We Promised Safer Communities. Now We're Cutting the Lifeline

By Amy L. Solomon
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The words of the grieving mother are forever seared in my brain: "Do not forget us."

She was among a group of women who had lost children to gun violence, united in their anguish – and in their commitment to protecting other moms from experiencing the same unimaginable fate. I met her on a trip to Chicago in 2023, when I visited federally funded programs working to interrupt cycles of violence and save lives.

And on April 22, in the first 100 days of the second Trump administration, many of the grants that pay for such violence intervention efforts were eliminated, part of a sweeping cut to federal funding from the Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

So far, more than 350 grants totaling hundreds of millions of dollars were terminated, impacting safety in communities across the country. Still more cuts are on the way.

What is the Office of Justice Programs (OJP)?

Until now, you might not have heard of OJP. It's the federal office that helps fund your city police department, your county jail and your state prison – as well as many of the innovative crime control and prevention strategies that have helped drive crime rates down from their peaks in the early 1990s.

If you're a crime victim, OJP likely pays for many of the services you receive. It also funds research that tells us if certain programs reduce crime and save taxpayer dollars.

I've worked at OJP over three administrations, and I led the office as assistant attorney general under former President Joe Biden. I've also been on the outside as a grantee, working with Republican and Democratic administrations alike on public safety issues that often – and ideally – attract support across partisan lines.

And while every new administration invariably shifts gears in line with its own goals, you don't see funding that has already been competed for and committed get rescinded.

Belt-tightening is not what's happening here. Funding termination letters told program providers they were no longer in sync with the new administration's priorities of "combating

violent crime" and "protecting victims of trafficking and sexual assault."

Yet, as I can tell you firsthand, that's exactly what many of these programs do.

Victims and survivors of crime will face diminished services

The proposed cuts will have far-reaching consequences for public safety, victim support, justice system operations and crisis response. Schools may lose critical support to safeguard students, while law enforcement could lose resources to curb violence in rural communities.

Programs designed to interrupt violence, prevent shootings and support evidence-based policing will be forced to scale back or shut down. Efforts targeting sexual assault – including the processing of backlogged kits and improving response strategies – may be cut as well.

Victims and survivors of crime will face diminished access to essential support services, including support for victims of gender-based violence, for victims who are deaf or hard of hearing, and services for older adults facing abuse or exploitation. Specialized services for vulnerable populations – such as victims of human trafficking – will be jeopardized, leaving more people without help.

And within the justice system, both prosecutors and defense attorneys will lose training and resources that support the fair and impartial administration of justice.

The cuts will also undermine responses to some of our most pressing public health and safety challenges. More people with substance use disorders and those experiencing acute distress will go without care. Oversight efforts – such as helping to track deaths in custody or prevent sexual abuse in correctional facilities – will lose vital resources and safeguards. Additionally, research into mass shootings and identifying what works to reduce crime will be cut.

In short, many of the resources that keep our communities safe, strong and healthy were slashed overnight. Jobs and the fate of entire organizations are on the line. Lives will be at risk.

There's never a good time to disinvest in public safety. But these cuts feel particularly ill-timed as our country continues to recover from a painful surge in violent crime during the early COVID-19 pandemic years. By late 2024, violent crime rates had finally fallen to pre-pandemic levels or below, recent findings from the Council on Criminal Justice show, and

early numbers from 2025 document continued progress.

These national trends are promising, but Council on Criminal Justice experts caution that progress has been uneven, with too many communities – urban, suburban and rural – still struggling with fentanyl and unacceptably high rates of serious crimes like homicide and motor vehicle theft.

The federal government must continue to innovate and invest in evidence-based interventions that tackle these problems and make for safe and thriving communities.

There's nothing partisan about it: Now is the time to double down on effective, evidence-based crime reduction strategies – not defund them.

Perhaps that will happen when the full scope of the cuts comes to light. After all, Congress created and appropriated funds for many of the sacked programs, and Capitol Hill leadership appears to have been blindsided by the cuts.

With so much at stake, we cannot afford to dismiss the profound costs of promised "savings." We can and must do better, for the mothers I met in Chicago, and the countless other Americans who have already lost too much.

Amy L. Solomon is a senior leader and policy entrepreneur with deep experience in government, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sectors. From 2021 to 2024, Solomon led the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), the largest grantmaking entity of the U.S. Department of Justice. The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council on Criminal Justice.