



# LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS

To Reduce Crime & Incarceration

## A Nation in Crisis

The tragic killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 at the hands of a police officer, and the apparent complicity of fellow officers in his death, was senseless and indefensible. As police chiefs, prosecutors, sheriffs, and correctional officials from across the nation, we call on our membership and all law enforcement to redouble our efforts to improve our systems of justice across the nation.

While no single law enforcement incident represents the whole of their agency, we must acknowledge how police misconduct can undermine hard-earned public trust. Winning that trust back is essential to restoring our communities and ensuring safety and justice for all.

We must do better. And we must continue to work on the implementation of practices that focus on ensuring respect for the dignity, rights, and life of every person who comes into contact with law enforcement. This week, LEL Executive Director **Ronal Serpas** and Senior Counsel **Taryn Merkl** issued this [statement](#) regarding the death of George Floyd.

We call for change and increased accountability, together with the [President](#) of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the [Major Cities Chiefs Association](#), the [National District Attorney's Association](#), and [Fair & Just Prosecution](#), among other organizations that represent law enforcement officials.

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## Ensuring Justice and Public Safety

Federal Criminal Justice Priorities  
for 2020 and Beyond

Foreword by Ronal W. Serpas and Taryn A. Merkl | PUBLISHED APRIL 30, 2020

### LEL's 2020 Federal Policy Report

After many months of research and writing, this April, the Law Enforcement Leaders team published its [federal policy report](#), *Ensuring Justice and Public Safety: Federal Criminal Justice Priorities for 2020 and Beyond*. Started months before the coronavirus pandemic, the report was circulated to the LEL membership for feedback prior to publication, and we again thank our many members who provided invaluable edits and suggestions, and helped to strengthen our policy recommendations.

Building on LEL's 2017 [policy report](#), *Ensuring Justice and Public Safety* urges the federal government to adopt a range of strategies across five areas:

- Reducing unnecessary incarceration
- Increasing mental health & drug treatment
- Bolstering community policing
- Improving juvenile justice and
- Preserving & expanding recidivism reduction

Although the report could not be issued at the planned April 1 national LEL summit, we circulated it to a wide range of criminal justice and legislative stakeholders — including members of Congress, the Administration, presidential campaign staff, criminal justice reform advocates, academics, and others.

Alongside the digital circulation of the policy report, LEL Executive Director **Ronal Serpas** and Senior Counsel **Taryn Merkl** penned an op-ed in [The Appeal](#). The op-ed introduces the report by highlighting how deadly pretrial detention can be — especially during a pandemic — and advocates for the elimination of cash bail.

While the LEL team is disappointed about the necessary cancellation of the national summit, we are considering options to bring the coalition together later this year to discuss public safety and reform in a virtual setting.

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## The Fight for Safety & Reform in the Era of Covid-19

LEL leadership has been hard at work representing the coalition in national discussions about public safety and criminal justice reform in the wake of Covid-19. Director Serpas spoke to over 500 participants at the closing plenary session of the MacArthur Safety & Justice Challenge webcast on May 21 regarding policing in the era of coronavirus and what the future of policing will look like after the pandemic. In addition, Senior Counsel **Merkl** was a featured panelist at a virtual [town hall](#) on the coronavirus risks behind bars hosted by Defending Rights & Dissent, and she has been quoted in articles regarding community policing in the time of coronavirus (in [The Stamford Advocate](#)) and on bail reform (in [MLK50](#)). **Merkl** also gave a presentation to the League of Women's Voters on cash bail reform in late May.

At the state level, **Merkl** and **Serpas** signed onto an [amicus brief](#) in April with other law enforcement, prosecutorial, and correctional leaders supporting a petition to release nonviolent youthful offenders in Maryland to protect them from Covid-19 behind bars. The LEL team is also exploring potential advocacy in California regarding state referenda that are slated for the November ballot. Please contact [Sunwoo Oh](#) if you are interested in getting involved in California advocacy or would like to discuss LEL support for legislative advocacy in your state.

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## Member Efforts to Combat Covid-19 in These Unprecedented Times

As communities struggle to contain the Covid-19 outbreak, LEL members across the country have risen to the challenge of promoting community health and safety while maintaining public safety.

Many members are pursuing collaborative measures to reduce their local incarcerated populations without compromising public safety.

- In Denver, District Attorney **Beth McCann** worked with the sheriff's department to identify those at risk of contracting Covid-19 and those with little time left on their sentences who would not pose a threat to the community, [reducing the jail population](#) by nearly 50 percent.

- **Spearheaded** by Sheriff **Peter J. Koutoujian**, the Middlesex County jail has reduced its population by 100 individuals, a 15 percent decline, by reviewing bail and increasing electronic monitoring.
- In Manhattan, District Attorney **Cyrus R. Vance, Jr.** has worked with government partners and other New York City District Attorneys to **reduce** the Rikers Island population in response to the pandemic; the jail **now houses** less than 4,000 people for the first time in over 70 years.
- Washtenaw County, under the leadership of Sheriff **Jerry Clayton**, has similarly **reduced its jail population to historic levels** in order to maintain adequate social distancing within the facility.
- In Pittsburgh, Allegheny County District Attorney **Stephen Zappala Jr.** **committed** to not opposing the release of nonviolent incarcerated people who are at high risk of contracting Covid-19 in the county jail.
- Alexandria Commonwealth Attorney **Bryan Porter**; Erie County, New York District Attorney **John Flynn**; Salt Lake County District Attorney **Sim Gill**; Lucas County, Ohio Sheriff **John Tharp**; Cumberland County, Maine Sheriff **Kevin Joyce**; and other members have taken similar steps to downsize jail populations to reduce the spread of Covid-19 behind bars.

In other jurisdictions, members have decreased the number of people booked into local correctional facilities by encouraging cite and release in lieu of arrest.

- Gallatin County Sheriff **Brian Gootkin** is **collaborating with local law enforcement** to cite and release individuals for nonviolent misdemeanors to prevent the entry of Covid-19 into the jails.
- Chief **Peter Newsham** of the D.C. Police Department has **expanded** the types of illegal activities that qualify for citations instead of arrests.

Members have also leveraged technology to ensure that the delivery of justice is not delayed by the pandemic.

- As domestic violence calls increased in King County, Washington since the outbreak unfolded, Prosecuting Attorney **Dan Satterberg** **unveiled a program** in which those in need can file protection orders remotely.
- Vermont Attorney General **T.J. Donovan** hosted a **virtual expungement clinic** to ensure that Covid-19 didn't delay people from being able to get fresh starts.
- In Milwaukee County, District Attorney **John Chisholm** worked with local officials to process all felony, DUI, and domestic violence cases **using Zoom technology**, processing even more cases now than at the same time last year.

Thank you to all of our members for working to keep our communities safe and as healthy as possible in this truly unprecedented time. If you would like your local efforts featured in our next newsletter or on the LEL website, please contact [Sunwoo Oh](#).

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## LAW ENFORCEMENT LEADERS

To Reduce Crime & Incarceration



Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime & Incarceration unites over 200 current and former police chiefs, federal and state chief prosecutors, and attorneys general from all 50 states to urge for a reduction in both crime and incarceration. With this group, law enforcement joins the emerging movement calling for an end to unnecessary, widespread incarceration.

For inquiries, please contact [info@lawenforcementleaders.org](mailto:info@lawenforcementleaders.org)

To become a Law Enforcement Leaders member, contact us [here](#).

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