

Should We Defund the Police?

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How does defunding something or not investing in it give it a chance to be better? Many think society would be better with fewer police or even no police but defunding means something quite different than just getting rid of it. ““Defund the police” means reallocating or redirecting funding away from the police department to other government agencies funded by the local municipality. That’s it. It’s that simple. Defund does not mean abolish policing.” (Ray, 2020). To this day there is still a big misconception with this term. I would also say there can be misconceptions about the work that police do. They all have the title of police officers but not all wear a uniform, not all arrive at scenes. There is a lot more to a Police Officer Department than that. Immigration Officers are known as Licensed Deputies to those who work in Sheriff’s Offices. If you were to defund the Police, it would mainly target the licensed part of agencies. For Sheriff’s Offices this would include those assigned to water patrol, water, ice safety, hospitals, civil process services, investigation, courts, tactical teams, task forces, crime scene processing, and many more. With these many different units, I do not think defunding would be the best idea. In fact, many specialized units are typically funded by the Federal Government or

at least partially through wages and/or equipment. How can we find the common ground again? Let's find ways to lessen the burden on Police while maintaining order and offering help to those who, yes, may have entered the world of criminality, but need other forms of help than jail time or prison. If we can do this, we can effectively decrease some of the needs of the Police, which in turn may make relations better with community members.

As many hear the term defunding the police, many picture it as negative. Which is pretty true, nobody wants to have anything they own defunded. To me, defunding means starting over until proven to be better. Which the last 4 years has not done the best job for Police. Clearly there have been incidences with individuals or groups of officers that have been unethical, unprofessional, and even criminal. "Activists have been calling to defund the Police for nearly a decade—since at least 2014, following the death of Michael Brown at the hands of Police in Ferguson, Missouri—but the slogan caught on much more broadly in 2020, even being echoed by some progressive members of Congress." (Wilson, 2023) This term has been around for a pretty long time and caught more light after the incident happening in our own state, George Floyd's death. This was a time when our country felt very divided, especially Minnesota. The reason the term got more light after George Floyd's death rather than Michael Brown's death, I believe was social media and new technology. People are more free to voice opinions and these incidents have a lot more coverage through modern technology than they did in the past. My question is though, can this negative term have a positive outcome?

Many people can have different visions of what defunding the Police would actually look like, whether it be thinking of it being abolished or money put elsewhere. The article "What Defunding the Police Actually Looks Like" By Ramenda Cyrus (2023) goes to write about what defunding the Police could look like. The new mayor of Chicago, Brandon Johnson, has decided

to put more resources into the community, some research had been done to show that Police Officers are needed at every call. Instead of Police, they looked toward programs like CAHOOTS (Crisis assistance helping out on the streets). CAHOOTS is a mobile social service that provides 24/7 service. Responders from this program focus on de-escalating the situation by listening and emphasizing with the individual or group at hand, these responders are more for nonviolent emergencies. The idea of CAHOOTS sounds amazing, right, but why do we have to take away funding from one to get this program?

To the public the idea of defunding agencies to get social workers may be new. In reality many departments have already started to use social workers. In fact, places like St Paul, Blaine, Coon rapids, and Hennepin County have been using them without defunding their own programs. According to his website, Steiner (2022) writes:

Starting as far back as 2016, the St. Paul Police Department decided to try a different approach to mental health calls. In 2018, they partnered with the nonprofit community based mental health provider People Incorporated to embed social workers in their department as a way to avoid unnecessary arrests and hospitalizations and get people the help they need. This tactic has proven so successful that a number of police departments across the state have begun to follow St. Paul's lead and embed social workers into their ranks. (Steiner, 2022)

Most of these embedded social workers have been assigned to police through grants from the government or even people. They have not had to defund their departments to get these programs and it has worked simply fine.

There were many City Councils that were pushing to defund the departments or agencies in their area. Some had immediate reactions following the George Floyd case as many

constituents were pushing for these budget cuts. One example would be New York's budget cut of 1 billion from the original 6 billion they have. "Facing pressure from thousands of constituents calling to defund the police, New York City slashed \$1 billion from the police budget. But some city lawmakers – and the protesters calling for change – think the cuts weren't sweeping enough." (CNN, 2020) New York's department has one of the biggest hirings with over 55,000 people. That's 55,000 to get for equipment, 55,000 people to train, 55,000 to try and save lives. The fact that New York is a massive city means there are also probably many units sprawled around with different titles.

People also forget that many Police Officers opted out of the profession after all the criticism began and hearing that they may be defunded is not exactly attracting to the field. Leaving the same budget but now need to find new hires and people having to work overtime. In "It's Not Just a Police Problem, Americans Are Opting Out of Government Jobs" Daphne Duret and Weihua Li(2023), The Marshall Project, writes, "The toxic national dialogue that demonizes Police Officers has made Police Department staffing significantly more difficult for every major city in America," Bynum said Nov. 15, adding, "All it takes is a 30-second out-of-context clip on the internet to tarnish their reputation or even ruin their career." With high crime rated cities having a decline in police officers they must have many people working overtime. Another thing that was viewed was the decline in other government jobs in these areas like fire fighters and bus drivers.

I was close to this "defund" movement, as my parents are in law enforcement in the metro area. It was impossible to go onto any social media outlet or watch the TV without seeing

the outrage, the burning of buildings, the anti-police rhetoric. Although I never really researched the facts till now. My parents have worked in the Minneapolis area and have been for 25+ years. I know firsthand how everything that happened affected them and how difficult it was. I also know they understand the feelings that came with this movement. They also are for more programs that will assist police. Police Departments were defunded due to the amounts of officers that left the department. Now city councils around the country are trying to build them back up. Not only did many officers leave the profession. The ripple effect has been losing many prospective students that were seeking a career in Law Enforcement. Recruiting has been exceedingly difficult, and retention has been even more difficult. There is also a shift in personnel in many agencies of “Are these candidates a good fit for Law Enforcement.” There seems to be a rise in applicants that were not originally Law Enforcement students that now have stepped into the profession. This has been good and not so good at times. The overall prognosis for Law Enforcement is “this is going to take some time.” It is going to take time for people to heal, it is going to take some time to figure out funding all aspects the right way, it is going to take some time to get staffing levels back to where they were at one time or more realistically...Where they can be to safely and effectively fight the criminal activity that is going on all over our cities but also the country. My hope is that lawmakers, law enforcement, and the community members can work together to make positive changes. There must be some middle ground, but it will take tough, honest conversations and the ability to listen to each other and be reasonable. Let’s hope for all of us we can get that done.

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