



BUDGETING FOR EQUITY: POLICING & PUBLIC SAFETY

ALLIANCE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION
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Introduction

As cities across the country reckon with the legacy of systemic racism and white supremacy, municipal budgets have come into renewed focus. Cities are reassessing the role of police amid high-profile incidents of police violence and rampant abuses of power.

Police budgets in the U.S. have nearly tripled since 1977, while public schools, housing, and key infrastructure have fallen in disrepair. In cities like Austin and Seattle, police funding has been reallocated to affordable housing, food programs, and community-based services in an effort to stabilize communities and prevent harm before it happens.

Rochester's long history of police violence underscores the ways in which investments in policing have failed to translate into improved public safety and community wellbeing. This history includes the police killings of Daniel Prude, Tyshon Jones, Richard Gregory Davis, Israel Andino, Hayden Blackman, Vernard Davis, William Odom, Alicia McCuller, Louis Davila, Kenneth Jackson, Calvin Greene, Willie Carter, Craig Heard, Lawrence Rodgers, Patricia Thompson, Denise Hawkins, and countless others; the shootings of Silvon Simmons and thirteen-year-old LaShedica Mason; the heavily publicized assaults of Christopher Pate, David Vann, Benny Warr; and the macing of the 9-year-old girl and the mother with her 3-year-old daughter present.

There are numerous policy proposals under consideration in state and local legislatures that would advance a new vision of public safety. Daniel's Law, named after the late Daniel Prude, would ensure New Yorkers who are experiencing acute mental health crises are met with care rather than violence.

This report analyzes the past twenty years of Rochester budgets, with a particular focus on public safety spending. Budget recommendations are provided with the aim of reducing racial and economic inequities, ending chronic police violence, supporting youth, and improving overall community wellbeing.

Defining Public Safety

For a point of clarity, our definition of public safety in this report is not limited to police and law enforcement but inclusive of basic human needs, such as food and housing, as well as health care, jobs, and education. These resources don't simply contribute to public safety; they are foundational to it. We recognize that physical, psychological, and emotional safety is a byproduct of interconnected systems and relationships, and may vary from person to person based on factors such as age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and financial status.

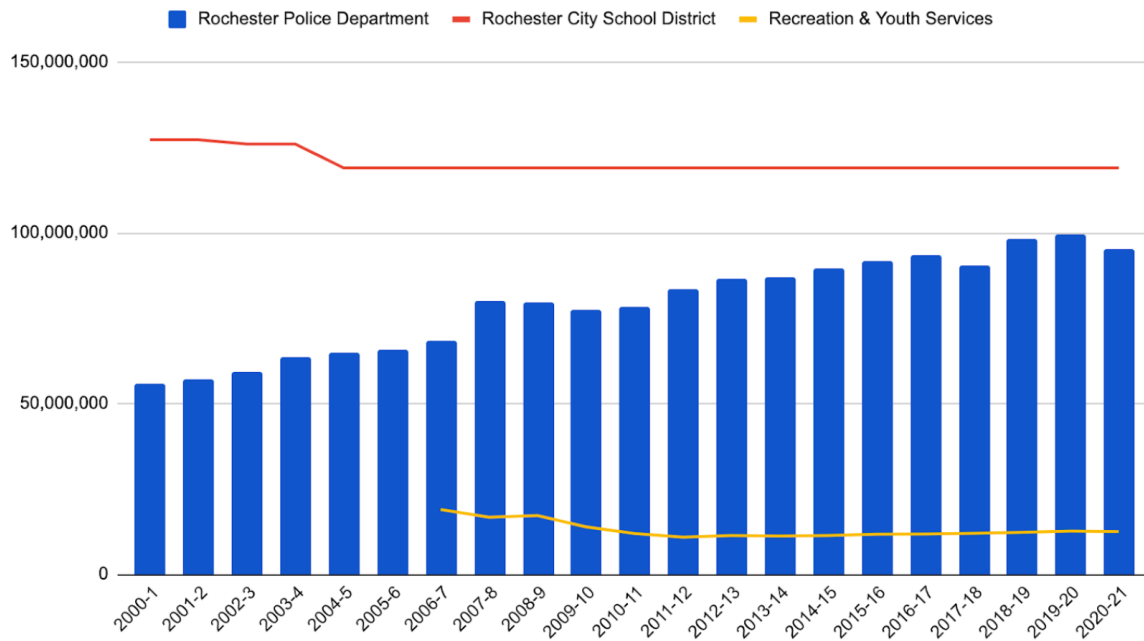
Budget Analysis

In our analysis of the past two decades of budgets, we found that the City of Rochester has steadily withdrawn resources from the Rochester City School District (RCSD) and Department of Youth & Recreation while increasing the size of the police budget by 77.6% between 2000 and 2020. This increase doesn't factor in pension or settlement-related costs, which would mark an even more significant growth.

In 2006, the City of Rochester spent three and a half times as much on policing as on the Department of Youth & Recreation. Today the city spends nearly eight times as much on policing as the Department of Youth & Recreation.

The \$127.3 million allocation to the Rochester City School District was reduced by 6.4% between 2000 and 2004, and the reduced figure has been kept in place for 16 consecutive budgets, despite rising annual RCSD costs related to staffing, transportation, and building maintenance. Annual increases to the RCSD allocation beginning in 2000 may have preempted many of the district's present financial struggles. If the allocation to the Rochester City School District had increased at the same rate as the RPD's budget, the district would have an additional \$99 million in funding.

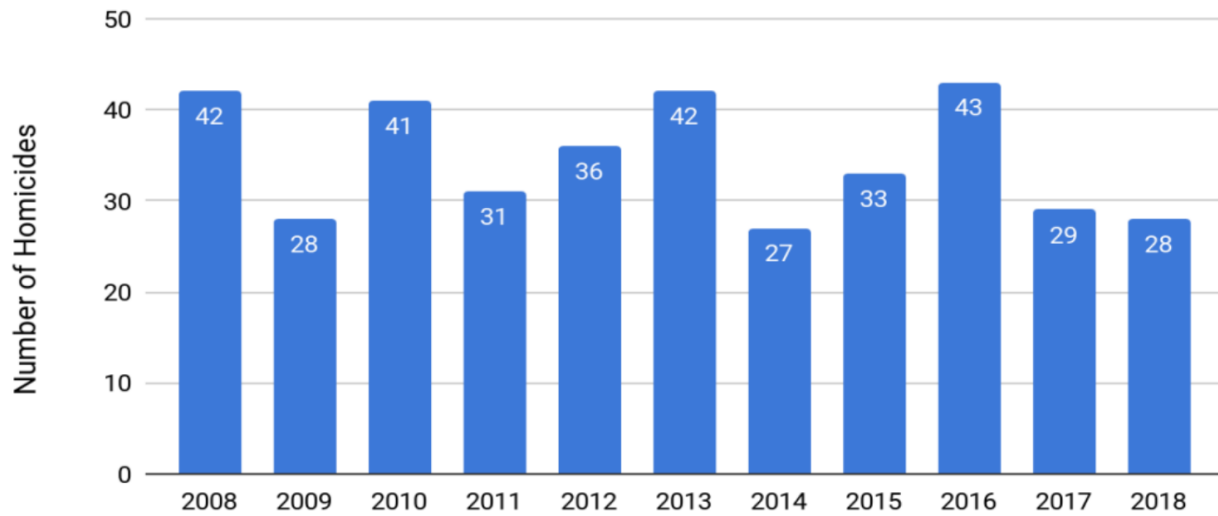
RPD Budget, RCSD Allocation, and Department of Youth & Recreation



With those increases to policing comes a shifting of money from the City of Rochester to suburban economies. Only 47 sworn RPD officers reside in the City of Rochester. 93.4% reside outside the city and pay taxes outside of the city. The growth of the Rochester Police Department has simultaneously funneled resources to suburban communities, and in some cases outside counties.

Rochester has twice as many sworn officers as similarly sized cities. Only Birmingham, AL has more officers among the U.S. cities with populations between 150,000 and 250,000 residents. Despite the growth of policing, rates of violent crime have not decreased at a commensurate rate. This is consistent with national studies that show little to no relationship between police budgets and crime rates.

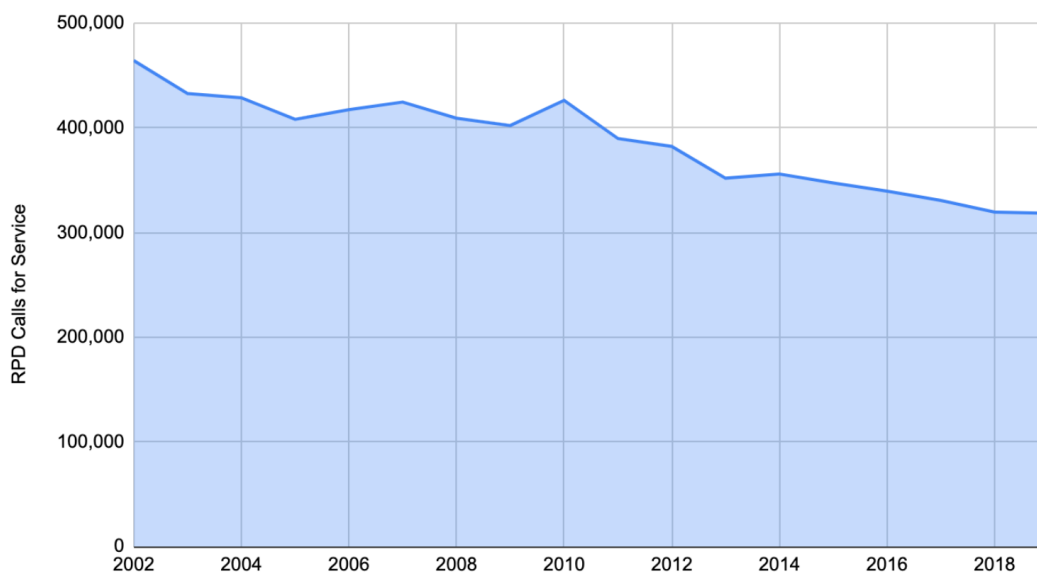
Rochester Number of Homicides 2008-2018



Rochester Institute of Technology, Center for Public Safety Initiatives

Increases to the police budget have happened in tandem with a 31.4% decrease in the volume of emergency calls between 2002 and 2019. Calls for service are 911 calls dispatched by the Office of Emergency Communications. The City of Rochester has also experienced a loss of population of well over 10,000 residents between 2000 and 2020. Between fewer service calls and a reduced population, the dramatic increase in police funding is even more inexplicable.

RPD Calls for Service



Federal Relief

Cities across the United States are experiencing unprecedented revenue shortfalls as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on local economies. The American Rescue Plan, which was passed in March, will distribute billions in federal aid to distressed counties and municipalities, including Monroe County and the City of Rochester.

When making decisions on how to allocate these funds, the City of Rochester should use an equity lens and direct funds toward families and communities most impacted by the pandemic and economic crisis. These funds can take the form of emergency rent and utility assistance, medical relief funds, food and nutritional assistance, mental health services, relief for undocumented and excluded workers, and other relief programs that put money directly into the hands of families and individuals.

Localities should refrain from using emergency funds to bolster law enforcement, jail facilities, or systems that perpetuate the mass criminalization of individuals struggling with poverty and instability.

Community-First Budget

A true community-first budget should redirect funds toward programs and services that support an inclusive vision of safety and stability, while improving community control and oversight of public resources. This can be achieved by augmenting existing programs, housing new services in high-usage infrastructure (like public schools, libraries, and neighborhood service centers), and piloting programs that have experienced success in other cities.

Rochester's unusually high rate of youth unemployment and childhood poverty, both of which are among the highest in the nation, make youth and families a clear focus area for investment.

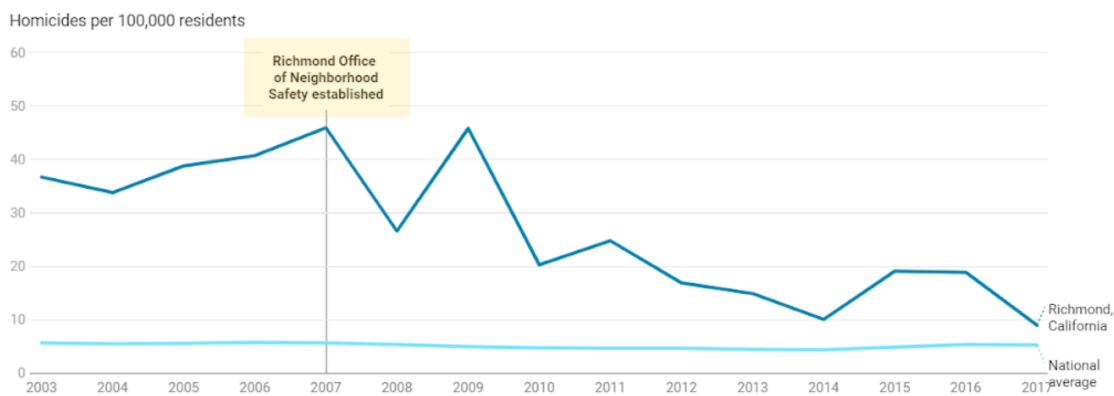
Additionally, the city should pursue the immediate passage of non-budgetary items, like "Good Cause Eviction" protections and the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA), which create public safety through the stabilization of neighborhoods, as well passing bans on chemical weapons, LRADs, and invasive surveillance tools that threaten the security and wellbeing of residents.

Recommendations

- The city should explore participatory budgeting processes that grant community members a greater voice in the decision-making process. Participatory budgeting can help to restore public trust in government functions while allowing neighborhoods to tailor the budget to their unique needs.
- The City of Rochester should reduce the Rochester Police Department budget to 2001-02 funding levels. This amounts to a 40% reduction and would bring the RPD in line with police departments in similarly sized cities as Rochester. **Recommended 2021 Budget: \$57 million**
 - Permanently halt the construction of the three proposed police substations (East Main, Lake Avenue, Bull's Head)
- Increased investment in the Department of Recreation & Human Services (previously the Department of Youth & Recreation). **Recommended 2021 Budget: \$30 million**
 - The City of Rochester should expand the size and scope of its crisis intervention team (Person-in-Crisis) to meet the volume of mental health, homelessness, family dispute, and substance use calls that are currently dispatched to RPD. Ensure that the appropriate professionals are responding to crises in a timely manner and that administrators have the support needed to carry out the program effectively.
 - An expansion of youth jobs programming to employ young people to perform public service, environmental, and civic engagement projects throughout the City of Rochester.

- Expanded hours and programming at community recreation centers (R-Centers).
 - Reentry programs to support individuals returning to society after involvement with the justice system.
 - An expansion of the Pathways to Peace program and research into adapting best practices from other successful programs like Advanced Peace and Ceasefire.
 - Quarterly public data reporting to measure the effectiveness of the aforementioned programs.
- Restoration of funding for the Rochester City School District to its 2000 level, planned annual increases, along with a strong maintenance of effort provision in the city charter. **Recommended 2021 Budget: \$127.3 million**
 - Properly funding the Police Accountability Board to provide needed community oversight of the Rochester Police Department and investigate misconduct complaints. **Recommended 2021 Budget: \$5 million**
 - Shift the scope of Neighborhood Service Centers to serve as Offices of Neighborhood Safety, providing peer support services, youth intervention programs, health education, housing and eviction defense services, and restorative forms of community mediation with trusted facilitators. **Recommended 2021 Budget: \$8 million**
 - Modify from its current focus on nuisance and quality of life complaints that can result in unintended interactions with the criminal legal system.
 - Expanding language access to better meet the needs of the city's immigrant and deaf populations.

Homicide rates dropped significantly in Richmond, California, 2003–2017



- Investment in neighborhood public libraries for expanded service hours, improved technology, and expanded youth and family programming.
Recommended 2021 Budget: \$16 million

Conclusion

By prioritizing youth and families, neighborhood-based services, mental health care, and violence prevention in the budget, Rochester can create safer and stronger neighborhoods and better recover from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both long-term investments and emergency assistance should center the communities that have suffered the greatest harm as a result of unaddressed racial, social, and economic inequities. Rochester has an opportunity to rectify the historical disinvestment in public goods and resources and put our communities on the path to true health and safety.