

2025 Public Safety Agenda for Members of Congress



INTRODUCTION

With Republicans controlling the House, the Senate, and the presidency [for the first time in five years](#), all eyes are on Washington, D.C. Citizens, legislators, and key stakeholders are eager to see what the future holds for federal legislative priorities. The last time this occurred, lawmakers—growing increasingly frustrated with spending billions of dollars on criminal justice policies that failed to rehabilitate people and locked them out of employment opportunities—[shifted their perspective](#) in favor of second chances and alternatives to traditional sentencing structures. To maximize the potential of this incoming trifecta and to advance research-supported enhancements to the legal system, here are three key initiatives that federal lawmakers should prioritize in 2025 to enhance public safety and ensure tax dollars are used effectively.

AGENDA

ADVANCE CLEAN SLATE AUTOMATED RECORD-SEALING

— ? **Why:** The federal government has long recognized the importance of [second chances and clemency](#), though it offers no process for arrest and conviction records to be sealed from the public purview. These records include the arrests of people who were not convicted as well as those who were convicted but had their sentence commuted or were later pardoned or exonerated. [Nearly 2 million people](#) have publicly available federal records, which limit their ability to obtain and sustain suitable housing, employment, and education; engage in volunteer work; and fully reintegrate into their communities—[all at great expense](#) to taxpayers and our national economy.

✓ **Benefit:** [Research indicates](#) that individuals, their families, and their communities benefit from automated record-sealing and the restored opportunity to obtain employment, and increase earning potential, establish stability in housing, and maintain the physical and social capital needed to support their continued desistance from crime. This translates into safer streets and a more robust contribution to the tax base that stimulates our local, state, and national economies.

ADVANCE
CLEAN SLATE
AUTOMATED
RECORD-SEALING
(continued)

DESCHEDULE
CANNABIS

🗨️ **Keep in Mind:** People who have been convicted of a crime, served their sentence, completed all of their legal requirements, and remained law-abiding in the years that follow have repaid their debt to society. Individuals with sealed records are [less likely to commit crime](#) compared to those without a criminal history, and careful consideration of eligibility criteria and permitting records access for legal or other professionals under certain, limited circumstances mitigates public safety concerns.

📍 **Where Clean Slate Automated Record Sealing Stands:** Both [H.R.2930](#) (the Clean Slate Act of 2023) and its companion legislation, [S.5266](#) (the Clean Slate Act of 2024) were introduced and referred to their respective judiciary committees. Due to recent changes in Congress, both bills need new co-sponsors to advance.

— ? **Why:** [Most states](#) have either legalized recreational or medicinal marijuana, decriminalized cannabis, expunged cannabis criminal records, or issued mass pardons. The federal government’s continued prohibition of cannabis creates a [legal gray area](#) for people, police, and other criminal justice professionals. Its [Schedule 1 classification](#) also [overcriminalizes and over-penalizes people](#) while unduly burdening police, courts, and corrections systems.

✓ **Benefit:** [Descheduling cannabis entirely](#) and regulating cannabis products reduces the conflict between federal and state laws, decreases applicable penalties for certain cannabis convictions, and facilitates greater access to cannabis research. [State-sanctioned medicinal marijuana dispensaries](#) could also benefit from tax breaks and banking opportunities extended to small businesses. Access to banking and reduced tax burdens could improve product pricing, reduce illicit competition, and decrease the violence associated with current cash-based operations. Product regulation, including testing, quality control, marketing, packaging, and age restrictions, can reduce potential harms.

🗨️ **Keep in Mind:** [More than 90 percent of Americans](#) on both sides of the political aisle support adult access to medicinal or recreational cannabis. Despite a shift in the public perspective, marijuana is not a harmless substance. We need standards in place to [mitigate consumer harm and public safety concerns](#), such as driving under the influence or minors gaining access. [Aligning state and federal laws](#) could also reduce negative citizen-police interactions associated with marijuana prohibition enforcement, improve police legitimacy, and free up resources to address more serious criminal matters.

📍 **Where Cannabis Descheduling Stands:** [As of Jan. 1, 2025](#), 38 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia permit the use of medical marijuana, while 39 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia have measures in place to regulate recreational marijuana. At least 120 cities or counties across 12 states have [decriminalized marijuana](#), meaning it is still illegal but violators are no longer subjected to jail time as long as they possess only a small amount as defined by local ordinance. [Hundreds of federal bills](#) have been proposed to decriminalize, legalize, and/or regulate medical and recreational marijuana. Following an August 2023 recommendation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that cannabis be moved from Schedule 1 to Schedule 3, the U.S. Department of Justice [submitted a proposal](#) to reclassify the substance in April 2024. The proposal cites [HHS study findings](#) that marijuana has accepted medical use, reduced abuse potential, and decreased likelihood of physical or psychological dependence compared to other Schedule 1 substances. While advocates are excited about the potential progress rescheduling could make in ending the country’s longest war, they also fear the proposal does not go far enough. They prefer [complete descheduling](#) from the [Controlled Substances](#)

PASS THE
“VIOLENT INCIDENT
CLEARANCE AND
TECHNOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATIVE
METHODS ACT OF
2024” (VICTIM ACT)

FOR
ADDITIONAL
SUPPORT

[Act](#) to bring federal law in line with existing state laws that permit medicinal and recreational use and support regulating cannabis products similar to how states handle alcohol and nicotine. [H.R.6673](#), the “Strengthening the Tenth Amendment Through Entrusting States 2.0 Act” or the “STATES 2.0 Act” was introduced in December 2023. This bipartisan, bicameral bill aims to protect each state’s rights to determine their own approach to cannabis policy and provides minimum safety standards for cannabis regulation. The bill has been referred to the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.

- — ? **Why:** The certainty of being caught for committing a crime consistently emerges as a [more effective deterrent](#) than the severity of punishment. Yet case clearance rates in the United States have dropped precipitously in the past 60 years, [hitting historic lows in 2023](#), with half of all murders going unsolved. [Some jurisdictions cite](#) high detective caseloads, antiquated data and case-management systems, and mistrust in police as reasons why so many murders remain unsolved. Departments across the country also face police recruitment and retention issues that have [risen to crisis levels](#). Some states and localities have [reduced educational and physical fitness standards](#) in response to staffing issues—a short-term fix that could have long-term public safety consequences.
- ✓ **Benefit:** This [bipartisan, bicameral legislation](#) would establish a grant program to assist state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies in their efforts to improve case clearance rates and solve more crimes, especially homicides and firearm-related violent crimes. Providing the necessary [tools, technology, and resources](#) to police departments helps them hold law violators accountable, provides justice for victims and their loved ones, and makes our communities safer. In addition to helping agencies hire and train personnel, [grant funds can be used](#) for the investigative technology and forensic equipment needed to solve cases and to “provide victims and family members with mental health resources and assistance with shelter, wage and relocation costs.”
- **Keep in Mind:** The police departments most in need of federal grant funding may not have the personnel or other resources needed to apply for and manage the funds. [Only an estimated 10 percent](#) of local agencies receive federal funds in a given year, severely limiting the legislation’s impact and ability to enhance case clearance rates and victim outcomes. A simple, streamlined application process will be critical to increase the likelihood of departments applying for and receiving funding.
- 📍 **Where the VICTIM Act of 2024 Stands:** Both [S.3763](#) and [H.R.7308](#) were introduced and referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary in February 2024.

● If you need help with further research around these issues, information on implementing these types of initiatives, or anything else, please do not hesitate to reach out.

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