

# Crime & Safety Transformed:

A Fair Approach to Justice Reform



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# Executive Summary

Crime in the United States was steadily declining from the 1990s<sup>1</sup> until the mid-2010s, when it began to rise<sup>2</sup> – and spiked in 2020. This spike was the **largest<sup>3</sup> single-year crime increase in American history**.

Many things contributed to that increase. Key among them are the reduced criminal penalties against violent and repeat<sup>4</sup> offenders in many cities – despite the fact that **79% of Americans<sup>5</sup> support strengthening sentences** for violent criminals.

**Every American deserves to live in a safe community** where repeat and violent offenders are fairly punished. This is possible with **common-sense criminal justice** that strengthens penalties against those offenders.

**“Every American deserves to live in a safe community where repeat and violent offenders are fairly punished.”**

To reform the criminal justice system, Americans must:

-  Strengthen **sentences** for repeat and violent offenders
-  Fund and improve **forensic laboratories**
-  Develop and apply **programs** to reduce reoffending
-  Increase **monitoring** of those most likely to reoffend
-  Expand **victim and witness support**

## Reform #1

# Strengthen sentences for repeat and violent offenders

### Summary

District attorneys across the country **refuse to prosecute “low level” offenses**. These practices created a revolving door exploited by career criminals.

*By strengthening sentencing guidelines for repeat offenders, judges can maintain discretion for first-time criminals while serial criminals remain in custody.*

In Suffolk County, Massachusetts, the district attorney created<sup>6</sup> a “do not prosecute” list of 15 crimes ranging from theft to destruction of property. As a result, crime skyrocketed<sup>7</sup>. Last year, **burglaries rose by 66%**, and **car theft another 35%**.

Career criminals often benefit most when crime isn’t prosecuted. In New York City, nearly one third of all shoplifting<sup>8</sup> incidents in 2022 involved just **327 people who were arrested and rearrested more than 6,000 times**. Similarly, the Atlanta Police Department found that **1,000 people committed 40% of all crimes<sup>9</sup> in 2022**.



**1/3** of all shoplifting  
in NYC in 2022

involved just

**327 people**

rearrested

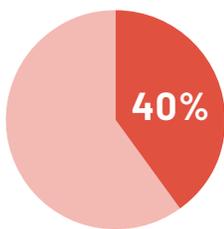
**6,000 times**



# Stronger sentencing has the power to deter repeat violent offenders. Crime isn't fair, but justice should be.

Incarcerating repeat violent offenders can immediately **protect Americans**. For those imprisoned<sup>10</sup> for serious federal crimes, sentences between 60 and 120 months are associated with a 18% decrease in reoffending, while sentences of more than 120 months lead to a 29% decline.

Stronger sentencing has the power to deter repeat violent offenders. After California passed a "three strikes" law enhancing sentencing for criminals' third offenses, **felony arrests for people with two strikes declined<sup>11</sup> by 20%**.



of **all crimes** were committed by **1,000 people** in 2022, according to The Atlanta Police Department

**In 2022, burglaries rose by 66%, and car theft another 35% in Suffolk County, Massachusetts**



Judges need the power to send first-time criminals to programs with proven<sup>12</sup> records for turning young offenders from life-long criminal behavior while focusing on penalties on serious criminals.

**Crime isn't fair, but justice should be.**

## Opportunities for Reform

-  **Repeal "do not prosecute" memos** for crimes that lead to higher crime rates
-  **Strengthen sentencing for violent offenders** to reduce the rate of reoffending
-  **Restore three-strikes** laws for violent crimes to deter serial criminals

## Reform #2

# Fund and improve forensic laboratories

### Summary

With an estimated **100,000 untested<sup>13</sup> rape kits nationwide** and **575 convicts exonerated<sup>14</sup> by newly-tested DNA evidence**, countless criminals are running free while innocent people waste away behind bars due to limited forensic testing.

*Improving forensic testing will improve justice for victims and the accused alike by ensuring the best evidence is available for everyone.*

In 2023, **the D.C. U.S. attorney declined<sup>15</sup> to prosecute 67% of arrests** – up from 31% in 2016 – in part because the D.C.’s internal forensic laboratory lost its accreditation. This forced the city to pick and choose which evidence samples to test at private laboratories.



Over  
**100,000**  
untested rape kits

**These delays deny justice to victims** and the falsely accused because forensic evidence often plays a crucial role in identifying dangerous criminals – even decades after a crime is committed.

**575** convicts exonerated  
by newly tested DNA evidence



Thanks to DNA evidence<sup>16</sup>, Joseph DeAngelo – who committed at least 13 murders, 50 rapes and 120 burglaries in California between 1974 and 1986 – was finally brought to justice in 2018. Forensic evidence also helped prove Anthony Ray Hinton’s innocence<sup>17</sup> after being wrongly convicted of two murders and spending 30 years on death row.

## Joseph DeAngelo

**13 murders**  
**50 rapes**  
**120 burglaries**

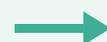
between 1974 and 1986



Brought to  
justice in  
**2018**

## Anthony Ray Hinton

Wrongly convicted  
of **2 murders**



Declared **innocent** after  
**30 YEARS**  
on death row

Stories like these aren't unique - the federal government's most recent estimate is that as much as **23% of forensic evidence for unsolved crimes has not been tested**<sup>18</sup>.

Improving forensic testing will lead to safer communities by ensuring the correct criminals are behind bars.

**23% of forensic evidence for unsolved crimes has not been tested**



## Opportunities for Reform



**Increase funding for forensic laboratories** to address testing delays



**Invest in new forensic technologies** to expand the effectiveness and opportunities for analyzing forensic evidence



**Improve criminal DNA** databases to match more DNA to known offenders



**Expand forensic training programs** to increase performance and reduce errors that can prevent justice

## Reform #3

# Develop and apply programs to reduce reoffending

### Summary

The United States has one of the **highest<sup>19</sup> reoffending rates** in the world. However, some programs can drastically lower it.

*By adopting programs that use best practices and standards, former criminals can be re-integrated as contributing members of society.*

Programs like **San Francisco's Back on Track<sup>20</sup>** have reduced reoffending rates to as low as 10% by combining community service with personal responsibility, employment, education and close supervision.

Criminals struggling with mental illness or drug addiction need greater intervention. Prisons are already the largest<sup>21</sup> mental health<sup>22</sup> providers in America, but **expanding mental health treatment in prison**—and mandating treatment after release—is necessary<sup>23</sup> to prevent the mentally ill from reoffending.



Convicts who **earn their high school diplomas** in prison are

# 30%

**less likely to reoffend**

Additionally, only about **35% of convicts are employed<sup>24</sup> before going to prison**. By having a job, former inmates can reduce their risk of reoffending by another 12% upon release. In-prison education and vocational programs can help convicts stay out of prison, too. Convicts who earn their high school diplomas in prison are **30% less likely to reoffend**.



**Investing in in-prison education<sup>25</sup> saves the government** from \$13.21 to \$19.62 for every dollar spent, since many of those offenders don't return to prison.

A conviction can also stand in the way of professional growth, because it prevents people from attaining a professional license in fields such as in cosmetology, animal training or nursing. In 30 states, applicants can even be denied<sup>26</sup> licenses for arrests that did not lead to a conviction.

**One mistake shouldn't define a person's whole life.**



Investing in in-prison education **saves the government** from **\$13.21** to **\$19.62** for every dollar spent



In **30 states**, applicants can even be **denied licenses** for arrests that **did not lead to a conviction**.

## Opportunities for Reform

-  **Expand in-prison mental health and drug treatment programs** to ensure prisoners can re-enter society successfully
-  **Mandate post-release participation in treatment programs** to help people upon reentry and monitor their status
-  **Expand in-prison educational programs** to ensure former prisoners have the skills they need to secure work upon release
-  **Reduce unreasonable professional** licensing barriers to reduce reoffending and improve career opportunities

## Reform #4

# Increase monitoring of those most likely to reoffend

### Summary

A small number of criminals commit a large portion of crimes in the United States. Ensuring **criminals do not reoffend** is essential to reducing crime.

*Increased monitoring of high-risk offenders keeps former convicts on track and ensures they are quickly caught and convicted if they commit another crime.*

Anthony Johnson was arrested<sup>27</sup> **50 times for various theft-related crimes** starting at age 12. He was released in 2008 from a 71-month sentence for jewelry theft, but quickly returned to crime and was convicted again in 2013.

Darren Vann, a convicted<sup>28</sup> sex offender, was released from prison in 2013 after serving five years in Texas for sexual assault. **A year later, he was arrested** in Indiana for the murder of a young woman, and confessed to killing six others.

### Anthony Johnson

Arrested  
50 times



Released in **2008**  
convicted again in **2013**

### Darren Van

5 years in  
prison for  
sexual assault



Released in **2013**  
arrested again in **2014**



## 79% of Americans support strengthening sentences for violent criminals

79%

Support

21%

Don't support

Every person deserves to be treated with dignity. But **high-risk offenders are often known<sup>29</sup> to police, making them easier to monitor through precision policing<sup>30</sup>**. Increased monitoring of high-risk offenders can help law enforcement personnel work across<sup>31</sup> agencies to detect and address any issues before they escalate.

**Increased monitoring of high-risk offenders can help law enforcement personnel work across agencies to detect and address any issues before they escalate.**

## Opportunities for Reform

-  **Expand electronic monitoring for high-risk reoffenders**
-  **Fund intensive supervision programs** to prevent criminals from reoffending
-  **Adopt data-driven risk-assessment tools** that can help multiple agencies work together to monitor high-risk offenders
-  **Implement community notification laws** that require community notification when high-risk offenders are released into a community

## Reform #5

# Expand victim and witness support

### Summary

Few victims of violent crime actually report it to the police, which **deprives victims of the ability to get justice** – and the help and care<sup>32</sup> they need.

*By expanding victim and witness support programs, more criminals will face trial while their victims will receive the justice and services they need to move on with their lives.*

In 2021, **only 46%<sup>33</sup> of victims of violent crimes reported them to the police** and only **9% of victims received support** from a victim services provider. Victims often fail to report crimes out of fear of reprisal, while some do not believe the police can help them.



ONLY

**46%**

of victims of violent crimes **reported them** to the police



ONLY

**9%**

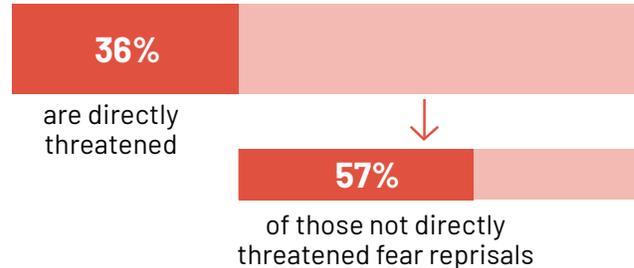
of victims **received support** from a victim services provider

Federal analysts estimate<sup>34</sup> **witness intimidation occurs in 75% to 100% of crimes** in gang-dominated neighborhoods. A Bronx survey found that **36% of witnesses are directly threatened**, while **57% of those not directly threatened fear reprisals**.

The trauma<sup>35</sup> of victimization can significantly challenge a person's ability to participate in the legal process, occasionally even leading to withdrawal of testimony. By **enhancing victim and witness support services**<sup>36</sup>, we can help ensure justice is served.



**witness intimidation occurs in 75% to 100% of crimes** in gang-dominated neighborhoods.



**The trauma of victimization can significantly challenge a person's ability to participate in the legal process, occasionally even leading to withdrawal of testimony.**

## Opportunities for Reform

-  **Enhance funding for victim and witness support services** to better provide counseling, financial assistance and legal support for victims and witnesses
-  **Strengthen confidentiality and protection measures** to protect the privacy and safety of victims and witnesses
-  **Improve training for law enforcement and court personnel** so officers, prosecutors and judges can provide proper support for victims and witnesses
-  **Develop specialized support programs** so specific groups such as children and victims of domestic violence can see the process through until the end



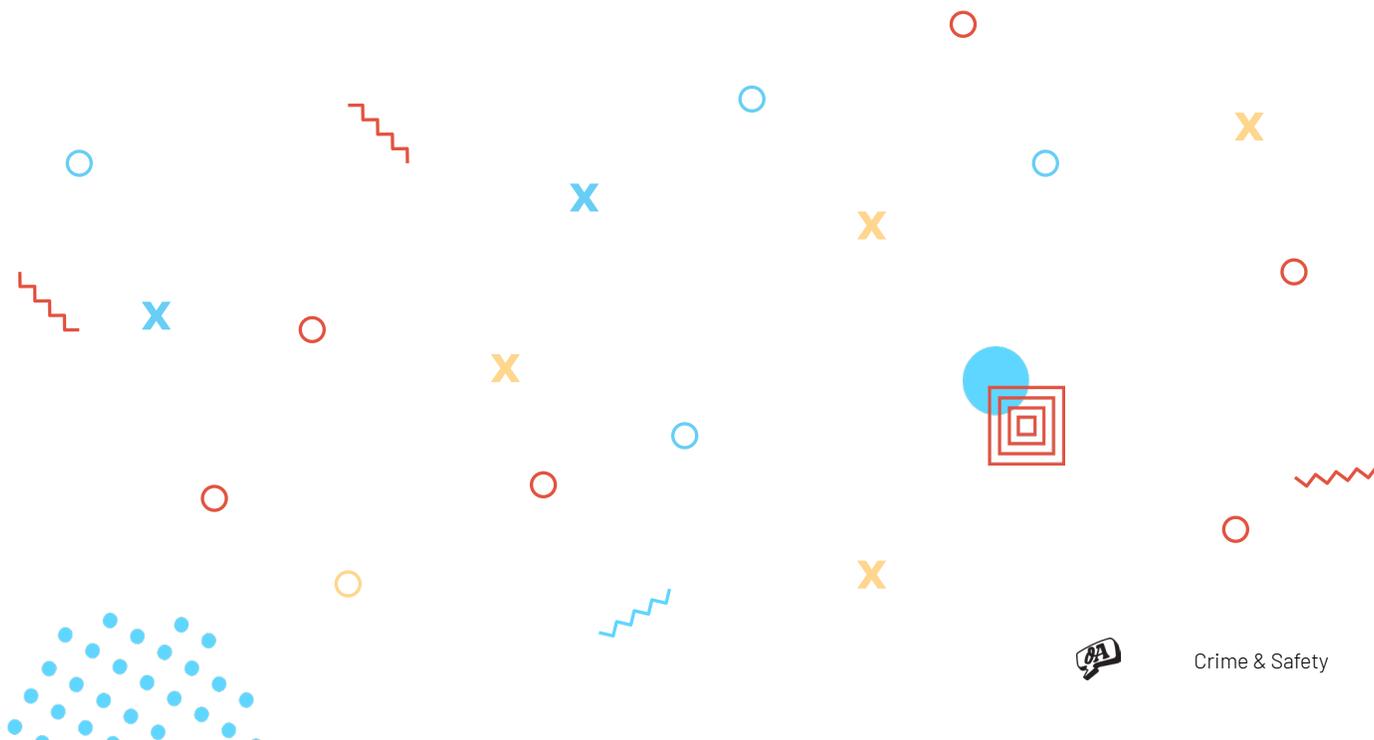
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