

2024 Public Safety Agenda for Governors



INTRODUCTION


In his [first letter](#) to Amazon.com shareholders 27 years ago, Jeff Bezos was clear about his mission: to become the most customer-centric company on the planet. Since then, customers have remained at the core of Amazon’s business approach. Just like successful CEOs who start with the customer and work backward, governors must understand and prioritize the needs of all criminal justice stakeholders—victims, law enforcement, and even offenders. By embracing high-tech tools, focusing on young people, and reforming cash bail, governors can create a more customer-centric justice system in 2024.


AGENDA

EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGY


- ? **Why:** As CEOs of their respective states, governors know that data-driven decisions are critical to protecting the public. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) promise to expedite emergency response, improve crime prediction, and automate tasks that consume valuable officer hours. The potential is perhaps most profound in labor-intensive police operations like reviewing body camera video. With [more than 10,000 hours](#) generated per week, most of that footage—especially in big cities—[goes unseen](#).
- ✓ **Benefit:** Not only can computer vision sift through 100 percent of an agency’s body camera footage, it can index it, make it searchable, and even [identify subtle details](#) that elude human reviewers. Speech recognition and natural language processing can flag critical events or unprofessional behavior to highlight training opportunities for command staff. Offloading work onto AI agents frees up officers for tasks that require a more human touch, such as [trauma-informed policing](#).


EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGY (continued)


—  **Keep in mind:** The tension between security and privacy requires a balance between innovation and individual rights. Facial recognition systems like the increasingly ubiquitous [Clearview AI](#) have been deployed widely with little to no government oversight. Meanwhile, predictive policing programs in [Los Angeles](#) and [New Orleans](#) have drawn unfavorable comparisons to the fictional “Precrime Division” in 2002’s [Minority Report](#). That is why prudent safeguards like Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s new [AI Advisory Council](#) are essential to ensure that progress does not come at the expense of civil liberties.


 **Where the states stand:** So far, governors in Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Virginia, Wisconsin, and elsewhere have issued [executive orders](#) to study the possibilities and perils of AI. But state executives should challenge themselves to go beyond blue-ribbon commissions by providing budget incentives for ambitious public safety innovations. For example, automated body camera analysis produces results that both law enforcement and civil liberty advocates can get behind. The police department in Alameda, California, recently used the technology to [reduce use-of-force incidents](#) by 36 percent.

FOCUS ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

—  **Why:** Tech CEOs like Elon Musk like to talk about the power of [reasoning from first principles](#)—a strategy for breaking down difficult problems to their most fundamental components. In the realm of public safety, this “[Day 1](#)” mentality begins with juvenile justice policy. Many adults in the system began their journey while still [under 18](#). By addressing youthful misbehavior before it fully develops into adult criminality, governors can lower overall crime rates, shrink prison populations, and save taxpayer money.

 **Benefit:** Prevention usually achieves the best return on investment. The benefits of turning a young person away from delinquency toward a more [prosocial](#) life trajectory can compound over the next 50 years. The human brain is also [more malleable](#) at a young age, which means rehabilitative interventions have a higher success rate in children than adults. Think of youth interventions as routine dental exams—catching a cavity early means avoiding a painful and expensive root canal down the road.

 **Keep in mind:** The more contact young people have with the juvenile justice system, the [higher their risk](#) of negative outcomes. Locking up teenagers severs social ties and delays educational milestones, which only increases their chances of further criminal behavior and arrests. Once an individual becomes entrenched in the youth justice system, they are [up to three times more likely](#) to be convicted of a crime as an adult.

 **Where the states stand:** In 2016, Kansas embarked on a [bipartisan effort](#) to overhaul its juvenile justice system. The reforms cut back on juvenile detention, concentrated resources on high-risk youth, and expanded diversion to keep kids out of the system entirely. Over the next two years, both youth arrests and out-of-home placement [declined significantly](#), allowing the state to shift tens of millions of dollars to community-based interventions. Since the law passed, Kansas’ overall crime rate has [plunged 20 percent](#).

REIMAGINE CASH BAIL

- ? **Why:** For a country that purports to cherish personal liberty, the United States locks up an astonishing proportion of its citizens—more than almost any other country. In fact, it has the dubious distinction of ranking [just below](#) El Salvador, Rwanda, and Turkmenistan in over-incarceration. What is perhaps less well known is that [80 percent](#) of the incarcerated population has not been convicted of a crime, and [60 percent](#) remain behind bars only because they cannot afford bail. In most states, getting out of jail early has more to do with someone’s bank balance than their danger to society.
- ✓ **Benefit:** For governors who still believe in the presumption of innocence before trial, there are alternatives. Scientifically validated [risk assessments](#) and [pretrial support](#) allow low-income defendants with minor charges to rejoin society while the real criminals remain locked up. The goal is to concentrate resources on those who pose the biggest threat while helping low-level offenders maintain stable jobs, housing, and family connections.
- 🗨️ **Keep in mind:** Pretrial release in any form is inherently imperfect. While critics are quick to seize upon new crimes committed by anyone released post-bail reform, it is worth remembering that such cases [regularly occur](#) under the current system too. As police are often in the best position to determine who poses a flight risk and who is safe to release, reform efforts should give law enforcement discretion to keep people in jail. Additionally, safeguards like [preventative detention](#) and [pretrial monitoring](#) can help mitigate the risk of making the wrong decision.
- 📍 **Where the states stand:** New Jersey and Illinois have both moved toward eliminating cash bail with promising results. Before voters approved a [constitutional amendment](#) reforming bail in 2013, then-Gov. Chris Christie compared New Jersey’s pretrial system to “[a debtors’ prison](#).” The state’s pretrial jail population has [fallen 20 percent](#) since then, with a concurrent drop in crime greater than the national average. Illinois’ [Pretrial Fairness Act](#) is still too new for a comprehensive evaluation, but early observations suggest it has [improved clarity](#) around custody decisions and [decreased jail populations](#) after just a few months.

FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

● If you would like additional information about these issues, please do not hesitate to reach out.

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