

January 29, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-255, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy, and Leader McConnell:

Thank you for your leadership in responding to the grave challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and your dedication to the health and safety of the American people.

The National Coalition for Shared Safety represents the leading organizations that are advancing community safety solutions. We are critical assistance providers, public health experts, and business leaders who are joining together to promote the most effective strategies to achieve public safety for all. We are on the front lines of supporting crime survivors and people with past convictions. Our organizations specialize in trauma recovery, health, mental health, violence prevention, and reentry support. Together, we are promoting the safety solutions every community needs.

The Coalition requests that Congress allocate \$3.41 billion in the stimulus to services dedicated to helping communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19. This includes a \$2 billion to support the general operations of critical assistance providers in the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grants, the Department of Health and Human Services' Community Services Block Grant program, or the Department of Justice's Justice Assistance Grant program; \$10 million to support state's efforts to automate criminal record clearance; and \$1.4 billion in federal investments towards transitional jobs and workforce development programs.

COVID-19 has had a profoundly destabilizing impact on communities throughout the country, which has driven severe spikes in violence and trauma. As the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice has reported, "homicides, aggravated assaults, and gun assaults rose significantly beginning in late May and June of 2020. Homicide rates increased by 42% during the summer and 34% in the fall over the summer and fall of 2019. In the 21 cities providing homicide data, there were 610 more homicides in the summer and fall of 2020 than during the same period in 2019. Aggravated assaults went up by 15% in the summer and 13% in the fall of 2020; gun assaults increased by 15% and 16%."¹ Stay-at-home orders and isolation have also amplified unsafe conditions at home for many LGBTQ and youth, exacerbating mental health conditions and increasing rates of suicide. During the pandemic, critical assistance providers have helped communities throughout the country that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, job loss, and associated increases in violent crime.

¹ National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice. "Impact Report: COVID-19 and Crime." 2020. Retrieved from <https://covid19.counciloncj.org/2020/11/30/impact-report-covid-19-and-crime-2/>

The social and economic effects of COVID-19 have been exacerbated by decades of costly overreliance on our criminal justice system, particularly jails and prisons, that have produced limited benefits at the expense of disproportionate harm to low-income, immigrant, and communities of color. During the pandemic, these harms have been compounded by injurious gender norms that have driven spikes in interpersonal and domestic violence, traumatizing women, girls, and boys in ways that will perpetuate cycles of crime and violence if unaddressed.

Critical assistance providers' services are designed to address the specific challenges communities in crisis face. Critical assistance provider organizations tend to be small, based in and staffed by residents of the communities they serve. These features give them the proximity and credibility they need to work effectively with the people who have been most harmed but least helped by our criminal justice and human service systems. During the pandemic, these organizations have also gone above and beyond their normal work, serving as front-line workers, mediating conflicts and preventing violence, delivering food, PPE, and other essential services to people who lack access to vital resources.

Critical assistance providers serve an essential role in ordinary times and have become even more critical to their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. To continue to provide services, critical assistance providers are in dire need of additional governmental support. Surveys of these providers have shown:

- Four out of five report an increasing need for services and diminished ability to provide them, with four in five organizations reporting different kinds of service requests related to the pandemic, resulting from both increased needs and an inability to reach or provide services to clients directly. The vast majority of respondents reported a severe drop in funding.²
- Seventy-five percent of respondents to one survey said they had stopped providing some services or closed operations entirely since the rise of the pandemic. Nearly one in five reentry service providers surveyed reported layoffs.³

This precarious financial situation and lack of governmental investment jeopardizes critical assistance providers' capacity to help people precisely when communities in crisis need them the most.

In order to ensure that a decisive federal response best protects the health and well-being of our most vulnerable communities, we ask that any federal response include five pillars.

1. Support for Critical Assistance Services for Communities in Crisis

- We propose a minimum of \$2 billion to support the general operations of critical assistance providers dedicated to services such as, but not limited to, trauma recovery, healthcare, substance-abuse treatment, victim services, mental health care, housing, violence prevention, community violence interruption, and reentry support.
- To ensure stimulus resources reach critical assistance providers, we request that the appropriation be made to federal agencies and grant programs that are structured to support community-based nonprofit organizations, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grants, the Department of Health and Human Services' Community Services Block Grant program, or the Department of Justice's Justice Assistance Grant program.

² Alliance for Safety and Justice, "#STOPHESPREAD: A survey of crisis assistance service providers and people on the frontlines working to stop cycles of crime." (2020). Retrieved from <https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ASJ-Summary-of-Surveys-RD4.pdf>

³ Council of State Governments. "Survey Shows Reentry Services Halting Across U.S." (2020). Retrieved from <https://csgjusticecenter.org/surveymshows-reentry-services-halting-across-u-s/>

- In any appropriation, we ask that appropriation language direct grant-making agencies to prioritize community-led public safety solutions and accelerate processes, application reviews, and bureaucratic barriers to emergency aid reaching organizations.

2. Elimination of Unnecessary Barriers Based on Criminal Records

- We propose that any federal response eliminate restrictions to federal assistance in order to ensure that criminal record-based legal restrictions do not bar people from accessing resources, such as housing, small business loans, and other essential services, that will protect their health and economic recovery during this challenging time.
- To help the more 70 million Americans with a criminal record participate in the post-COVID economic recovery, we further request that \$10 million dollars be allocated to support state efforts to automate their criminal record clearance systems. This funding can be administered through the National Criminal History Information Program in the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

3. Investments in an Equitable Recovery

- We request an overall \$1.4 billion dollars in federal investments towards transitional jobs and workforce development programs that are trauma informed and gender responsive. These programs have been proven to be particularly effective at engaging the people that critical assistance providers serve.
- This investment should include \$800 million across federal workforce programs to reach 100,000 justice-impacted individuals with a transitional job.
- We propose as part of this request an investment of \$100 million in additional funds over and above the current allocation for SNAP Employment & Training to accelerate COVID-19 response.
- Finally, we ask that \$500 million be allocated for reentry and skills training to create the infrastructure needed to put unemployed Americans back to work.

4. Prioritize Critical Assistance Providers in Vaccination Efforts

- We propose that critical assistance workers, including violence prevention workers, community health workers, mental health workers, violence interrupters and outreach workers, homeless service providers and other types of service providers who are not traditionally referred to as community health workers be vaccinated in Phase 1. These workers have not merely been on the frontlines throughout the pandemic. Instead, critical assistance workers come from and are trusted by their communities, serving to model and disseminate culturally responsive public health education on vaccinations.

5. Stabilize Victims of Crime Act Funding

- We support ongoing efforts to redirect monetary penalties from federal deferred prosecution and non-prosecution agreements that would otherwise be deposited into the General Treasury into the Crime Victims Fund. In recent years, many critical assistance providers have begun to receive Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) assistance grants, as states have looked to strengthen and expand victim services to reach more and different types of crime survivors. In Fiscal Year 2020, however, the VOCA disbursement - and thus the funding available for victim service providers - decreased by 25%, and victim service providers have been told to expect further potentially catastrophic cuts. Such cuts to programs that already struggle to serve crime survivors would mean that hundreds of thousands of Americans would be unable to access lifesaving services every year, programs would be forced to close, and tens of thousands of advocates could lose their jobs during a time of extremely high unemployment. This would also coincide with continued increased need, particularly for communities of color

that have been disproportionately impacted, for services resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and reduced state and local funding.

On behalf of the National Coalition for Shared Safety, our member organizations, and the many crime survivors, people with past convictions, and their families and communities who we represent, we urge you to make these investments to strengthen our nation's most vulnerable communities during this time of crisis. By investing in policies and organizations that support the recovery of this community of individuals, we can increase equity and improve the safety, health, and economic security of all.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



national alliance of trauma recovery centers

