

ACLU-NM PUBLIC SAFETY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



A GUIDE TO AMPLIFYING YOUR VOICE DURING THE
2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

ACLU
New Mexico

Introduction: ACLU of New Mexico's Public Safety Advocacy Toolkit and how to use it

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Three steps to fight against so-called “tough on crime” policies
- Guidelines on how to bust myths around crime
- Tips on how to speak to lawmakers at the upcoming 2022 legislative session
- Stats and trends you can cite, including how to use social math to make your case

TAKE ACTION:

- Speak to lawmakers at the upcoming 2022 legislative session
- Get social
- Influence the public narrative

There's been a recent wave of media coverage about an increase in homicides in cities across the U.S., including New Mexico's largest city, Albuquerque. We recognize that public safety is on everyone's minds and that it is essential for people to feel safe in their communities.

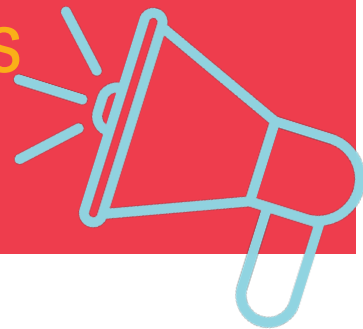
Unfortunately, many of the policies politicians have pushed in the past have decimated New Mexican families. An overly punitive approach to crime has ensnared our communities in vicious cycles of poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, and incarceration. It is time we demand real solutions – solutions that support and empower families with the tools they need to thrive.

Ahead of the upcoming 2022 legislation session, there are already calls for bills that increase police funding, create stiffer penalties, and undo progress New Mexico has made around pretrial detention. It's imperative that we resist these proposals and fight for alternative, evidence-based responses to harm and violence.

Prioritizing alternative responses to harm and violence is more effective and longer-lasting than shoveling even more money into policing, passing antiquated “tough on crime” policies, or keeping people who have not been convicted of a crime locked up before trial.

We developed this toolkit so New Mexicans can fight back against policies that fail to make our communities safer, fuel mass incarceration, and exaggerate racial discrimination in the criminal legal system. Browse the toolkit below and share the link with others or download, save, and share for when you're offline.

Three steps to fight against so-called “tough on crime” policies and calls to dump more money into policing



STEP 1: Speak to lawmakers.

Identify your state senator and representative and set a meeting with their offices. You always have the most success if you are speaking directly to your lawmaker, you are their constituent, and you elected them. Their job is to represent the interest of their constituents.

Prepare for the meeting. When speaking with a lawmaker, always make sure you have talking points/bill information. We recommend that you prepare an elevator speech.

Make your case. The purpose of every visit is to educate key people on the issues and ask them to support your position. Talk to them about the issues from your perspective and why it matters to you personally. In addition to sharing your personal perspective and story, use messaging guidance and other information provided here to be persuasive.

If you have a story, share it with them briefly. Legislators are often busy and won't have too much time to speak. Keep your message succinct and impactful.

Ask them if they have any questions. If they ask you a question that you do not know then refer them to a staff member of the ACLU. Make a plan to follow up with them.

STEP 2: Get social.

Social media is a powerful tool to use to build momentum and to educate your community. You can use social media to rally and thank your supporters and to respond to your opposition. Below are some general tips to maximize your social media effort.

Facebook is great for reaching supporters quickly. You can share posts from the ACLU-NM and any other relevant content you think helps make your case.

Twitter is great for inserting yourself into the conversation and reaching a substantial amount of people, especially members of the media. When using Twitter make sure you use relevant hashtags in your post. You can use other people's handles to call out or speak directly to other Twitter users. This can be a great way to informally engage with your lawmakers and their staff. Be sure to plug in the relevant details.

Instagram is a great way to educate folks about what is going on and reaching a variety of people passionate about this issue. Make sure to use relevant hashtags in your post. You can easily direct people to message you on how to get involved.

ACLU of NM frequently posts about criminal justice reform. You can find us on social media at the following links:

www.facebook.com/aclunm

Instagram and Twitter: @aclunm

Sample social media posts:

Year after year, so-called “tough-on-crime” policies fail to make our communities any safer. It’s time we invest more resources into solving the root causes of crime and building healthier communities. Let’s call on our @Senator (tag) to invest in community programs, not just policing!

@GovMLG is calling for changes to pre-trial detention that would keep people who have not been convicted of a crime locked up before their day in court. Research shows the vast majority of people released pending their trial do not commit crimes. Tell @GovMLG that people should not be locked up for the mere accusation of a crime.



STEP 3: Influence the public narrative.

Educating the public and generating support and attention for the issue is a crucial part of any local advocacy campaign. A couple of good strategies to use when trying to generate media attention are Op-Eds and letters to the editor.

Op-Eds are pieces you submit to a media outlet that reflect your opinion about an issue. They are a good opportunity to educate the public and advance your advocacy within your local community. Most newspapers have rules about how to submit op-eds and the format they must follow in order to be considered for publication. If the newspaper does not have posted guidelines, feel free to call up the op-ed editor and ask for them. When writing an op-ed, make sure to tailor your piece to your audience and stay focused on your issue. Use facts and research to support your opinion, but you want to also stick to clear and plain language. This is not the place for overuse of jargon. Make sure to have others read your piece before you submit and remember to edit carefully. After submission, make sure you follow up with the editor.

Letters to the editor are used to respond to something that was printed in the newspaper. A letter to the editor is a good strategy if you are looking to uplift something that was printed or if you would like to offer a new or contrary perspective. If you are considering submitting a letter to the editor, make sure it is timely. You’ll need to respond as soon as you can to a published piece. You will also need to follow the rules for submission for that newspaper. A few quick tips include:

- **Read previous letters.** Previous letters show you what types of letters the newspaper likes to publish.
- **Keep it simple and to the point.** Shorter, well written letters that are direct are more likely to get published.
- **Know your audience.** Familiarize yourself with what the paper likes to print and try to write toward that audience.
- **Edit.** Edit your work several times and ask a friend to read it before submitting. If you are interested in submitting an op-ed or letter to the editor and would like additional guidance, please reach out to ACLU of NM at bjones@aclu-nm.org

Myth busters: Use these messages to bust myths when you hear them



Myth: We need even more police officers on our streets to address crime.

Fact: Police typically deal with violence only after someone has already been killed, injured, or otherwise harmed. Even then, many police departments are alarmingly ineffective at holding anyone accountable for violent crimes, as reflected by low “clearance rates” (whether any suspect is ever charged for a reported crime). For example, a recent study found Chicago has a homicide clearance rate of about 40 percent, which drops to just 22 percent when the victim is African American.

Myth: We must increase funding for police departments to adequately address crime.

Fact: America has steadily increased police funding year-over-year [regardless of whether crime rates are going up or down](#). There is no documented connection between the two. In 2020, for example, Houston, Nashville, Tulsa, and Fresno all increased their police budgets — and all saw increased homicides. It’s time we invest in proven solutions like: investments in housing, health care, jobs programs, education, after school programs, gun control, environmental design, and violence interruption programs.

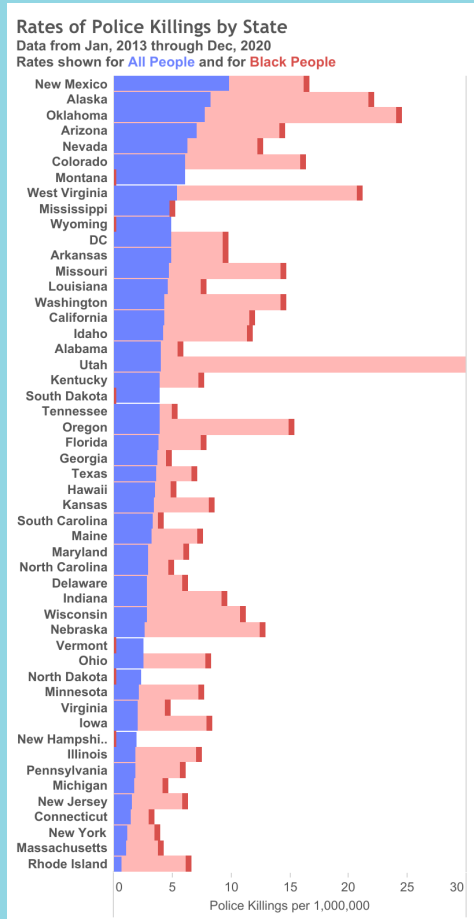
Myth: Recent reform measures are to blame for a rise in homicide rates across the nation.

Fact: There is absolutely no data to support the position that reforms are responsible for an uptick in homicides. In the last year, homicide rates have increased in cities with conservative and progressive leadership, and cities that have passed reforms, and not passed reforms. We still don’t totally understand the causes of the recent spike, though experts have pointed to the pandemic, economic stress, unprecedented gun sales, and the defunding of community services. Additionally, crime is still trending down in New Mexico and across the U.S. from a peak in the 90’s.

Myth: We’ve been too soft on crime and need stiffer penalties to address crime.

Fact: Tough-on-crime policies have fueled mass incarceration and failed to make our communities any safer. Research shows that investments in housing, health care, jobs programs, education, after school programs, and violence interruption programs, all reduce crime. Elected officials should pass legislation that ensures these investments and addresses the root cause of crime.

Topline statistics in New Mexico you can cite when testifying against punitive policies



Source: [Mapping Police Violence](#)

Many of the people incarcerated in New Mexico are not behind bars for new crimes. The amount of people incarcerated due to technical parole violations (such as a missed appointment or failed drug test) made up an average of 30% of overall prison admissions over the past ten years. Source: [NM Legislative Finance Committee](#)

High levels of technical violation revocations cost the state an estimated \$23.1 million in FY21, \$9.5 million higher than FY20. Source: [NM Legislative Finance Committee](#)

In 2017 Black people made up 7 percent of the prison population and only 2% of the state population. Source: [Vera](#)

The proportion of Latinos incarcerated in NM is the highest in the country and is significantly higher than the adult state population rate. Source: [The Sentencing Project](#)

In 2016, 1 in 10 people eligible for release were kept in beyond their release date.

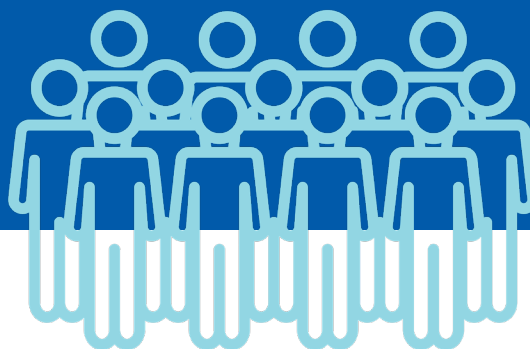
1 in 4 people imprisoned in NM are being treated for a serious mental illness. Source: [New Mexico Corrections Department](#)

85 percent of people under NMDC control have a substance abuse problem. Source: [Rio Grande Foundation](#)

The rate at which people in New Mexico are shot and killed by law enforcement is the highest in the country. Source: [Mapping Police Violence](#)

Albuquerque directed just under \$226.9 million for the police department for fiscal year 2022, more than any other city department got and about 18.7 percent of the total city expenses. It's more than the city budgeted for parks and recreation, fire, economic development, arts and culture, senior affairs and civilian police oversight combined. Source: [Albuquerque fiscal year 2022 budget](#)

Using **social math** to make your case.



What is social math?

Social math is a **practice that uses easy to visualize comparisons** to make large numbers comprehensible and compelling. Using social math allows advocates to talk about statistics and data by placing them in a social context that provides meaning.

Here are a few local relevant stats translated into social math you can use in your advocacy:

[New Mexico spent \\$329 million on the corrections department in FY21](#), about \$232 million more than they spent on Child Protective Services.

- Albuquerque directed over \$226 million for the police department for [2022](#). That's more than the budgets for parks and recreation, fire, economic development, arts and culture, senior affairs and civilian police oversight combined.
- Despite overall decreasing crime rates, New Mexico's prison population grew 481 percent between 1980 and 2016 - over half the seats at Isotopes Park.
- In less than ten years, 181 people have been shot and killed by New Mexico law enforcement, which could fill two city Rapid Ride buses.



\$226 million

Albuquerque Police Department Budget



Parks and Recreation, Fire, Economic Development, Arts and Culture, Senior Affairs and Civilian Police Oversight Budgets Combined

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In less than ten years, 181 people have been shot and killed by New Mexico law enforcement. Enough people to fill two Rapid Ride buses.



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