key Public Safety Services are Dangerously Underfunded
City of Chicago: 2020 Budget Overview

How Does the City of Chicago Prioritize Investments in its Workforce?
City of Chicago: 2020 Budget Overview

Most 911 Calls Do Not Require Law Enforcement
Chicago Police Department: 2018 Annual Report

Other City Departments are Better Equipped to Address Most 911 Public Safety Calls
City of Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communications: Obtained under the Freedom of Information Act; requested as, “Records of number of police service calls by category of service for the most recent year available,” released July 2020

DATA SOURCES