

# Teton County & Town of Jackson Path to Defunding

Research Report & Survey of Resources

**ACT!**  
**NOW!** **JH**

# Objectives

The purpose of this report is to define defunding vs reform, to show the Commissioners and Council the value of focusing on defunding-related policy and budgetary initiatives. We will explore both the history of defunding as a concept and what that concept has to do with Teton County's and Jackson's specific needs. We will provide examples of similar-sized, rural areas of the country that are currently enacting defunding-oriented changes in their community, and will provide examples of alternative forms of public safety and restorative justice for the Commissioners and Council members to consider.

# Introduction to Defunding vs. Reform

The conversation around policing has gained mainstream traction in the past few weeks and years as video recordings of unarmed Black people killed at the hands of the police have revealed the violence of the current policing system. Privileged (read: white, affluent) people have begun to see what poor, Black, and brown communities have for generations: that these tragedies are not anomalies in another wise "good" system of policing, they are the inevitable result of a police system designed to maintain racial, economic, and gender inequities through use of force. Furthermore, the past 50 years have included massive increases in police funding through failed initiatives such as the War on Drugs, War on Terror, stop-and-frisk, and countless other measures that increased [tremendous harms in communities](#). In the meantime, social services including public housing, education, and health care have been [defunded in a parallel manner](#).

The work against the injustice of policing accepts that police brutality, racial inequality, and economic disparity needs to be addressed. This report will focus on the plethora of evidence that policing in its current form does not decrease crime or harm, rather it often increases them, and that tangentially, [public goods including housing, health care, and education have been shown to decrease crime](#). Here then is where the necessary division between reform and defund arises.

To reform accepts the premise that policing as maintained today is generally effective at keeping communities safe, and that with measures such as implicit bias training, body cameras, and more diverse police forces will fix the issues around the edges. These often lead to [increased police empowerment and budgets with no demonstrable harm reduction](#). To defund accepts the evidence-based conclusions that funding social services in lieu of policing will lead to safer communities built on equality and justice, not oppression and punishment. By reducing the social inequities that drive crime with the funds of harmful policing, defunding focuses on preventive solutions over expensive punitive measures.

The outrage witnessed in protests in every state over the past month, while triggered by the death of George Floyd, go beyond explicit cases of police violence. It is the result of unheard voices saying they will not accept the structural, abstract forms of violence produced from poverty. This is why we are demanding substantive change, even in our seemingly peaceful mountain town. We do not need our police to kill an innocent person to see that the resources they consume would be better served ameliorating the economic inequities produced by our institutions.

# Teton County & Jackson Background Information

As a community, Teton County faces myriad, layered social issues that are unique to our context and representative of larger issues nationwide. Our community is home to numerous social service organizations that work with our underserved populations. We have somewhat of an understanding of the root causes of the problems we face, but there are clear gaps in our knowledge that must be addressed in order to have a proper conversation about law enforcement’s role in these problems. Below is a summary of important information to consider when thinking about the connections between human services, public health, and law enforcement in Teton County.

## 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment

- Determinants of health are 40% socioeconomic factors, 30% health behaviors, 20% clinical care, and 10% physical environment. This shows us just how important the specific qualities of our community and individuals’ roles within it are to those individuals’ health.
- County’s primary health behaviors and conditions (top 3 of 6) are mental health, alcohol use, and sexual/ reproductive health.
- The social determinants of these health issues are severe housing (lack of access to affordable housing), access to care, and food insecurity.
- Teton County has a higher suicide rate than the rest of Wyoming, a worse standard of sexual/ reproductive health, and less access to housing and medical care

## PPI Human Services & Resource Allocation Plan

- Priority 1 issues are housing, early childhood education, and educational development, mental health, and substance use disorders. Note the clear overlap between these issues and the issues outlined in the Health Needs Assessment.

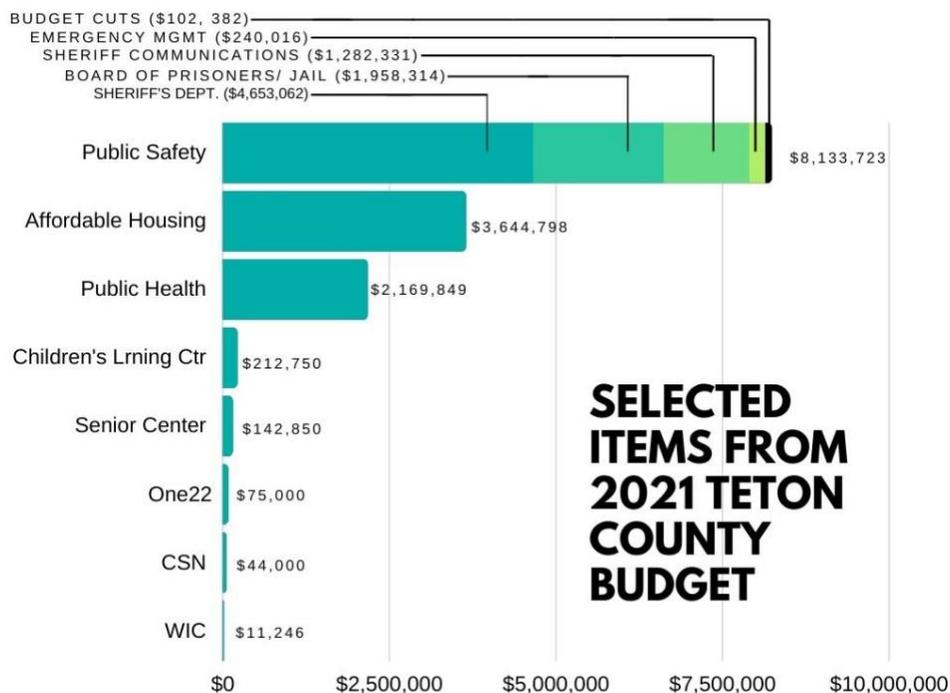


Figure 1 (Created by ActNow JH)

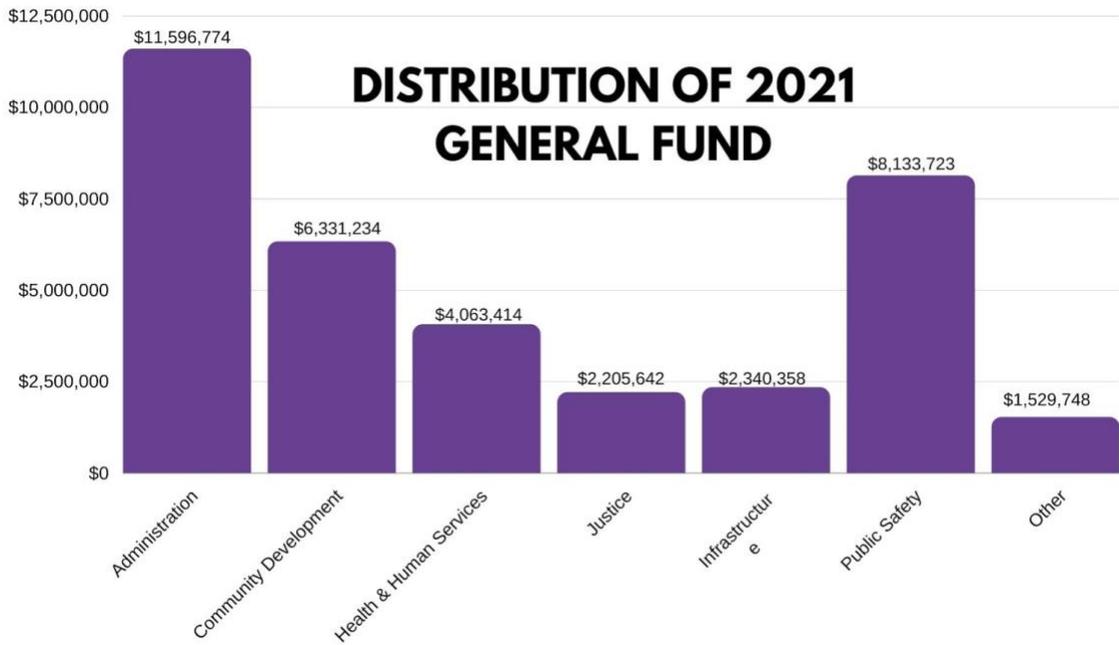


Figure 2 (Created by ActNow JH)

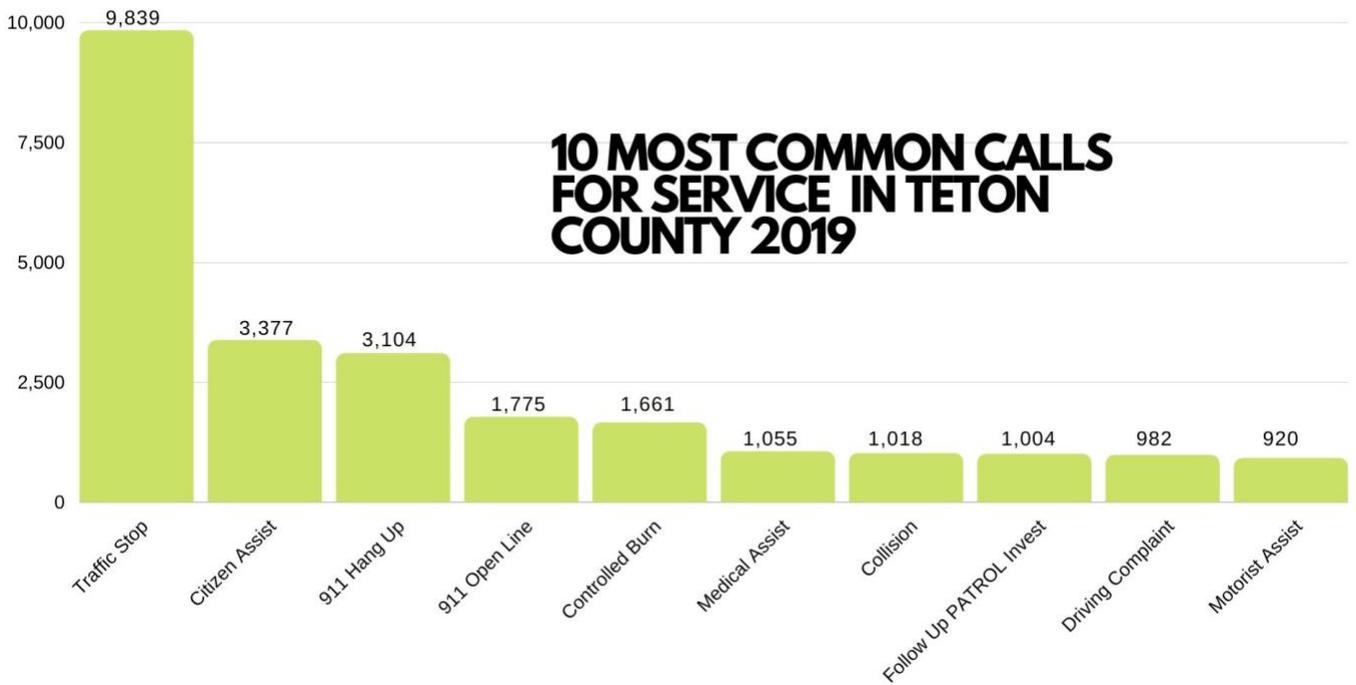


Figure 3 (Created by ActNow JH)

In light of these studies, we know that our main problems in the county and town are lack of affordable housing, lack of healthcare, lack of early childhood education, substance/alcohol abuse, reproductive/sexual health, and food insecurity.

We urge you to consider what we *don't* know. These studies examine two main players in the community wellbeing conversation: human services and public health. There is another player in this conversation, about whom we do not know nearly as much: law enforcement. We must study our law enforcement, its objectives and outcomes, and its specific issues and ability to meet community needs with as much scrutiny as we have studied health and human services.

The Sheriff's Department is the single most well-funded public service in the county (Figure 1). Within the County Budget, Public Safety accounts for 22.47% of the General Fund. Within the Town Budget, this number is 40% (Town of Jackson). With such large budgets, these departments need to be met with a high level of scrutiny that examines both their effectiveness and efficiency.

At this time, the elected officials and certainly the public do not have a clear picture of what our law enforcement departments do with their time and budget. In 2019 the most common call for service in the county was traffic stops. This is triple the amount of the next highest calls, which are citizen assist, 911 hang up, and 911 open line. Are these calls the most efficient use of our funds? Is there a better way to handle these situations that does not involve traditional law enforcement?

National and historic research shows connections between law enforcement and mental health issues, substance/alcohol abuse, general health and wellbeing, and housing issues/poverty in general. For example, we know that, among incidences of police violence and death at the hands of police, [a large number of these instances had to do with mental health](#). We know that [poverty and lack of access to housing contribute to crime](#), and lead poor communities to have [heightened police interaction](#). [We know that increasing access to healthcare reduces crime](#). The connections between law enforcement and many of the issues our community faces are clear, but we need hard data that comes directly from our community in order to further discuss the implications of these connections in Teton County.

Questions that we cannot answer until we do an audit of law enforcement:

- What is the connection between our affordable housing crisis and crime in Teton County/Jackson?
- What is the connection between lack of access to health care and crime in Teton County?
- What is the connection between substance/alcohol abuse issues and crime in Teton County?
- Socioeconomic is a major determinant of health. How does it also affect an individual's interactions with law enforcement?
- What are law enforcement's objectives regarding community wellbeing, and are these objectives in line with goals set by the health and human services studies?
- Would alternative public safety better fulfill the objectives of other organizations that work with populations affected by the issues outlined above? (e.g. mental health counselors, public health workers, substance/ alcohol abuse counselors, etc.)
- What calls for service are armed officers with the power to arrest needed for? What percentage of annual calls do these calls account for?

# Policy Suggestions & Current Nationwide Initiatives

We recognize that Teton County is unique in many ways. We are rural; we are a blue spot in a red state; we are a tourist destination; we have a large immigrant population; we have a massive amount of wealth (as well as a wide chasm of wealth disparity). Recognizing that no two communities are the same, we have compiled a list of similarly sized and/or rural areas that are currently enacting defund-oriented initiatives around the country. We want to keep our comparisons as relevant as possible to Teton County. Below is a list of our policy suggestions, based on our research and examples from around the country, as well as a list of these examples with links to relevant local news sources. Some of these suggestions are specifically related to the county, some to the town, and others require joint efforts between the county and town.

## Our Suggestions (short term)

- Remove the School Resource Officer from Teton County schools. We know that SROs [do not reduce crime in schools](#), but do increase harm to students and lead to unsafe learning environments
- Do not hire for currently unfilled positions within the Sheriff's Department (Court Officer and Detention Officer) and remove those salaries from the budget.
- Do not hire for currently unfilled positions within the Police Department and remove those salaries from the budget.
- Hire at least two Spanish speaking dispatchers as soon as possible, and provide a salary incentive for Spanish language fluency.
- Enact an in-depth audit of local law enforcement departments in order to learn more about their efficacy, efficiency, how they spend their budgets, and areas of potential change.

## Our Suggestions (long term)

- Establish a system for removing police presence from situations in which they are not specifically needed (e.g. if a 911 call comes in about a medical emergency, send an EMT or ambulance and not a law enforcement officer).
- Establish a non-law enforcement alternative crisis response network that responds to emergency calls in which a crime is not being committed, and that does not carry weapons, nor have the ability to arrest citizens.
- Consolidate the JPD with the TCSO and disband the JPD so that the non-police alternative can take its place both as crisis responders and in the budget.

## Examples of Defunding-Oriented Policy Changes

- [Winona, MN \(population 26,813\)](#)- Unanimously voted to remove officers from public schools.
- [Northampton, MA \(population 28,726\)](#)- Voted to cut police budget by 10%, resulting in layoffs.
- [Helena, MT \(population 32,315\)](#)- Unanimously voted to do a deep dive into local law enforcement policies and practices in order to make meaningful changes.
- [Edmonds, WA \(population 42,767\)](#)- Currently deliberating removal of officers from public schools.
- [Burlington, VT \(population 42,899\)](#)- Discussions of amount of uniformed officers, firing specific officers named in police brutality lawsuits filed by Black men, and removing SROs from schools.
- [Portland, ME \(population 66,417\)](#)- School board debating removing SROs from schools.
- [San Leandro, CA \(population 89,703\)](#)- City council approved a measure to reallocate \$1.7million from police budget into "a new bucket to be reallocated with community input."

### Examples of Alternative Public Safety & Restorative Justice

These are just a few examples of specific organizations doing this work, but there are hundreds of organizations around the country involved in alternative public safety and restorative justice like victim-offender mediation, diversionary programs, and former prisoner assistance to reduce recidivism, to name just a few of the many restorative justice practices in existence.

- [CAHOOTS, Eugene, OR \(population 171,245\)](#)- trained crisis responders that provide 24/7 assistance to non-crime-related dispatch calls. They do not arrest citizens or carry firearms and instead provide mental health and medical aid to emergency callers. CAHOOTS handles around 20% of 911 calls and is allocated only 2% of the public safety budget.

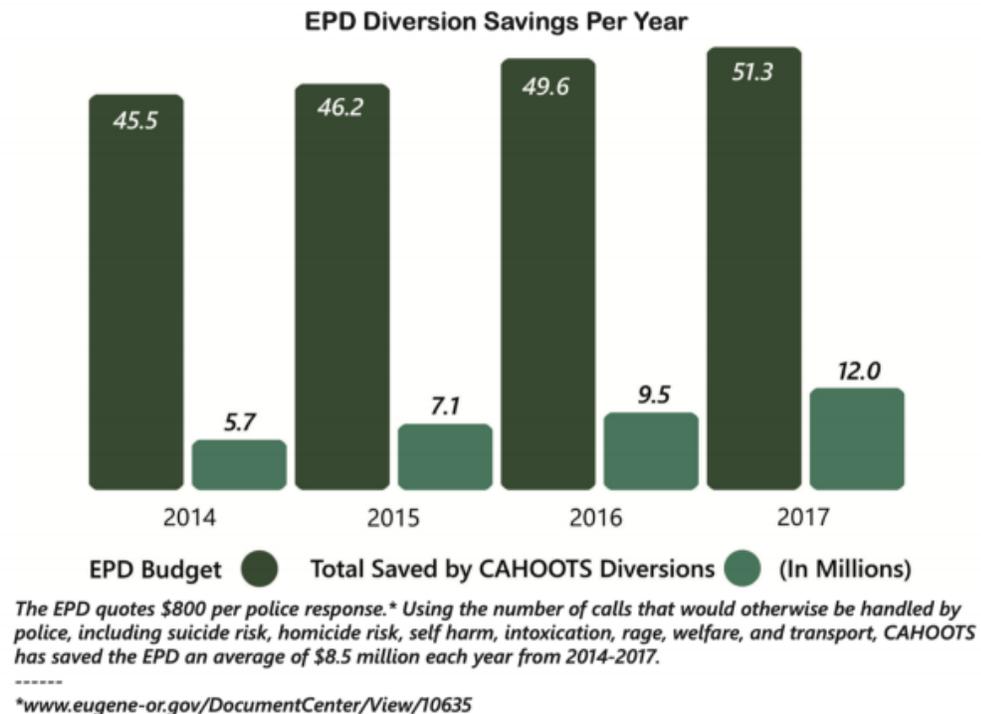


Figure 4 (Created by White Bird Clinic)

- [Burlington Community Justice Center, Burlington, VT, \(population 42,899\)](#)- provides various restorative justice services including but not limited to Court Diversion (in which low-level offenders can be removed from the court system and put into a program that does not criminalize them and instead uses restorative practices to deal with the consequences of their crime), and Youth Substance Abuse and Safety Program (an alternative to civil court process for youth under 18 who violate VT's underage alcohol and/ or marijuana laws).
- [Ogle County Juvenile Justice Council, Ogle County, Illinois, \(population 50,643\)](#)- works with juvenile offenders in the areas of restorative justice, crime prevention, juvenile expungement, and more in order to prevent juvenile delinquency and best serve populations of youth that find themselves in the court system.
- [Public Investment in Community-Driven Safety Initiatives](#), A research report detailing nine examples of community-based crime prevention strategies currently utilized in the United States. This report has mechanisms for reallocation of funds that incorporate the cost saving measures of these programs.

# Conclusion

Teton County is a unique location, but it is not alone in the issues it faces. Affordable housing, substance abuse, health care, food insecurity, and domestic violence are issues the rest of the nation faces as well. These issues are not new, and neither is the defunding framework that provides solutions to them.

Traditional policing does not reduce crime, and it criminalizes and destroys the lives of our most vulnerable populations. Investing in human services, restorative justice, and alternative forms of public safety is a proven way to reduce crime, increase access to vital resources, and make communities safer and more prosperous.

We hope that the Commissioners and Town Council will not only listen to our voices but also read the vital resources we have included in this report. These expert voices are showing us a way to improve the quality of life for our entire community; now we have to do the work to educate ourselves and take substantive action for a more just and equitable future.