

Focus: Police and criminal justice reforms in New Jersey under Attorney General Gurbir Grewal

Goal: Understand the reform priorities and process, as well as the factors that enabled such reform



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The New Jersey Attorney General (NJOAG) is structurally unique:

- Appointed, not elected
- Centralized oversight over county prosecutor offices, as well as supervision over police departments across the state
- Ability to set policy via law enforcement directives rather than legislative action
- Structure could be replicated legislatively

“Culture eats policy for breakfast”: policy change must come with steps toward lasting cultural change, conversation, and education.

Developed after extensive consultation with community, civil society, and internal stakeholders, the NJ “Excellence in Policing” Initiative aims to help officers avoid needing to use force, while setting strict limits and consequences on the use thereof.

- Training for all—new recruit to police chief—helps shift mindset from “warrior” to “guardian”
- Support for officers through stress and trauma, with new early warning system for officers
- New policy bans use-of-force except as last resort and includes common sense prohibitions
 - E.g. firing from or at moving vehicles
- Creates affirmative duty to provide emergency medical assistance and to intercede if another officer engages in the unauthorized use-of-force
- To improve police accountability, new online dashboard publicly reports and new rules govern all use-of-force incidents

Police officers are still often called when someone experiences acute mental health challenges, but police behavior can change.

- Identify mental health challenges as such rather than as threat
- Train to buy or use time until specialists arrive, rather than resolving situation immediately

Some NJ initiatives focus on reducing youth involvement with criminal justice system.

- **“Handle with Care”** program is a cooperation between schools and police

- **Juvenile justice commission** is focused on a trauma-informed approach with restorative justice elements

Youth engagement is possible via relationship building.

- Avenues include mentorship, youth programs, and sports leagues

Further work is required in US on police recruitment and hiring, as officers are still able to avoid accountability by transferring departments, even within a given state.

Rising gun and violent crime rates across US may call recent calls for police reforms into question by external entities, even as states invest in interventions.

- Patchwork of US state gun laws and porous borders make regulation within state difficult

Previously New Jersey replaced cash bail system with algorithm, but more work is required.

- Reduced number of people held pre-trial
- Algorithm has not solved for racial disparities



KEY EXAMPLES

- NJ **Policing** Initiatives
- NJ Use of Force **Dashboard (Explanation)**
- NJ **Combating Gun Violence** Initiative
- Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (**ABLE**) (US)
- Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (**ICAT**) Training (US)



REFERENCED RESOURCES

- NJOAG priority on **strengthening community trust**
- NJ Use of Force Policies (**Overview, Policy**)
- *Atlantic* **article** on recent NJ police reforms
- 2019 article on the **effect of bail reform** in NJ
- NJ **Independent Investigation of Criminal Cases involving Police Use-of-Force or In-Custody Death Directive**
- NJ **Juvenile Justice Reform Directive**
- NJ **Violence Intervention 2020 Program Report**
- **“Examining the Impact of Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) De-escalation Training for the Louisville Metro Police Department: Initial Findings”** by Robin Engel et al.
- *America on Fire* by Elizabeth Hinton