

"Defund the police": Cities respond to demands for a major law enforcement shift

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People walk past a "Defund The Police" sign that was painted on 16th Street near the White House in Washington, D.C., June 8, 2020. After days of protests in the capital over the death of George Floyd at the hands of police, Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser renamed that section of 16th street "Black Lives Matter Plaza." Photo: Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images

People are asking that governments stop providing money to police departments. The demand comes after the death of George Floyd.

Floyd was a black man killed by a white police officer. It happened in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25. His death led to large protests across the country. People are angry and hurt. They feel that police unfairly target the black community.

Now activists and local leaders want changes. They want changes to policing. They say cities should give less money to police departments. Some people think the police should be broken up entirely. Demonstrators have chanted "defund the police" at rallies.

Politicians across the country are now thinking about defunding the police. It would mean no longer giving money to the police force. The police force would be reduced. Money would instead

go to programs to help people. Supporters want the money put toward black communities. They want it used for schools, health care and housing.

A Plan To Change What Police Do

Democrats in Congress also proposed changes to the law. The changes would restrain police use of force. Democrats announced this plan on June 9.

Alex Vitale studies social problems. He wrote a book about policing. In it, he argues that policing has increased in the past 40 years. Now, police do more than just fight crime. Police respond to homelessness and youth violence. The point of defunding is not to make all police go away, Vitale said. The point is to change what the police do.

Some law enforcement leaders do not like the idea.

William Barr works for the Trump administration. He is the top legal adviser. Barr said he believes the U.S. police system is not racist. He said he understands why black Americans do not trust officers "given the history of this country."

Peter Newsham is the police chief of Washington, D.C. He warned lawmakers to be careful. He said cutting funding could add to police violence. He said defunding police could affect an officer's training.

Cutting Money From Police Departments

Leaders in some cities are planning to make changes.

Eric Garcetti is the mayor of Los Angeles. On June 3 he made an announcement. He said he would cut money from the city's police force. The money will instead go toward health care and jobs.

In Portland, Oregon, leaders agreed to make changes. They will remove police officers from the city's schools. They announced this on June 4. They will move the money into community programs.

In Minneapolis, nine city lawmakers announced plans on June 7. They said they plan to break up the city's police department. They might build a whole new public safety system. They might pass new city laws. Or, they might move funds away from the police department.

Lisa Bender is the Minneapolis city council president. She said the council is committed to ending policing. The existing system of policing is not working, she said.