

# STACEY ABRAMS

GOVERNOR

## Second Pillar of Plan to Strengthen Public Safety, Address Violent Crime, and Reform Criminal Justice in Georgia

### THE CHALLENGE

In Georgia, families of every background are concerned about the rise in violent crime and how it impacts their communities. Law enforcement plays an essential role on the front lines of Georgia's fight against violent crime. Georgia's leaders must support and invest in law enforcement at every level to ensure that we build One Georgia with safe, thriving communities.

Georgians also understand that community trust and accountability for law enforcement are essential to public safety. Trust requires that those who protect us also develop substantive relationships with the communities they serve. Accountability for bad actors reinforces the bond between community and law enforcement. An effective public safety plan must be comprehensive, based on proven successes and backed by real funding to ensure equitable outcomes regardless of zip code. By making smart choices with our budget and our policies, Georgia can improve public safety without returning to failed policies or raising taxes.

### IMPACT ON GEORGIANS

To secure our communities, the next governor must simultaneously address pay for law enforcement officers and pursue policies to strengthen community trust and accountability.

**Support and Investment:** Higher officer pay will lead to better officer recruitment, better officer retention, better community interactions and a safer Georgia. However, recent increases in pay for some officials are insufficient to tackle the multiple vectors of law enforcement in our state. Georgia is responsible for state police, corrections officers and community supervision officers who oversee one of the nation's largest populations of

probation and parole. Yet, the current salaries do not pay these officers a living wage. The advertised salary for a correctional officer is \$38,040; for juvenile justice correctional officers the salary is \$37,730. The advertised starting salary for a community supervision officer level 1 is \$39,671, and these are the officers responsible for supporting re-entry and limiting recidivism.

Beyond state law enforcement, local communities struggle to recruit and retain law enforcement due to low pay, increased pressures and community tensions. With more guns in our communities, due to Brian Kemp's criminal carry law and the rise in violent crime under his watch, many law enforcement officers report concerns about an [increase](#) in crime and a [harder](#) time doing their jobs. Law enforcement in urban, suburban and rural areas across Georgia struggle with staffing shortages that put communities at risk.

According to an article from [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#) published in November 2021, one-quarter of Albany Police Department's positions were vacant, along with one-third of Putnam County Sheriff's Office's 35 positions. In Chatham, about 20 percent of the County's law enforcement positions were vacant. Additionally, over 1,105 law enforcement officers retired in Georgia in 2021 — the most retirements in the past six years. In 2020, 3,280 officers allowed their certification to lapse or be removed — the highest total in five years.

**Trust and Accountability:** As we address pay, we must also confront the erosion of trust in our communities. The rise in violent crime coupled with law enforcement shortages has left police forces overwhelmed and under-resourced. This challenge has a [direct correlation](#) with the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve. In Georgia, violent crime increased by 23 percent from 2019 to 2020, while [homicides increased by 55 percent](#). Both remained high in 2021.

While the police are a crucial resource in deterring and responding to violent crime, they are most effective when they have the support of the community they serve. Community trust is the foundation of effective policing. In order to strengthen public safety and address violent crime, we must promote targeted policing strategies that can reduce violent crime without intimidating communities. Effective policies will fortify training standards. Investments like Medicaid expansion can reduce the overreliance on police to respond to crises they are not trained to address, whether the issue is a mental health crisis or a confrontation with the disabled.

Most officers strive to do their best, but those who fail must be held accountable for misconduct. Reports of bad action cannot be ignored: aggressive over-policing of minor or nonexistent offenses, failing to pursue and solve homicides and other violent crimes in all neighborhoods, and—most notoriously—killing civilians, particularly young Black men who posed no threat. This lack of trust affects all law enforcement and impacts both cooperation with investigations and tensions between law enforcement and residents. Georgia must both improve its own standards and incentivize local law enforcement by ensuring that accountability will be fair and transparent. Under the prior administration, Georgia made strides by improving the grand jury process and improving law enforcement training standards. As more is done, trust and accountability are stronger - as is public safety.

## **STACEY'S PLAN**

Stacey Abrams is the only candidate for governor with a comprehensive plan to strengthen public safety, address violent crime and reform our criminal justice system in Georgia, without raising taxes on families.

Specifically, as Governor, Stacey will:

### **Support and invest in law enforcement:**

- Raise base salary for state patrol, correctional officers (adult and juvenile), and community supervision officers to approximately \$50,000/year and offer proportionate increases based on experience, which will improve recruitment and retention efforts to address severe staffing shortages, at a two-year cost of \$91M per year
- Provide \$25M in state grants to local agencies for salary raises to support living wages and incentivize local housing options, rather than deferring support to the public through problematic tax credit programs that have proven uneven or insufficient in other sectors
- Secure and regularize mental health supports at every level of law enforcement, including reducing stigma and expanding self-reporting options
- Invest in expanded training and collaborative supports, like crisis officers who specialize in mental health and social services

**Build community trust and accountability in public safety:**

- Develop and enforce guidelines for key police department policies that govern community relations and transparency
- Partner with Georgia Peace Officers Standards and Training Program (GA POST) to fortify training standards that address use of force, de-escalation, and crisis intervention and tie increased state funding to local department adoption of best practices
- Require accountability for unlawful law enforcement and correctional violence and misconduct
- Provide and maintain a statewide database of law enforcement officers dismissed for violation of standards to help other law enforcement agencies make informed hiring decisions