

2023 Public Safety Agenda for Newly Elected Members of Congress



INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Congress plays a key role in crafting and elevating policies that can affect change at the federal level or offer support to state and local authorities. During the past election cycle, public safety was among the top concerns of voters. As such, they elected candidates from across the country to address this important issue. Here, we elaborate on key initiatives we have researched extensively to help lawmakers come up with smart legislation that can help combat the rise in crime and promote public safety.

AGENDA ITEMS

CANNABIS REFORM:

Descheduling cannabis federally and bringing cannabis into established legal, regulation and taxation structures

Why: People in law enforcement have become [distrusted by many in the communities they serve](#), and with the vast majority of Americans [supporting adult use](#) of medicinal or recreational cannabis, legalization can further add to the legitimacy of law enforcement officials. Additionally, many non-violent offenses, like low-level possession of cannabis, have forced law enforcement to [extend resources to enforce](#) these laws instead of focusing them on the spike in violent crime.

Benefit: With the federal descheduling and legalization of cannabis, members of law enforcement can reduce [negative community police interactions](#), bolstering police-community relations. Descheduling can also, with appropriate regulation, help break up and do away with the [illicit cannabis market](#). Furthermore, law enforcement resources can be used to address the violent crime that has festered across the country.

Take Note: Cannabis legalization needs to be paired with [appropriate regulations that are not too strenuous](#), or it can lead to a continuation or even growth of the illicit market which can be seen in states like Colorado and California.

Where Congress Stands:

- [States Reform Act](#)
- [Harnessing Opportunities by Pursuing Expungement Act of 2021](#)
- [Secure and Fair Enforcement \(SAFE\) Banking Act](#)

RECORD SEALING AND EXPUNGEMENT:

Opening up second chances to those with existing criminal records by sealing or expunging certain records after a crime-free period of time

- ? **Why:** [One in three Americans](#) has a criminal record that hinders their ability to acquire a good paying job and quality housing. Without the ability to get a fresh start after finishing their sentence, many past offenders end up resorting to survival crime to stay afloat. Past offenders are [27 percent more likely to be unemployed](#) and their earning capacity is [25 percent less](#)—even though they are more likely to stay at their job—compared to those without a criminal record.
- ✓ **Benefit:** Automatic expungement and record sealing for low-level non-violent offenders will allow many to get a fresh start when they re-enter society. For the broader community, it will help lessen crime, [contribute billions of dollars to our GDP](#), open up a workforce amidst the current shortage and save taxpayer dollars on government programs re-entrants would depend on if they still had their criminal records.
- 👋 **Take Note:** In a polarized political time, automatic clean slate expungement is a bipartisan, bicameral policy model that also has the support of more than [70 percent of American voters](#), and states from Pennsylvania to Utah have passed legislation to enact their own clean slate programs.
- 📍 **Where Congress Stands:**
 - [Clean Slate Act](#)
 - [Fresh Start Act](#)
 - [Kenneth P. Thompson Begin Again Act](#)

JUVENILE JUSTICE:

Prioritizing rehabilitation over harsh punishment of juveniles can lead to less criminality

- ? **Why:** Juvenile detention [can lower the likelihood](#) of kids graduating from high school and [increase their chances](#) of being arrested as an adult. Moreover, when children are prosecuted as adults, they increase their risk of recidivism and are more likely to be involved in violent crime in the future. Youth incarceration severs social ties and does not set people up for a successful life.
- ✓ **Benefit:** The “lock them up and throw away the key mentality” has [proved to be an ineffective](#) way to combat crime versus deflection policies that utilize community treatment. Responsible reforms can help these young individuals while also not derailing their lives by postponing educational milestones and stifling their future success.
- 👋 **Take Note:** The amount of youth incarcerated has [decreased 40 percent](#) in some states like Texas. [Reports](#) have shown that jurisdictions can address the concern of recidivating youth offenders by enacting smart policies such as more treatment and allowing for a sufficient amount of supervision.
- 📍 **Where Congress Stands:**
 - [Juvenile Justice Package](#)

PRE-TRIAL REFORMS:

Responsible reforms to make pre-trial processes more efficient

- ? **Why:** The collection of government debt through driver’s license suspensions have proven to be ineffective, and the [enforcement of it diminishes public safety](#) and takes away from more important responsibilities of law enforcement. Additionally, the [high cost of health care](#) for detainees in jails across the country has forced law enforcement agencies, especially our sheriffs, to spend financial resources.
- ✓ **Benefit:** Smart pre-trial reforms can enhance public safety by saving law enforcement agencies both time and money that can be spent on more pressing matters such as violent crime and training.
- 👋 **Take Note:** Debt-based license revocation has a [big effect on lower income Americans](#), and those in [pre-trial detention have high rates](#) of chronic illness, mental illness and suffer from substance misuse.
- 📍 **Where Congress Stands:**
 - [Driving for Opportunity Act](#)
 - [Due Process Continuity of Care Act](#)

ADULT RECIDIVISM REDUCTION:

With reforms to post adjudication sentencing as well as in-prison programming and incentives, adults in the system are less likely to reoffend upon release and dollars can be better spent on programs proven to reduce recidivism rates.

FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

- ? **Why:** Many federal sentencing laws and prison policies were changed in the early 1990s, particularly by the [Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994](#), done prior to [extensive criminological research in the decades since](#) on drivers of criminal behavior, practices to deter crime and tools to incentivize rehabilitation of offenders.
- ✓ **Benefit:** Taking another look at existing sentencing and prison reforms continues to be critical to public safety, as there is a twofold reality to acknowledge: first, any dollar spent incarcerating an individual longer than necessary for the purposes of public safety and justice is a dollar not spent effectively deterring crime; and second, increased sentence lengths [do not effectively deter crime](#) and instead [yield diminishing returns](#), therefore risking increases in crime elsewhere in the system. Dollars are far better spent implementing evidence-based recidivism reduction programming.
- 👤 **Take Note:** Known as “tough-on-crime” reforms at the time, the [Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994](#) was spearheaded in large part by [then-Sen. Joe Biden](#) and signed into law by then-President Bill Clinton. The largest criminal justice package since this bill was the First Step Act of 2018, which undid many ill-informed changes from the “1994 crime bill,” which was spearheaded by former House Judiciary Chairman Doug Collins (R-Ga.) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), and signed into law [by former President Donald J. Trump](#).
- 📍 **Where Congress Stands:**
 - [First Step Implementation Act](#)
 - [Eliminating a Quantifiably Unjust Application of the Law \(EQUAL\) Act](#)

● If you need help with additional research around these issues, taking the next step to push forward legislation or any related matters, please reach out.

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