

Defunding the Police: Will it Solve America's Mental Health Crisis? By Melody Falker

The year is 2020. The United States is in the midst of many crises. There are wildfires in the West. The presidential election is splitting the country. We currently hold the lead for the most Coronavirus cases, with 15 million Americans having tested positive since March. But most importantly, protests and riots have continued for months, challenging systemic racism in this country.

While racism has been an issue for centuries, the death of George Floyd sparked outrage across the globe. All generations have been speaking up about the victims of police brutality who have yet to receive full justice, such as Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake, Tamir Rice, and countless others. There have been petitions, fundraisers, and organizations attempting to put a stop to the racism that is embedded deep into our government. And while there is no true solution to this issue, there have been many ideas discussed. One of these ideas is to defund the police.

This is a touchy subject to some, as many Americans have family members who serve in this field. But the true meaning of defunding the police is often misunderstood. Some argue that "Defund the Police" really means "Abolish the Police", but that is not true. By defunding the police, funding that was originally supplied for the police department would be redistributed to other government funded departments.

According to [brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu), nine out of ten 911 calls are for non-violent encounters; meaning that a police officer's training is not ideal for these situations. This causes the argument that funding would be better allocated if redirected toward Social Services. If there were a social services hotline, the non-violent calls would have the proper resources available for their situation and are more likely to get the help that they need. In addition, this would allow police officers to spend more time on the cases that require their skill sets.

It is believed that defunding the police would be significantly beneficial for those with mental illness. According to the National Library of Medicine, "A recent review of studies estimated that six to 10 percent of all police contacts with the public in the U.S. involve persons with serious mental illnesses". If given the opportunity to call a social services hotline rather than 911, that ten percent could be redirected to the professionals they need to receive treatment. And, although they receive substantial funding, police officers are not trained to handle people with a mental illness.

Through research from populardemocracy.org, it is shown that the United States spends \$100 billion dollars per year on policing, and an additional \$80 billion on incarceration. For comparison, the President's 2020 Budget Request only allows \$64 billion for the Department of Education. And a more extreme comparison, the United States allowed \$721.5 billion for the military in 2020. By just redirecting a small portion of the budget we allow for self-defense and policing, mental health hotlines could get enough funding to create easy-access programs, allowing for more counseling throughout the country.

Statistics from [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov) show that in 2017, 46.6 million U.S. adults suffer from mental illness, which translates to roughly one out of every five adults. These numbers include adults with any form of mental illness, although 11.2 million adults suffer from serious mental illness (SMI). Those who are diagnosed with a SMI have a disorder that leaves them with serious functional impairments, and have difficulties doing at least one major task in life. Although the entire 46.6 million adults should receive professional assistance for their mental illness, only 19.8 million manage to get the services that they need. This is most likely because of the costs of

healthcare. At its lowest percentage, 2.4% of adults (residing in Massachusetts) with mental illness are uninsured; but at its highest percentage, 22.9% of adults (residing in Wyoming) with mental illness go without insurance.

Knowing that a large percentage of adults in the United States suffer from a mental illness, the government must create an easily accessible form of mental health care for people from all backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. While defunding the police cannot entirely guarantee the full funding needed for this issue, the increased budget for Social Services could allow for significant improvement of U.S. citizens' mental health.