

Public Safety Reforms for Pittsburgh

No matter what we look like or where we live, we all want our families to be whole and our communities to be vibrant. But too often, the people entrusted to serve and protect our communities target, detain and even kill Black people like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks, and Antwon Rose II, among too many others.

This summer, in Pittsburgh and around the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the stark disparities in communities from policing to public health, from community spaces to income, race, and housing. People from all walks of life have risen up together to demand liberty and justice and a government of, by, and for the people. The protests are rapidly transforming our lives, exposing the injustices that the powerful few have unleashed since our country's founding.

Now, we have the opportunity to focus public attention on creating communities where everyone is safe and free, with an economy that works for all of us. This year has redefined what it means to reckon with our past, advocate for better in our present, and expand the possibilities for our future.

We have an opportunity to reimagine and redefine public safety. In some neighborhoods, we invest in small business, community resources, public health, and housing. In others, we target residents by over-policing, focusing on enforcement, and allowing historic disinvestment. We need to rethink what it actually means to serve the public. Together, we can double down on making Pittsburgh a city that works for all, not just for some.

It's no secret that the pandemic is already resulting in revenue shortfalls and putting strains on our City's financial future. We must be creative, smart, and bold as we approach how and where we direct our dollars to ensure that our budgetary choices increase access to opportunity, public health, and true safety and security for Black and brown Pittsburghers living in traditionally disinvested neighborhoods.

Below, I've reviewed what we've done so far, and what else we can do to ensure that we all can care for our families, set our kids up to thrive, and live safe, full, and healthy lives.

City-Level:

The following legislation was introduced this summer by Council Members Burgess and Lavelle. I support their efforts and I look forward to expanding upon the groundwork that they have laid.

- **Bill 2020-0404:** "Stop the Violence Fund," which creates a new fund that prioritizes violence prevention in our communities. [Click for full text.](#)
- **Bill 2020-0405:** "Duty to Intervene," which mandates that officers step in and stop or attempt to stop another employee or officer who they witness using unreasonable force. [Click for full text.](#)
- **Bill 2020-0406:** Bans the purchase of surplus military equipment for use by police without approval by council. [Click for full text.](#)
- **Bill 2020-0410:** Directs \$250,000 in the 2020 Operating Budget from Police Salaries to the Stop the Violence Fund. [Click for full text.](#)
- **Bill 2020-0487:** Prohibits Pittsburgh Police officers from using chokeholds. [Click for full text.](#)
- **Bill 2020-0447** Adds a referendum question on the ballot that would expand the powers of the Independent Citizen Police Review Board, allowing the Board to require police officers to participate in investigations, conduct performance audits of the Police Bureau, and prevent the removal of Board members except for just cause and with City Council approval. [Click for full text.](#)

City Council held a series of Public Hearings and Post Agendas on the above set of legislation. Those videos can be viewed [here](#).

Additionally, Mayor Peduto has announced a number of changes to the way that the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police manages protests, including:

1. Assigning a new Incident Commander to oversee protests;
2. Bringing in Civil Affairs and Public Safety Community Engagement Staff to help oversee responses to protests;
3. Limiting the use of Police Special Response Teams at protests and creating clear, written guidelines for these units that, among other things, will specify that jump-out arrests of protesters by non-uniformed police in unmarked vehicles will not be permitted;
4. Barring police from wearing military-style camouflage uniforms at protests.

I support these initial steps, and am committed to doing more.

What else can we do at the city level?

Reallocate money from the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police budget to investments in our neighborhoods.

Top 5 911 Call Types	Top 5 Minutes of Time
Traffic Stop	Parking Complaint
Burglar Alarm	Traffic Stop
Parking Complaint	Domestic Violence
Welfare Check	Welfare Check
Domestic Violence	Burglar Alarm

Source: 2019 911 Call Data, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police

- In 2020, the Operating Budget for Pittsburgh’s Bureau of Police was \$114,787,000, 18.9% of the City’s budget, making it the second largest section of the budget behind the Finance Department. Traffic stops and parking complaints make up two of the top call categories for the Pittsburgh Police. Instead of sending armed police officers to mitigate minor infractions like these, we should consider using civilian options for these and other categories.
- Based on the full set of 911 call data from 2019, Pittsburgh Police spent 19 percent of their time responding to incidents and activities that could be addressed by unarmed civilian staff or addressed in other ways. Recognizing that much more analysis is needed, if that percentage were applied to the current Police Operating Budget, it would equate shifting \$21,809,530 to other City departments, offices, and even to government and to non-governmental partners.
- Similarly, we should reconsider asking police to respond to incidents related to mental health, addiction, and homelessness. When possible, we should employ social workers and mental health professionals trained in de-escalation as other cities through the U.S. and the world have demonstrated is both possible and beneficial.
- We need to quickly identify new and greater sources of funding for programs and policies that address core issues around housing and food security, physical and mental health, education, access job opportunities, and clean water and air. Meeting these basic needs for all Pittsburghers will put us on the path toward ensuring true public safety is achieved.

Crowds and Protests

- During protests, Pittsburgh must ensure the safety of protestors, police, and the general public. We need to:
 - Prioritize de-escalation tactics;
 - Ensure police treat protests as peaceful gatherings rather than riots;

- Minimize or completely eliminate the use of chemical munitions and projectiles;
 - Prioritize proactive and calm communication to the crowd – even in the face of escalating tensions;
 - Evaluate the mental health of officers before, during, and after protest events; and,
 - Improve the transparency of protest-related policies and proactive public communication during protests.
- Legislation I am considering includes banning the use of chemical munitions and projectiles by police until and unless a third-party assessment of best practices has been conducted, best practices have been adopted by the Bureau, and all officers have been trained on best practices.

Ban on predictive policing

- Councilmember O'Connor has introduced legislation that addresses predictive policing and facial recognition technology [Click for full text](#). The implementation of predictive policing in Pittsburgh has not been transparent, nor has it involved community members. Existing technology can rely too much on bias and historical data, further continuing racial injustice. Predictive policing has been put on hold by the City of Pittsburgh but should be permanently banned.

Require public hearing prior to the labor agreement with Bureau of Police employees

- Modeled after legislation introduced by Philadelphia City Councilmember Katherine Gilmore Richardson, this legislation would require City Council to hold a public hearing at least 30 days before the City enters into or amends a collective bargaining labor contract with the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP). It would also require the Mayor's Administration to send a representative to inform Council and the public about the terms of the contract proposal.

Increase Transparency with the Pittsburgh Police Department

- In 2016, City Council passed an open data ordinance in order to provide data transparency to the public. In addition to reported incidents, arrests, and non-traffic citations that are already shared publicly with the Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center, other data should be made available in a disaggregated and searchable format outside of the Bureau of Police Annual Report, and should be done so in a way that protects identities of the public and officers. This includes: complaints against police, calls for service from 911, use of force data, traffic stops, field contacts, and officers involved in arrests and citations.

An overhaul of policing and a redefining of public safety is not something that can be addressed by our city alone. Pennsylvania's system of government ensures multiple levels of government play a role in determining where the police are located, how they can be disciplined, and other crucial decision points. If we are going to make changes, we must coordinate with every level of government that oversees the police.

Policing in Schools:

- I support calls to remove School Resource Officers from Pittsburgh Public Schools and reallocate the \$7.3 million-per-year funding towards hiring other qualified professionals who can serve in a similar capacity without the ability to arrest the student. Additionally, we should exhaust every resource available prior to calling the police into our schools.
- Pittsburgh Public Schools should bolster investment in restorative practices, counseling, and mental health services in order to promote violence prevention and reduce the school-to-prison pipeline.

Allegheny County-level legislation:

- In June, members of County Council presented legislation that would ban less-lethal weapons such as bean-bag rounds and pepper spray. Although this legislation was not passed, I support, where legal, halting the use of less-lethal weapons at all levels of government, until or unless associated police units are trained in best practices recommended by a third party assessment.
- There are 109 different police departments in Allegheny County, making police accountability difficult to manage at the County governmental level. I support the formation of a Citizen Police Review Board at the County level, as proposed by Councilmember DeWitt Walton, that can hold Allegheny County law enforcement accountable and would allow individual municipal police departments to opt in.

State-level legislation:

- [HB 1910](#) - (Rep. Williams) - Will require enhanced training for police officers on how to treat people of diverse racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds. Requires officers to take a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder test every two years, or within 30 days of a lethal use-of-force. *Passed unanimously in both House and Senate, signed by Governor Wolf on July 14.*
- [HB 1841](#) - (Rep. Readshaw) - Will require police agencies to do thorough background checks of any new hires through a statewide database that holds information on disciplinary actions and separation records of all police officers in the state. *Passed unanimously in both House and Senate, signed by Governor Wolf on July 14.*
- [SB 459](#) - (Sen. Costa) - Would require all police departments to report any use-of-force incidents to the state police. The state police would then be required to present annual

use-of-force reports to the attorney general. It's uncertain if these reports will be made public. *Passed in the Senate, now is in the House.*

- [SB 1205](#) – (**Sen. Street**) - Would require police departments to publish their use of force policies and limit the use of chokeholds to instances where deadly force is needed. *Passed in the Senate, now is in the House.*
- [HB 1664](#) - (**Reps. Lee, Gainey**) - Would mandate that de-escalation and non-lethal force options be exhausted by a police officer prior to using lethal force. Would also mandate that lethal force only be used and justified to prevent imminent threat to life. *Referred to Judiciary Committee.*
- [HB 2602](#) - (**Rep. Bullock, Wheatley, Rabb**) Addresses the police arbitration process relating to officers under disciplinary investigations. The bill would amend Act 111 to remove collective bargaining powers from the police union around police misconduct investigations, disciplinary actions, disciplinary records. It also calls for records of these investigations to be available under Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know law.
- Other state-level reforms that I support include: requiring mandatory drug testing after a police-involved shooting; improving access to police footage by requiring all non-body camera police footage to be subject to the Right to Know Law; creating a state oversight board to professionally certify, train, and provide continuing education to officers with disciplinary powers; require law enforcement officers to be regularly evaluated for PTSD; requiring law enforcement officers to be mandated reporters of police misconduct, corruption, and brutality.

Federal-level legislation:

- [H.R. 1720/S. 3912](#) - (**Congresswoman Karen Bass; Senator Cory Booker**) - A bill to hold law enforcement accountable for misconduct in court by limiting qualified immunity, improving transparency through data collection, and reform police training and policies. *Passed in House, now is in the Senate.*