



# ***CREATING A SAFER MARYLAND FOR ALL:***

Interrupting Violence, Preventing Crime, Addressing  
Racial Inequities, and Supporting Rehabilitation

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As CEO of one of the nation's largest nonprofits fighting poverty, Wes' organization funded national research on the long-term implications of crime, incarceration and criminal convictions, and that work led to the passage of transformative legislation and policy.

Marylanders deserve to feel safe in their homes, schools, places of worship, and businesses across the state. Diverse and caring communities make Maryland a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. However, we know that there are real and unaddressed issues threatening our best hopes for our young people, their families, our communities and our entire state. These challenges will require bold and decisive action, and the willingness to take responsibility for what we can do instead of merely assigning blame. Through a comprehensive approach based in community partnerships and effective coordination across local and state agencies, Wes is committed to addressing head-on the reality of rising rates of violent crime, domestic violence, hate crimes, overdose deaths and persistent racial inequities within our justice system.

While there are no easy answers to these substantial challenges and the patterns of violence that undermine public safety and peace of mind, a failure of executive leadership over the past eight years has made Maryland less safe. For too long, local communities and law enforcement agencies have been left to fend for themselves at the expense of public safety. From 2015 to 2020, Maryland saw increases in the rate and number of murder and rapes. In 2020 there were 573 reported homicides in jurisdictions across Maryland and more than 80% of those homicides were the result of a shooting.<sup>1</sup> Gun violence tears through communities and abruptly ends the lives of our friends, our family members, and our neighbors. Maryland has the 7th highest firearm homicide rate in the country and tragically we lost 59 young people to firearm violence in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

Keeping Marylanders safe is the primary and most essential responsibility of the governor, and our ability to do so and help Maryland achieve its true potential depends on a governor who will be fully engaged and ensure crime is addressed with urgency in our communities. Wes recognizes there are a myriad of issues why people do not feel safe, and this is an issue we cannot compromise on. Crime is a complex socio-economic consequence of a wide range of factors including adverse childhood experiences, housing instability, educational challenges, lack of access to health care treatment and the lack of investment in long-underserved neighborhoods. Wes has dedicated his career to fighting poverty and creating opportunities for the communities he serves. As an Army Captain and combat veteran, Wes was charged with serving and protecting communities around the globe. As CEO of one of the nation's largest nonprofits fighting poverty, Wes' organization funded national research on the long-term implications of crime, incarceration and criminal convictions, and that work led to the passage of transformative legislation and policy.<sup>3</sup> Wes has also worked to rebuild trust between communities and law enforcement through collaborative work with communities and law enforcement agencies.<sup>4</sup> During his time as CEO, Wes also raised and oversaw the distribution of \$650 million to increase access to job training, improve worker conditions and more.<sup>5</sup> As governor, he will bring the same energy and passion to enhancing the prospects of all Marylanders, especially those most at risk.



**Improve data collection across all levels of government & at the community level.**

Wes understands that investing in reforms to the justice system is imperative and must be done while investing in strategies to reduce crime. He believes in marijuana legalization, youth intervention, and importantly, police accountability. He also supports the implementation of comprehensive solutions to public safety issues in the state, with a lens on social and racial equity. His policy plans for large societal problems like gun violence, as well as addiction and overdoses are intersectional and must involve public health professionals, community leaders, law enforcement, advocates, workforce development leaders and more. He knows that solving systemic problems requires cooperation and successful partnerships across all levels of government and with the communities that are closest to the problems.

## **UTILIZE A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH TO INTERRUPT CYCLES OF VIOLENCE AND PREVENT CRIME**

### ***Improve data collection at the state level and produce reports in a consistent and timely manner.***

To understand the breadth of crime in our state, recognize patterns and develop comprehensive intervention strategies, we must improve data collection across all levels of government and at the community level. Additionally, reports containing that critical data must be completed and published online in a consistent and timely manner to enable state and local leaders to respond to emerging trends with urgency. During our current governor's administration, the collection and timely reporting of data has lagged behind and must be addressed. For example, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has not published an annual report since 2018, meaning that essential data about firearm, transportation and drug-related deaths are not readily available and must be pieced together through other sources.<sup>6</sup> As governor, Wes will ensure every state agency collects and reports data in a timely manner. He will also modernize and streamline reporting processes to make it easier to communicate information across state, local and federal agencies. This will enhance Maryland's understanding of crime in our state and allow us to target resources to areas most in need.

### ***Rebuild trust and strengthen relationships between law enforcement and the community.***

Law enforcement plays a critical role in preventing and solving crime and keeping our communities safe, but for them to be able to do their jobs effectively, there must be a strong foundation of trust with the communities they serve. Strong accountability, transparency and communication are the pillars of that foundation, and if communities do not feel that officers or agencies are held accountable for wrongdoing, or that agencies are not being transparent, that trust becomes fractured. Additionally, if communities are not able to see the results of the work law enforcement agencies are doing it will be challenging to maintain



Each year, we lose a tragic number of Marylanders to gun violence. More than 80% of the state's homicide victims were killed with firearms.

trust and may impede the collaboration necessary to prevent and solve crime. Two clear examples of how distrust can impact public safety is Maryland's homicide clearance rate and the proliferation of gun violence on our streets. In 2020, homicide investigators across the state were only able to clear roughly half of these cases.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, we have seen major upticks in gun deaths and illegal firearms flooding our streets. By improving trust between communities and law enforcement, as well as improving coordination among state, local and federal agencies, officers will be better able to solve crimes and keep Marylanders safe. As governor, Wes will improve coordination across all levels of government, drive additional state support into local communities, and work with local agencies to ensure strong accountability and transparency measures are in place. Wes will also earmark and deploy federal grant funds to local agencies and community organizations to support community policing initiatives. Finally, Wes will work with local agencies to encourage hiring within their communities so that the people they serve recognize the faces of the people protecting them. He will also encourage the implementation of incentives for officers living in the communities in which they work, like additional points toward promotions, raises or other benefits.

**Reduce and prevent gun violence.** The proliferation of illegal firearms onto our streets continues to endanger Marylanders and wreak havoc on families everywhere. Each year, we lose a tragic number of Marylanders to gun violence, and more than 80% of the state's homicide victims were killed with firearms. Making matters worse, too many victims and perpetrators of these crimes are young people.<sup>8</sup> Between 2010 and 2019, Maryland experienced a 15% increase in gun-related deaths and homicides were the driving force behind the rise in firearm deaths.<sup>9</sup> While Maryland has taken great strides to address gun violence through the passage of life-saving legislation, there is still more work to be done.<sup>10</sup> Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, as well as community members and local organizations are critical in our fight to get dangerous weapons off our streets, and to be successful we must all work together. As governor, Wes will bring these groups together and invest in proven community-based violence intervention programs that will target and interrupt crime. He will also work with the legislature to ban ghost guns, which are difficult to track and trace – making it challenging, if not impossible, for law enforcement to identify perpetrators of violent crimes. In 2021, from Montgomery County, to Prince George's County to Baltimore City, law enforcement across the state recovered alarming numbers of these dangerous weapons, especially compared to previous years.<sup>11</sup> Wes will also work with law enforcement agencies to create a firearms database to track firearms used in crime and better enable law enforcement to analyze and solve gun crimes.

**Implement probation and parole reform with a focus on successful re-entry.** In 2019, there were more than 70,000 people on probation in Maryland and nearly 10,000 on parole.<sup>12</sup> Maryland has also logged a recidivism rate of 40.5%, meaning that nearly half of individuals released from incarceration will be re-incarcerated within three years.<sup>13</sup> This demonstrates a clear failure in our system. We currently have 129 vacant positions within the Division of Parole and Probation, meaning that our existing parole



In Maryland, more than **40%** of people released from state correctional facilities will return within three years.

officers are overwhelmed by high case numbers and as a result, individuals on probation and parole may not be adequately supervised.<sup>14</sup> It also means that we are failing to support and guide returning citizens as they re-enter our communities. As governor, Wes will immediately re-evaluate existing risk assessment tools to ensure that resources are allocated to the highest-need individuals. Research makes clear the ineffectiveness of devoting excessive supervision resources to low-risk individuals when they could be better deployed in monitoring higher-risk individuals who have a statistically greater likelihood of reoffending.<sup>15</sup> Wes will also ensure that every vacant probation and parole officer position is filled and that they have the resources they need to do their jobs effectively. Wes will further leverage federal dollars to expand behavioral health, job training, transportation and housing programs at the local level to support returning citizens. Wes understands the importance of this work because as the CEO of one of the largest nonprofits fighting poverty, under his leadership, the organization funded essential research<sup>16</sup> that led to the passage of the Less is More Act in New York, which ensures individuals are not re-incarcerated for technical violations and reduces the length of supervision for successful behavior.<sup>17</sup>

***Invest in and strengthen re-entry programs.*** As noted above, Maryland has a recidivism rate over 40.5%, which is significantly higher than some of our neighboring states, which boast rates as low as 23.1%.<sup>18</sup> We must assess the effectiveness of re-entry programs and whether our infrastructure is providing the necessary support for them and their families to adequately participate in the legitimate economy. We must do more to prepare people to return home and keep our communities safe. In 2021, individuals in Maryland’s correctional facilities were reading at a fifth to eighth grade reading level, and less than half entered the facility with a high school diploma.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, one-fourth of individuals who are incarcerated in Maryland’s state correctional facilities are receiving treatment for a mental health disorder,<sup>20</sup> and nearly 70% enter the system with a substance use disorder.<sup>21</sup> Without proper care and treatment, these individuals are more likely to recidivate.<sup>22</sup> As governor, Wes will substantially increase investments in behavioral health and re-entry services, and do a thorough review of the existing budget to ensure essential resources are prioritized and have the greatest impact. Wes will ensure that every facility offers strong education and job training programs early in incarceration – ensuring those who will inevitably return to their communities have the skills and capabilities to succeed. In addition to partnering with higher education programs, Wes will collaborate with private industries to create new opportunities for returning citizens.

***Fund violence intervention programs and community-based trauma centers.***

Community members know their cities and neighborhoods best and can leverage personal relationships to help end cycles of violence. Although Maryland continues to see high rates of gun violence and homicides, one neighborhood recently celebrated a full year without a homicide thanks to a program called Safe Streets.<sup>23</sup> Employees at Safe Streets typically live in the neighborhood where they work and many have experienced incarceration or levels of justice-involvement themselves. They have a unique ability



Montgomery County reported a **nearly 30% increase in domestic violence during the pandemic.**

to build rapport with residents, particularly youth, and have the skills to de-escalate situations and offer educational resources or mental health treatment options to communities. As governor, Wes will prioritize holistic programming to support young people most likely to become prey to cyclical violence, as both perpetrators and victims. In addition to anti-violence organizations which focus on prevention, it is crucial to provide effective responses to violent crime. Community-based hospital trauma centers provide medical attention as well as social support, referrals for substance use disorder treatment, and counseling for individuals who are often victims and perpetrators of violence.<sup>24</sup> Wes will ensure grant funds for these effective programs are accessible to Maryland communities that are committed to developing and expanding innovative solutions.

**Address the growing number of domestic violence cases.** Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable spike in reports of domestic violence in Maryland and nationwide. Close living quarters, the stress of financial difficulties and related anxiety about meeting basic needs, in addition to prolonged social isolation required during the pandemic have exacerbated and magnified the challenges individuals experiencing domestic violence face as they seek help. While nationally we've seen a nearly 10% increase in domestic violence,<sup>25</sup> Montgomery County reported a nearly 30% increase during the pandemic,<sup>26</sup> and Baltimore City reported a 31% increase in the number of domestic violence calls in the first three months of 2021 compared to the first three months of 2020.<sup>27</sup> In Maryland nearly 70% of domestic violence homicide victims were killed with a firearm.<sup>28</sup> We must take a multi-pronged approach to prevent and respond to violence against women, who are most commonly victims of domestic violence.<sup>29</sup> Wes will raise awareness about this issue, ensure law enforcement officers receive training and are utilizing domestic violence restraining orders, and leverage federal grant funding to expand access to housing, educational opportunities, job training and placement, and trauma-informed treatment for survivors.

## IMPLEMENT POLICE REFORM WITH A FOCUS ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

**Improve coordination and collaboration among state, local and federal law enforcement agencies.** As crime levels continue to rise across Maryland, it is essential that state, local and federal agencies are working hand-in-hand to solve our communities' most challenging public safety issues. Wes knows that local law enforcement agencies are working day and night to keep our communities safe, but many agencies remain under-resourced and are in dire need of additional support. State and federal law enforcement agencies can provide critical support to local agencies and can serve as force multipliers to their work. As governor, Wes will increase resources for state law enforcement agencies so they are better able to provide support to localities

upon request, and he will also work to improve communication and collaboration with federal agencies. Wes also recognizes that state law enforcement agencies can be strong partners in improving access to high-quality training. Wes will work to open a training academy for the Maryland State Police that is dedicated to law enforcement training and available to local law enforcement agencies. This will ensure state and local law enforcement agencies can receive top-notch training and relieve backlogs in training for law enforcement and correctional officers.

**Support localities in the development of police reform plans.** Wes has a proven track record of supporting police reform. Under Wes' leadership as CEO of one of the nation's largest nonprofits fighting poverty, the organization co-sponsored the Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative in New York.<sup>30</sup> This important collaboration resulted in the adoption of a police reform plan at the city and state level. This initiative offered a framework for consideration by local law-enforcement agencies to develop a reform plan. Every locality was required to adopt a plan for reform in order to be eligible for state funding. As governor, Wes will mirror this approach by working with agencies and organizations across the state to assist each locality with the development of achievable goals to improve their day-to-day function and overall operations. Wes recognizes that we cannot utilize a one-size fits all approach, rather he believes in a collaborative, agency-by-agency approach supported by technical assistance and federal funding from the state rather than a uniform statewide plan. Wes will ensure that law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve work hand-in-hand to develop and implement their plans.

**Promote diversity, equity and inclusion in law enforcement agencies.** In recent years, the nation has recognized the often-frayed relationship between communities and law enforcement agencies. A crucial part of rebuilding trust in law enforcement is ensuring that officers in the field reflect the diversity of the communities they are charged with serving and protecting. Not only is Wes committed to promoting racial diversity in law enforcement officers, but he is also committed to making sure law enforcement agencies are all encompassing of diversity regarding age, gender, sexual orientation, and geography. However, Wes also recognizes that diversity alone is not enough. It is essential that state and local law enforcement agencies also embody a culture of equity and inclusion, meaning that diverse officers have equitable access to career advancement and that they are disciplined and held accountable in equitable ways. As governor, Wes will lead by example and set clear goals for diverse hiring at



**Ensure officers reflect the diversity of the communities they are serving and protecting.**



the state level, and he will set aside federal funds local agencies can apply for and implement stronger recruitment and hiring practices. That includes programs that engage young people in schools about the possibility of becoming a law enforcement officer in the future. Wes will also ensure federal funds are made available for local agencies to deploy training on diversity, equity and inclusion so they can better serve their communities.

***Support expanded decertification standards for law enforcement officers.***

Policing must be carried out with absolute integrity and with the appropriate intensity in order to maintain trust within our communities. That means ensuring high levels of training and that those in positions of leadership create and promote a culture of accountability and transparency. Last year, the General Assembly overrode the Governor's veto to pass a bill which establishes more de-certifiable offenses for police, such as a misdemeanor or felony conviction, or a violation of the Maryland use of force statute. This legislation also improves information sharing among law enforcement agencies regarding personnel issues and internal investigations.<sup>31</sup> Previously the decertification of an officer was quite rare and Maryland only decertified one officer between 2015 and 2019.<sup>32</sup> In order for law enforcement officers and the public to begin to rebuild trust, there must be higher ethical and moral standards for police. Wes supports the expanded decertification standards and believes this policy will increase transparency and lend more credibility to those who seek to police their fellow Marylanders as a career law enforcement officer. As governor, Wes will ensure clear guidance exists to inform the decertification process in a way that promotes accountability and ensures the process is fairly executed. He will also work to create a database for law enforcement, so agencies can access key information about applicants history before hiring decisions are made.

***Fund Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and additional behavioral health programming in the community.***

Law enforcement officers are often expected to respond to a wide range of situations including behavioral health crises they are not specifically trained to handle. Crisis services for those with mental illnesses or substance use disorders are limited or nonexistent in most areas of the country.<sup>33</sup> People are frequently unable to access care in their communities for a variety of reasons: lack of stable housing and transportation, inadequate health insurance, or insufficient financial resources to access a rehabilitation or treatment center. In response to this issue, the Maryland General Assembly established the Crisis Intervention Team Center of Excellence (CITCE) in the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services.<sup>34</sup> Wes will ensure CITCE receives the funding necessary for successful implementation of a statewide model crisis intervention program with replicable training. CIT programs will provide appropriate services to those in need and allow police to focus exclusively on crime prevention and response. Wes will also work to build a comprehensive community behavioral health network so that when individuals are in crisis, there is always a place for them to go.



**Fund Crisis Intervention Teams**

**and additional behavioral health programming in the community.**

**Support mental health resources for law enforcement officers.** It is crucial that law enforcement officers have access to mental health services, especially ones that are trauma-informed. Law enforcement officers witness and experience an overwhelming number of traumatic experiences which can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder if left untreated. Approximately 15% of officers in the United States experience PTSD symptoms. Untreated trauma can lead to impairment of mental well-being and affect their ability to perform duties to the public. Further, long-term PTSD can lead to behavioral dysfunction including substance abuse, aggression, and suicide.<sup>35</sup> It is imperative that we are providing our law enforcement officers with the services they need to cope with the duties of their job. As Governor, Wes will work with local organizations to proactively address potential mental health challenges of law enforcement officers before it is too late. Wes will also ensure that a part of law enforcement training is dedicated to educating potential officers about the warning signs of PTSD and where they can get confidential help. Lastly, Wes will ensure that law enforcement officers have adequate insurance to cover a wide range of mental health services.

## **BUILD A MORE RESTORATIVE AND REHABILITATIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

**Provide for a restorative justice system and reform sentencing laws for juveniles.**

According to recent data from Maryland's Juvenile Justice Reform Council, 90% of youth who completed pre-court supervision (i.e., a tool to hold youth accountable without going through court proceedings)<sup>36</sup> are not re-adjudicated or re-convicted within a year.<sup>37</sup> Wes supports expanding restorative opportunities for youth and implementing recommendations from the Council that reduce the disparity between Black and white youth. Research shows that age is often the predictor for violent crime. Criminal justice reform advocates note that brain development is the major reason why young adults, not yet fully developed, might make poor decisions that result in criminal activity. Wes will fight to ensure that youth are not tried as adults in the criminal justice system. He will work to prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system in the first place by increasing access to wraparound services in schools, restorative practices, investing in after school and summer programs to keep young people engaged in healthy activities, and increasing access to intervention programs. Wes will also partner with schools to find ways to keep youth in schools, avoid pushout and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.



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***Increase access to employment opportunities upon release from incarceration.***

Research demonstrates that individuals who have previously been incarcerated experience a 27% unemployment rate, which is more than 20% higher than the national average.<sup>38</sup> Making matters worse, a recent study shows that individuals who have been previously incarcerated or have a conviction on their record collectively lose out on \$372.3 billion in lost wages annually, and a person who has experienced imprisonment can expect to see a 52% reduction in annual earnings.<sup>39</sup> In order to address this challenge and better prepare people to return home, we must improve access to education and job training during and after incarceration, and we must revisit policies like expungement reform, which enable individuals who have paid their debt to society to have their records cleared. As governor, Wes will increase state investments in re-entry programs, which include education and job training. In addition to increasing state resources, Wes knows the business, nonprofit and philanthropic communities can play a critical role in this effort. Parallel to his work as CEO of one of the nation's largest nonprofits fighting poverty, Wes will work with industries to improve access to job training and transportation and will also work with the business community to raise awareness and increase hiring of individuals with criminal backgrounds. Wes will also work with the legislature to pass expungement reform legislation so people can access opportunity.

***Expand pretrial service programs across the state.*** In Maryland, it is estimated that there are thousands of people each day who are incarcerated while they await trial.<sup>40</sup> These individuals have not yet been convicted, yet are costing local and state governments a tremendous amount of money to detain. Additionally, even a short period of pretrial detention can impact a person's employment, housing stability and more.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, cash bail is too often used as the only means to release someone while they await trial. The cash bail system is rife with inequities, disproportionately impacting communities of color and low-income communities that cannot afford bail.<sup>42</sup> Pretrial services play a critical role in our ability to prevent people from being held before trial without relying on cash bail. These locally-operated programs enable courts to release low-risk individuals back to the community while they await trial, and pretrial workers provide the necessary support and supervision to prevent people from reoffending and ensure they appear in court. As governor, Wes will increase funding for these proven programs and ensure that Marylanders who do not pose a risk to their communities are not detained while they await trial.

***Support the legalization of cannabis, address historic racial and social inequities related to enforcement, and ensure equity in implementation of the legal market.***

We must take steps to address the destruction the war on drugs has inflicted on many Maryland communities, and people of color in particular. Although Maryland decriminalized the possession of small amounts of cannabis in 2014,<sup>43</sup> substantial racial disparities in enforcement persist. Black Marylanders are still more than twice as likely to be arrested for a cannabis-related offense compared to their white peers.<sup>44</sup> Wes supports legalization and Speaker Jones' effort to get this on the ballot for voters to



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decide. If the people of Maryland vote to legalize cannabis, we must acknowledge and attempt to reconcile the impacts of criminalization before we can begin to discuss the benefits of legalization; this includes implementing automatic expungement for low-level possession charges. We will also ensure that if Marylanders choose to legalize cannabis, that the new legal framework is implemented equitably so communities that have experienced the greatest disparities benefit the most. That includes evaluating employment restrictions for individuals with cannabis-related convictions and ensuring Black-owned cannabis businesses are given the opportunity to grow and thrive, lessening the likelihood Maryland will experience the cannabis-related racial wealth gap other states are seeing.<sup>45</sup>

***Treat the substance use crisis as a public health crisis.*** As with many other societal issues, COVID-19 has underscored the seriousness of a growing health crisis within our communities. Since the start of the pandemic, Maryland has seen a significant uptick in the number of opioid overdose deaths, with a 20% increase in opioid related deaths from 2019 to 2020. This crisis must be approached from a public health standpoint, not a criminal justice or enforcement perspective. Harm reduction strategies including fentanyl test strips, needle exchange sites, and increased naloxone distribution are important tools that are proven to save lives. In 2020, 90% of the 2,799 overdose deaths in Maryland were related to opioids. Over 2,300 deaths have been attributed to fentanyl, a particularly potent synthetic opioid.<sup>46</sup> Like crimes of poverty, overdose deaths will continue to happen if individuals have no recourse in overcoming difficult life circumstances resulting from financial instability, mental health disorders, educational and employment roadblocks, or inadequate housing. We will support legislation and initiatives that improve quality of life, along with diverse support for substance use disorder issues including drug courts, treatment, overdose response programs, and naloxone training.

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