

FIGHTING  
THE POWER OF  
POLICE FRATERNAL  
ORGANIZATIONS ("UNIONS")

# FIGHT THE (FOP) POWER!

AN  
ORGANIZER'S  
PLAYBOOK

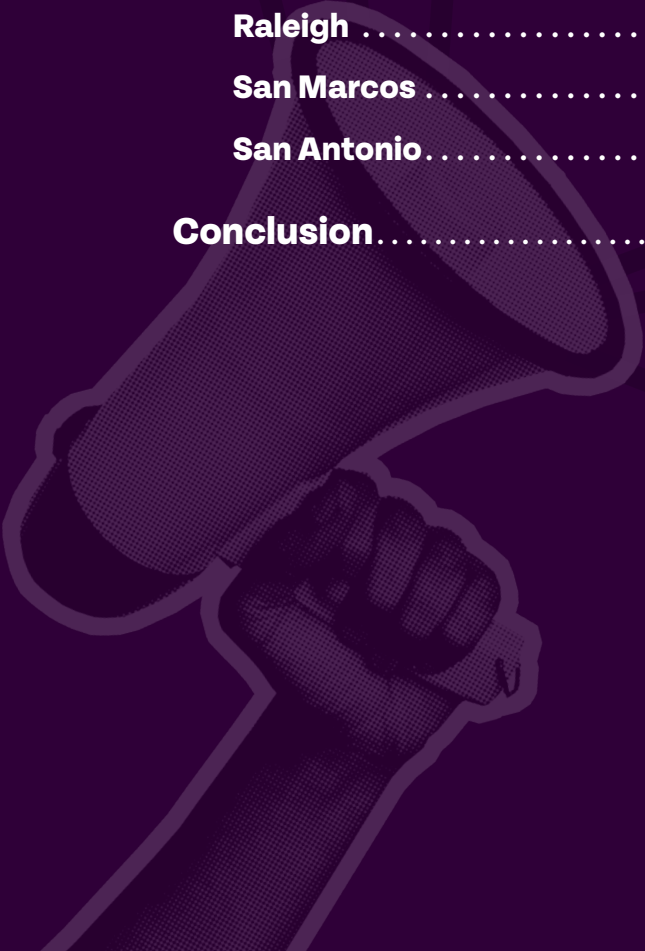
IC INTERRUPTING  
CRIMINALIZATION



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# INTRODUCTION

**POLICE FRATERNAL ASSOCIATIONS** (also referred to as police “unions”) represent a powerful political force that stands in the way of progress on virtually every front of social justice movements – they vociferously oppose and block efforts to meet, prevent, and respond to crises with care instead of criminalization, vehemently defend the violence of policing and punishment, viciously target anyone who challenges their power, and command deference from politicians and policymakers by claiming to be the exclusive arbiters of public safety.

They control our collective resources through secretly negotiated contracts that limit our ability to invest in public services or to meet community needs, instead diverting an ever-increasing share of precious collective resources into cops, courts, and cages. Rather than advancing the needs of working people, police “unions” actively advocate and justify repression of labor and social movements, claim benefits and protections that are denied to public sector workers, and advance Right-wing political agendas.

Organizers working to build safer communities by interrupting criminalization, calling for divestment from policing and punishment and investments in meeting material needs, creating ecosystems of community care, and building our capacity for transformative justice consistently run up against obstacles created by police fraternal associations.

**These barriers take the form of:**

- litigation challenging hard fought legislative, policy, or budget wins;
- police contracts that lock municipal budgets into a carceral economy and prevent communities from developing and expanding

community-based safety strategies that do not involve the violence of policing; and

- efforts to subvert the political process through campaign contributions and endorsements.

Additionally, while fraternal organizations are not unions, they sometimes claim to be “unions” out of political opportunism, creating challenges for efforts to build solidarity with organized labor in campaigns to divest from policing and invest in community safety strategies.

In 2020 Color Of Change released a Police Union Playbook documenting the ways that police unions wield their power.<sup>1</sup> Building on that work **we offer this playbook for community members, workers, activists, organizers and targets of police violence to use when fighting back against police fraternal organizations.** In it, we summarize information, strategies, and tactics to challenge and diminish the power of police fraternal organizations and remove the obstacles they place on our paths to safer, more just and liberatory communities.

[1] Color of Change, “Police Union’s Playbook,” Police Union’s Playbook, 2020, <https://policeunionplaybook.org/>.



# WHAT ARE POLICE FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS?

**Police Fraternal Organizations (PFOs), often incorrectly referred to as police unions,<sup>2</sup> are organized political groups of police officers who advocate on behalf of the police.** They include a number of national groups with chapters across the country, including the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA), the International Brotherhood of Police (IBP) and the National Association of Police Organizations Employees (NAPOE). While only 10% of the overall workforce are union members, over 55% of employees at 12,000 local police departments across the country are part of a PFO, and more than 70% of all cops in non-management roles are covered by some form of collective bargaining agreement.<sup>3</sup>

PFOs may be affiliated with national labor organizations, but often take stances that contradict labor policy and interests. For instance,

in the 2020 election IUPA endorsed the re-election of Republican President Donald Trump, even though it is a charter member of the AFL-CIO which endorsed Democratic President Joe Biden.

PFOs also diverge from labor interests on policy and legislative issues. For instance, recently the AFL-CIO and most of the labor movement supported the nomination of Gigi Sohn to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), a key regulatory appointment, yet her nomination was fiercely opposed by the FOP due to “her perceived animus toward law enforcement officers and the rule of law.”<sup>5</sup> The AFL-CIO and FOP also found themselves recently at odds on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act<sup>6</sup>— although its provisions were largely symbolic and would have poured millions more into law enforcement, the FOP resisted even this hollow effort to check police power.

“For the first half-century after police began organizing around 1900, police unions were illegal in most of the United States, especially after the suppressed Boston police strike of 1919. **City governments feared the negative political repercussions of permitting the independent organization of the agents of state violence.** In some cities, these de jure bans did not prevent police associations from lobbying over compensation and working conditions. But overall, these associations were relatively weak.

This picture changed in the 1950s and ‘60s, when police unions first won widespread recognition and collective bargaining rights, **organizing in response to political reformers who worked to rein in police corruption and the police abuse that fell heaviest on the backs of black communities.**”<sup>4</sup>

[ 2 ] For more information on how PFOs differ from unions, please see page 7.

[ 3 ] “Historical Overview of Police Unionization in the United States | Office of Justice Programs,” accessed September 22, 2023, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/historical-overview-police-unionization-united-states>.

[ 4 ] “Perspective | The Long Tie between Police Unions and Police Violence – and What to Do about It,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/09/limits-when-police-can-use-force-is-better-solution-than-banning-police-unions/>.

[ 5 ] “Letter Supporting Nomination of Gigi Sohn as FCC Commissioner | AFL-CIO,” April 27, 2022, <https://aflcio.org/about/advocacy/legislative-alerts/letter-supporting-nomination-gigi-sohn-fcc-commissioner>; Asa Rander and 911MEDIA, “Sohn Nomination Was Doomed From The Start,” *Fraternal Order of Police*, March 7, 2023, <https://fop.net/2023/03/sohn-nomination-was-doomed-from-the-start/>.

[ 6 ] “Pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act | AFL-CIO,” May 25, 2021, <https://aflcio.org/press/releases/pass-george-floyd-justice-policing-act>; Andrew Bittner and 911MEDIA, “National FOP President Statement on the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act,” *Fraternal Order of Police*, March 3, 2021, <https://fop.net/2021/03/national-fop-president-statement-on-the-george-floyd-justice-in-policing-act/>.

PFOs raise money, hold trainings on policing strategy, provide equipment, negotiate lucrative contracts, and aggressively lobby for increasing criminalization, increased police funding, and legislative protections from transparency and discipline. They benefit from public funds and fundraise for and defend cops who kill or have engaged in other acts of violence. For instance, the Missouri Police Union was the main fundraiser for Darren Wilson, the cop who murdered Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO.<sup>7</sup> Minneapolis' police fraternal organization was also a key fundraiser for the legal defense of Derek Chauvin, the cop who murdered George Floyd.<sup>8</sup>

And, PFOs go far beyond advocating on behalf of their members - they serve as the political arm of law enforcement, and are among the most powerful, well funded, and most organized forces in the US. They unapologetically spout racialized narratives of threats posed by "out of control" crime, position themselves as the only thing standing between order and violent chaos, and advocate for unchecked police power and resources to engage in violent repression.<sup>9</sup> Using a sophisticated combination of political action committee (PACs) and "dark money" organizations – which are not required to disclose the identities of their donors – and taxpayer subsidized lobbying activity to influence elections, PFOs are able to scale city and nationwide campaigns to pressure politicians to shield cops from scrutiny and accountability while giving them beneficial treatment at the expense of

**While sometimes framed as extremist minorities to be distinguished from the "reasonable" majority of law enforcement, PFOs simply are the most vocal and unapologetic representatives of police interests and perspectives.**

public sector workers and communities by stoking public fear and outright violence. Reflecting and shaping the views and interests of their members, PFOs endorse candidates for office who share their Right-wing, white supremacist, racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic beliefs and authoritarian views and promote police power. In other words, they endorse all the worst people in the most important places – if you google the politicians who are most opposed to progressive agendas in your community, you'll likely find that they are endorsed by the local PFOs.

- For instance, according to a study by POLICE magazine, nearly 85% of police voted for Donald Trump,<sup>10</sup> who frequently echoed their most extreme positions, openly advocating outright police violence.<sup>11</sup>
- In 2021, Norman, Oklahoma's FOP lodge #122 endorsed the same 5 candidates endorsed by "Unite Norman," a local extremist group with documented sympathies for white supremacist and Right wing extremist groups, including one who posted materials supporting QAnon conspiracy theories on his social media accounts and participated in the January 6, 2021 insurrection in Washington, D.C.

While sometimes framed as extremist minorities to be distinguished from the "reasonable" majority of law enforcement, PFOs simply are the most vocal and unapologetic representatives of police interests and perspectives.

[ 7 ] Arit John, "Non-Profit Run by a Missouri Police Union Is Now Handling Fundraising for Darren Wilson," *The Atlantic*, August 22, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/08/a-non-profit-run-by-a-missouri-police-union-is-now-fundraising-for-darren-wilson/379023/>.

[ 8 ] "Minnesota Police Association Funding Derek Chauvin's Defense | Wkyc.Com," accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.wkyc.com/article/news/verify/derek-chauvin-trial-defense-funded-by-minnesota-police-association/536-4e75fd51-f98d-453b-b241-48807092b6bd>.

[ 9 ] For examples, please see Johnny Damm's "I'm a Cop" comic book series illustrating statements by PFO leaders across the U.S. between 2020 and 2022, available at: <https://johnnydamm.com/im-a-cop/> and Johnny Damm, "When Cops Tell You Who They Are, Listen," *In These Times*, December 20, 2022, available at: <https://inthesetimes.com/article/straight-shooters-police-brutality-comic-cop>. Representative statements from PFO leaders include, "When the NYPD retreats, the violence will come...BEWARE, you've been warned!" "We can have four more years of President Trump or you can have no safety, no justice, no peace," "We are the only thing standing between Order and Anarchy," and "Cops need to be cops. We're in America goddamnit. We don't want to be forced to do anything. Period."

[ 10 ] "The 2016 POLICE Presidential Poll," *Police Magazine*, September 2, 2016, <https://www.policemag.com/patrol/article/15346665/the-2016-police-presidential-poll>.

[ 11 ] "Trump Tells Police Not to Worry about Injuring Suspects, Drawing Rebukes from Law Enforcement - The Washington Post," accessed August 25, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/07/28/trump-tells-police-not-to-worry-about-injuring-suspects-during-arrests/>.



# WHY DO WE SAY POLICE FRATERNAL ORGANIZATION (PFO) INSTEAD OF POLICE UNION?

- 1 That's what they call themselves!
- 2 To distinguish the violent enforcement work of the state!
- 3 They are treated remarkably different!
- 4 They play by a different set of rules!
- 5 That's how they organize themselves!
- 6 They are proudly anti-labor and are on the side of the bosses!
- 7 They negotiate for the right to kill and maim!
- 8 They block progress to build safe, healthier communities!

**Well, for one, that's what they call themselves – the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) is one of the largest police associations, and was one of the earliest forms of police organization in the Northeastern and Midwestern US.<sup>12</sup>**

Secondly, that is how they organize themselves - the majority of PFOs are organized and recognized by law - as fraternal organizations under IRS code 501(c)(8) or 501(c)(10) providing for the existence of fraternal societies (whose membership is based on a common tie), not under 501(c)(5), a category established explicitly for labor and agricultural organizations.<sup>13</sup> A fraternal society must operate in a lodge system, with a parent organization like the state or national FOP and subordinate chartered lodges/branches that are largely self-governing. Depending on their classification, they may provide membership benefits like life insurance, sick and accident benefits, scholarships, etc., and must use any money they receive for charitable/fraternal purposes. In other words, structurally

some PFOs are more like The Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks, or Moose Lodges, organized simply to provide benefits to their members, than they are labor unions – except that their political power and agenda is much more dangerous. And, while marginalized workers facing increasingly aggressive corporate union-busting tactics and legislative challenges to organizing into traditional labor unions may increasingly be seeking out alternate organizational forms to advance their interests, including fraternal societies, they are doing so under duress. PFOs have intentionally elected to organize outside the confines of labor organizations for political reasons.

Beyond structural and mission differences between PFOs and labor unions, we explicitly want to distinguish between unions, which represent workers and advance the broader interests of working people, and organizations which represent people who work for the violent enforcement arm of the state, including police, immigration authorities, Border Patrol, prison guards, probation

[ 12 ] The names and organizational forms used by PFOs vary somewhat by region, with PFOs in mountain, southwest and west coast states more often being organized as professional associations or professional guilds.

[ 13 ] Note – a few PFOs are organized under 501(c)(5), in an intentional effort to appear more aligned with traditional labor organizations in more traditionally pro-union towns like New York City and Seattle.

**“It is not within the province of the trade union movement to especially organize policemen, no more than to organize militiamen, as both policemen and militiamen are often controlled by forces inimical to the labor movement.”<sup>14</sup>**

– SAMUEL GOMPERS, FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR (AFL)

and parole officers. The differences between traditional unions and PFOs are significant, in spite of any structural or semantic similarities between PFOs and labor organizations. While they do the carceral work of surveilling, policing, criminalizing, and containing our communities, police are not workers in the political sense of the word.

## **POLICE ARE ON THE SIDE OF THE BOSS, NOT WORKING PEOPLE**

Police fraternal organizations derive their power from protecting the carceral racial capitalist state’s interests in keeping working people in line – and therefore by definition stand in opposition to the rights and power of working people. In other words, they are not aligned with other working people to build collective power and improve conditions in our workplaces and communities. Politically, workers’ interests are fundamentally opposed to those of the owning class, while police fraternal associations defend the interests of the ruling class, corporate power, and their own police power. **As a result, police often act in direct opposition to core labor movement interests to move in solidarity toward a more fair and just society.** In fact, throughout history one of the primary roles of police has been to surveil and control colonized

**and enslaved people, indentured workers, and migrants and to quash efforts to unite as workers to resist oppression through labor uprisings.** Examples of cops cracking heads on picket lines in an effort to violently break strikes and stop labor actions are too numerous to count, ranging from textile workers in 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts to janitorial workers in 1990s Los Angeles. As Kristian Williams recounts in *Our Enemies in Blue*, since at least the 1880s police have played a particular role in repressing striking workers. For instance, in response to the

1902 Great Anthracite Strike a Pennsylvania state commission concluded that “Peace and order ... should be maintained at any cost, but should be maintained by regularly appointed and responsible officers ... at the expense of the public.”<sup>15</sup> And, in 2011, as Wisconsin public sector workers fought legislation that would curtail collective bargaining rights, police showed their true colors by siding with Republican Governor Scott Walker and violently repressing labor protests.<sup>16</sup>



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A cop makes an arrest during a demonstration with thousands of healthcare workers in Hollywood. The event was organized by SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West and co-sponsored by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. (Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times)

## **POLICE ARE NEGOTIATING FOR THE RIGHT TO KILL, MAIM, AND VIOLATE PEOPLE’S RIGHTS WITH IMPUNITY**

**As Geo Maher elegantly and succinctly put it, “No other workers bargain for the right to murder other workers without consequence.”<sup>17</sup>** The work of

[ 14 ] Hugh O’Neill, “The Growth of Municipal Employee Unions,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 30, no. 2 (December 1970): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1173360>.

[ 15 ] Katherine Mayo, *Justice to All: The Story of The Pennsylvania State Police* (Legare Street Press, 2023).

[ 16 ] Dean Robbins, “Peaceful Relations Break down between Cops and Wisconsin Protesters as Assembly Votes on Budget Bill,” *Isthmus* | Madison, Wisconsin, March 10, 2011, <https://isthmus.com/isthmus/article.php%3Farticle%3D32704>; “Arrests of Wisconsin Capitol Protesters Criticized – Twin Cities,” accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.twincities.com/2013/08/27/arrests-of-wisconsin-capitol-protesters-criticized/>.

[ 17 ] Geo Maher, *A World Without Police: How Strong Communities Make Cops Obsolete* (London New York: Verso, 2021).



policing is the work of violence, of manufacturing and maintaining a violent order, at the expense of working people. PFOs are not just negotiating for better wages and working conditions, they are negotiating for more power to engage in and uphold structures of violence.

*“The purpose of unions is to protect workers from abuses of power. But the police represent and wield the power of the state, which includes the power to take human life. Other workers cannot kill people on the job and expect to have their labor union shield them from consequences. But cops can, and do.”<sup>18</sup>*

## **POLICE ARE TREATED DIFFERENTLY FROM PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS BY THE LAW, AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE AND IN THE BUDGET**

Not only are their historical origins and interests in direct opposition to those of working people, PFOs’ ongoing alignment with ruling and corporate class interests is apparent in the preferential treatment they receive in comparison to public sector unions and private sector workers.

While, as a general rule, labor law favors employers and unions operate at a political and legal disadvantage during negotiations which must be overcome by organizing and building power among workers, PFOs are protected through legislative “carve outs” that give them rights not afforded to other workers and preferential treatment from politicians during bargaining and budgeting. For example, in 2022 the state of Arizona passed a law that banned “release time” (paid time to engage in union-related activities) for all public employees except police and firefighters.<sup>19</sup> As a result PFOs do not face the same hurdles in organizing or collective bargaining as other unions.

Key terms of PFO contracts are often set by state laws, including Law Enforcement Bill of Rights (LEBOR) statutes that limit how officers can be investigated and disciplined.<sup>20</sup> Other unions could only dream of legislation that guarantees members full pay and benefits, confidentiality, employer-covered legal costs, and an investigation led by their peers in the event of a conflict with their employer or a member of the public. Yet these rights are guaranteed by law to police in almost half the states in the country.<sup>21</sup> In many, state labor and civil service laws give preferential treatment to police over public sector workers, and in some states police budgets are protected from cuts by law. As a result, cops walk into contract negotiations with more guaranteed rights and benefits than any other worker.

But nowhere is the preferential treatment given to police in contract negotiations more apparent than in the differential distribution of resources. While public sector employees are constantly struggling to resist funding cuts and maintain wages and benefits that are already often drastically lower than those of police, police wield greater power and face fewer obstacles when negotiating for major wage increases, job protections, new equipment, political power and more - often demanding and receiving a blank check from politicians and policymakers in a kind of “public safety” extortion racket in which cops return to each round of negotiations demanding more money in the name of a “public safety” they were never intended to deliver.

Fear mongering about crime using narratives and numbers of cops’ own creation<sup>22</sup> has made lowering police budgets and challenging police contract provisions quite toxic for politicians. For instance, when Boston Mayor Michelle Wu ran for office, her Blueprint for Police Reform Through Union Contracts<sup>23</sup> immediately became a sticking

[ 18 ] Concerned Residents of Norman, OK, “FOP Fact Sheet and FAQ,” February 2021, <https://communityresourcehub.org/resources/fop-fact-sheet-faq/>.

[ 19 ] “AMENDING TITLE 23, CHAPTER 8, ARIZONA REVISED STATUTES, BY ADDING ARTICLE 8; RELATING TO PUBLIC EMPLOYERS,,” Pub. L. No. SB1166 (2022).

[ 20 ] NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Community Oversight of Police Union Contracts: A Toolkit For Public Engagement In The Negotiation Of Police Collective Bargaining Agreements, August 2020, available at: [https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF\\_07242020\\_PoliceContractToolkit-12c.pdf](https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF_07242020_PoliceContractToolkit-12c.pdf).

[ 21 ] Mike Riggs, “Why Firing a Bad Cop Is Damn Near Impossible,” Reason.Com (blog), October 19, 2012, <https://reason.com/2012/10/19/how-special-rights-for-law-enforcement-m/>.

[ 22 ] Jared Knowles and Andrea J. Ritchie, *Cops Don’t Stop Violence: Combating Narratives Used to Defend Police Instead of Defund Them*, Interrupting Criminalization and Community Resource Hub, 2021, available at: <https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/resources-all/cops-dont-stop-violence>.

[ 23 ] “A Blueprint for Police Reform through the Union Contracts | Michelle Wu for Boston,” accessed August 30, 2023, <https://www.michelleforboston.com/plans/police-contract-reform/>.

**“If a politician seeks to increase the police budget, that is seen as business as usual, if you maintain the police budget at its current level, that is seen as politically risky, if you decrease the police budget, that is seen as political suicide.”**

– MAURICE B-P WEEKS, INTERRUPTING CRIMINALIZATION LABOR & ABOLITION FELLOW

point for Boston’s PFO, which launched an all out Right-wing campaign against the candidate, pumping out copaganda raising the specter of increased crime on Fox News and mounting early morning protests outside of her home.<sup>24</sup> Wu eventually won the race, but the threat posed

by even questioning police contracts was clear. Meanwhile, defunding public sector workers employed at schools, libraries, community health clinics, parks and youth programs is framed as a necessity in both good times and lean ones.

### **3 WAYS PFOS ARE DISTINCT FROM PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS:**

- 1. PFOs are on the side of the boss, not workers.**
- 2. PFOs and other associations of carceral workers like prison guards and border patrol are the only ones negotiating for the right to kill, maim, coerce, surveil, violate, and criminalize with impunity.**
- 3. PFOs benefit from exceptions to rules governing other workers in terms of scope and terms of contract negotiations, particularly with respect to provisions governing transparency and discipline.** In some states they have legislative protections baked into their contracts that other public sector workers don’t – including provisions prohibiting cuts to their budgets in Florida, Georgia and Texas.

[ 24 ] Lisa Kashinsky, “Wu’s Naysayers Try New Tactics,” POLITICO, August 25, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/massachusetts-playbook/2023/07/19/wus-naysayers-try-new-tactics-00106990>.



# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO FOCUS ON POLICE FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS AS WE WORK TO DIVEST FROM POLICING AND CREATE SAFER COMMUNITIES?

Ultimately, **PFOs block progress on almost every front of struggles to build safer, more just communities free of the violence of policing and punishment.** PFOs are powerful propaganda machines, shaping public debate around “crime” and public safety and advancing criminalization, policing and punishment as default societal responses to every issue. They are active and influential lobbyists at the local, state and federal levels, advancing policy agendas that drive increasing criminalization, policing, punishment, incarceration, and deportation, and aggressively resisting approaches that are not rooted in policing and punishment (which they dub “soft on crime”). PFOs are able to leverage their power to consistently increase funding for law enforcement agencies at the federal, state and local levels (now at over \$130 billion annually), and aggressively resist efforts to limit police power or cut police budgets.

While PFOs maintain a national presence and exercise considerable power in shaping national public discourse and federal law enforcement spending and policy, local PFOs, operating somewhat independently, devote a substantial amount of time and energy targeting state and local legislatures to prevent cuts and guarantee increases to police budgets, and to influence

legislation governing police policies, practices, and oversight. **An analysis by the Guardian showed that the LAPD PFO alone spent \$64 million in just two decades of lobbying state and local governments.**<sup>25</sup>

PFO leaders often operate as a kind of shadow cabinet in a state or municipality:

- For instance, in New York City, the Police Benevolent Association (PBA) leader is often seen as a political player with power at least comparable to the mayor or City Council – a power they have frequently flexed. Former PBA president Pat Lynch often led members to direct confrontations with elected officials to block reform and secure wage increases, most notably when former Mayor Bill de Blasio came to power on a platform challenging the NYPD’s racially discriminatory “stop and frisk” practices. New PBA president Patrick Hendry recently launched an aggressive campaign to weed out “anti-cop politicians” in the city and repeal the state’s bail reform legislation.
- Tulsa FOP lodge 93 chairman Jerad Lindsay engaged in vocal public opposition to State Question 805, which would have worked to

**PFO leaders often operate as a kind of shadow cabinet in a state or municipality.**

[ 25 ] Tom Perkins, “Revealed: Police Unions Spend Millions to Influence Policy in Biggest US Cities,” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2020, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/23/police-unions-spending-policy-reform-chicago-new-york-la>.

reduce Oklahoma's incarceration rates, which are among the highest in the world.

→ State Rep. Scot Matayosh of Hawaii was the original sponsor of a cash bail reform bill which passed with broad public support. As the bill made its way to the Governor's desk, Hawaii police and PFOs enacted massive pressure on the lawmaker while also ginning up public fear, ultimately leading Rep. Matayosh ask the Governor to veto the very bill he introduced.<sup>26</sup>

At the federal level, PFOs maintain a direct line to the President of the United States, who typically makes no move on public safety without PFO endorsement or involvement. For instance, President Obama's administration appointed a PFO member to sit on the highly touted Task Force on 21st Century Policing convened in the wake of the 2014 police killing of Mike Brown.<sup>27</sup> President Trump was not only endorsed by national and local PFOs, but Trump's Public Safety Task Force consisted almost entirely of law enforcement associations and organizations that championed rather than challenged police power.<sup>28</sup> President Biden has maintained a relationship with PFOs over the past four decades, beginning with his authorship and championing of the 1994 Crime Bill that continues to this day, as he pledges to pour billions of dollars into cop coffers and thousands more cops into the streets.<sup>29</sup>

PFOs are equally aggressive in protecting police power at the state level. For instance, in 2017, the Illinois Fraternal Order of Police successfully blocked legislation that would have expanded the jurisdiction of a civilian oversight agency to

investigate complaints of police sexual violence and prevented cops who engaged in sexual assault from continuing to serve in law enforcement.<sup>30</sup> In fact,

*The FOP was the loudest voice in opposition to the bill, according to an In These Times review of both Illinois General Assembly records and state lobbyist disclosures. These records show the FOP's Chicago and Illinois lodges employ powerful lobbyists with strong political ties who descended on Springfield to push back against the law.*

*Looking at five House committee hearings held from February 8 to March 21, in the early stages of the bill, police unions were virtually alone in filing witness slips in opposition. Of 117 individuals who filed witness slips at the first hearing, the overwhelming majority that supported it included the Illinois State's Attorney's Association, the Illinois chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and Cook County Sheriff's Office.*

*Only five slips at that first hearing were filed in opposition. Of those five, all but one were lobbyists working on behalf of an FOP lodge.<sup>31</sup>*

Despite overwhelming support for the bill, which was framed by proponents as essential to promoting public safety, the FOP was successful in eliminating independent oversight of police sexual assault investigations for the state police department and Chicago police department, the two largest police departments in the state. They also opposed legislation that would have stopped police disciplinary records from being destroyed.<sup>32</sup>

A year later, New York City PFOs similarly resisted efforts to provide survivors of sexual violence by cops with an option to file complaints with the

[ 26 ] HNN Staff, "Lawmaker Who Introduced Bail Reform Bill Now Asking Ige to Veto It," <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com>, May 21, 2022, <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2022/05/21/lawmaker-who-introduced-bail-reform-bill-is-now-asking-governor-veto-it/>.

[ 27 ] "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing," 2016.

[ 28 ] "Office of Public Affairs | Attorney General Announces Crime Reduction and Public Safety Task Force | United States Department of Justice," February 27, 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-announces-crime-reduction-and-public-safety-task-force>.

[ 29 ] Asma Khalid, "An Old Friend Of Law Enforcement, Biden Walks A Thin Line On Police Reform," NPR, July 8, 2021, sec. Politics, <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/06/1013266729/biden-tries-to-balance-calls-to-reform-the-police-amid-more-mass-shootings>; "Office of Public Affairs | Attorney General Announces Crime Reduction and Public Safety Task Force | United States Department of Justice." For more on 2023 federal police funding budget proposals, check out Interrupting Criminalization's monthly roundup, "This Month in Criminalization" at: <https://mailchi.mp/interruptingcriminalization/icroundup4>.

[ 30 ] Adeshina Emmanuel, "Police Union Fought Reforms To Address Sexual Assault by Officers," *In These Times*, September 14, 2017, available at: <https://inthesetimes.com/article/fop-police-reform-copa-chicago-sexual-assault>

[ 31 ] Adeshina Emmanuel, "Police Union Fought Reforms To Address Sexual Assault by Officers," *In These Times*, September 14, 2017, available at: <https://inthesetimes.com/article/fop-police-reform-copa-chicago-sexual-assault>

[ 32 ] Adeshina Emmanuel, "Police Union Fought Reforms To Address Sexual Assault by Officers," *In These Times*, September 14, 2017, available at: <https://inthesetimes.com/article/fop-police-reform-copa-chicago-sexual-assault>

civilian oversight agency rather than simply being routed straight back to the police department's Internal Affairs Unit. They ultimately filed a lawsuit challenging the Civilian Complaint Review Board's exercise of its independent investigatory jurisdiction over complaints of sexual harassment and violence by police. While the legal challenge was ultimately defeated, PFOs successfully stalled the process for several years.<sup>33</sup> The Civilian Complaint Review Board continues to struggle to receive sufficient funding to offer support to survivors who come forward, while the NYPD's budget now tops over \$14 billion.

In 2020, NYPD PFOs notoriously resisted city legislation to ban chokeholds, despite the fact that they have been banned by department policy for decades - a policy that they consistently violate, including in the incident in which NYPD Officer Daniel Pantaleo choked Eric Garner to death. They successfully sued to strike down the law.<sup>34</sup>

They also use their war chests to lobby for legislation and launch litigation limiting police budget cuts. For instance, in Norman, Oklahoma, the local PFO was successful in reversing an \$865,000 cut to the police budget achieved in 2020 through a local campaign to divest from policing and invest in community safety.<sup>35</sup>

And, they need not resort to litigation or state legislation to limit cuts to police budgets. **In local municipalities, PFOs exercise unique control over city and county budgets through the contracts they negotiate.** Even when much of public sector funding is under attack – as it was in 2020 and has been for the past four decades of neoliberal economic policies gutting public benefits and institutions in favor of privatization and corporate profits, police budgets remain untouched or continue to increase. Police are able to lock their

budgets in place through contract negotiations in part due to the fact that the vast majority of police budgets are connected to personnel and contract provisions setting wages, benefits, pensions, overtime, and other working conditions.

In Wisconsin, a state facing massive attacks on labor for the past few decades, cities cut funding for education, after-school programs, mental health, libraries, and more in order to feed the ever increasing demand for police funding in the name of public safety. Now, the bloated police pensions PFOs have successfully negotiated threaten to drive cities like Milwaukee into bankruptcy. Police benefit from public pensions 15% more than they contribute toward them, creating underfunded pension liabilities that have compounded over years. Rather than making up the difference through a 26% reduction in police spending, the city continues to defund libraries, schools, and health care.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, New York City reduced its public school budget by nearly \$1 billion dollars while police funding increased to over \$11 billion.<sup>37</sup> In New Jersey, while public sector workers struggle to maintain positions and salaries, cops receive six figure retirement payouts, lucrative overtime and side gigs, and even perfect attendance bonuses.<sup>38</sup>

While local public sector unions generally fight for more funding for education, public libraries, health care, and other public goods, PFOs actively work to block those expenditures by fighting for ever increasing police budgets and benefits. Police fraternal association propaganda falsely claims that increased violence and crime is the inevitable consequence of reducing funding for police, making challenging police power and resources a political third rail. As a result, police budgets withstand most fluctuations in city budgets and face a generally upward trend of funding, pay and benefit increases.

[ 33 ] ACLU, *Lynch v. CCRB*, <https://www.aclu.org/cases/lynch-v-ccrb> (last updated August 17, 2018); see also Mark Toor, "PBA Sues CCRB For Appropriating Powers Beyond Its Mandate," *The Chief*, April 2, 2018, available at <https://www.nycpba.org/news-items/chief/2018/pba-sues-ccrb-for-appropriating-powers-beyond-its-mandate/>

[ 34 ] Ali Watkins and Ashley Southall, "N.Y.C.'s Police Chokehold Ban Is Struck Down by Court," *New York Times*, October 5, 2021.

[ 35 ] "Judge: Norman City Council illegally cut police budget," *Associated Press*, December 4, 2020.

[ 36 ] Anderson Tucker-Harris and Devin Anderson, "Milwaukee Police Pension Impacts FY2023 and Beyond," n.d., <https://aartmke.org/news-resources/new-report-highlights-milwaukees-police-pension-problem>.

[ 37 ] Ujju Aggarwal, "Mayor Eric Adams Is Siphoning Funds From Public Schools to Fortify NYPD," *Truthout*, June 21, 2022, <https://truthout.org/articles/mayor-eric-adams-is-siphoning-funds-from-public-schools-to-fortify-nypd/>; "NYCLU Statement on the FY23 NYC Budget | New York Civil Liberties Union | ACLU of New York," June 13, 2022, <https://www.nyclu.org/en/press-releases/nyclu-statement-fy23-nyc-budget>.

[ 38 ] Gilded Badges, "How the Police Bank Millions Through Their Union Contracts," *ProPublica*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.propublica.org/article/new-jersey-police-contracts>.

Finally, PFOs can be dangerous forces targeting politicians, policymakers, organizers and activists working to limit police power, engaging, encouraging, and defending intimidation through threats, doxxing, and harassment. For instance, the San Diego Police Officers' Association targets politicians who propose reforms to policing practices to address racial disparities, not only in San Diego itself, but in neighboring jurisdictions, as a cautionary tale.<sup>39</sup>

The Funders for Justice Workbook on How to Organize Philanthropy to Erode the Power of Police

Unions states succinctly why Police Fraternal organizations are a key target:

*“The sole purpose of police unions is to protect and expand the carceral system of police, prisons, and punishment through ever-growing political power that has commandeered the policy and budget making process across the nation. Police unions are the political force behind the institution of policing, which upholds the system of white supremacy.”<sup>40</sup>*

**In many cities, including New York, the unions are a political force, their endorsements and campaign donations coveted by both Republicans and Democrats.** The legislation they support tends to get passed, their candidates elected. They insist on public displays of respect and may humiliate mayors who displease them. They defy reformers, including police chiefs, who struggle to fire even the worst-performing officers. In an era when other labor unions are steadily declining in membership and influence, police unions have kept their numbers up, their coffers full. **In Wisconsin, the Republican governor, Scott Walker, led a successful campaign to eliminate union rights for most of the state's public employees. The exceptions were firefighters and police.**

**Police unions enjoy a political paradox. Conservatives traditionally abhor labor unions but support the police. The left is critical of aggressive policing, yet has often muted its criticism of police unions—which are, after all, public-sector unions, an endangered and mostly progressive species.<sup>41</sup>**

[ 39 ] “Michael Smolens: San Diego City Police Union Expands Its Political Reach – The San Diego Union-Tribune.”

[ 40 ] Manuela Arcineigas and Ken Chapman, “Eroding the Power of Police Unions 2023” (Funders for Justice, 2023), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1owAoj-GQWB9jBhm7Jnx1ork6f\\_3sgNoW/view?usp=drive\\_web&usp=embed\\_facebook](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1owAoj-GQWB9jBhm7Jnx1ork6f_3sgNoW/view?usp=drive_web&usp=embed_facebook).

[ 41 ] “How Police Unions Fight Reform | The New Yorker,” accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/08/03/how-police-unions-fight-reform>.



# WHY NOW?

**There are a multitude of fights that are urgent at this moment as we continue to build towards safer, more just, and thriving communities free from violence of all kinds.** This presents the fair question as to why now is the right time to challenge the power of police fraternal organizations.

**The shortest answer is that without challenging the power of PFOs, very little else is possible.** PFOs have captured control of local and state government, insulated themselves in legislative and judicial protections, structured sustainable funding sources, and built a supporting state and national infrastructure that allows them to be unrelenting in the pursuit of their objectives. **They stand in the way of progress on every front in our struggles for safer, more just, abundant, and liberatory communities – by driving more and more of our collective resources into policing**

**and punishment instead of meeting individual and collective needs, by shaping public conversations around public safety through falsehoods and fear-mongering, by advancing undemocratic voter suppression strategies to push through their agendas.**

**The shortest answer is that without challenging the power of PFOs, very little else is possible.**

PFOs are a powerful platform for copaganda and a powerful political force dedicated to maintaining and increasing police power and resisting any efforts to rein it in, launching vitriolic attacks against opponents, defending the violence of policing, and manufacturing a society where the response to every conflict, harm and need is more police and more police power. They are a pivotal part of the web of relationships, resources and power that make up and fuel the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC).

**Organizing to weaken and ultimately dismantle PFOs won't solve all the problems we face. But it will eliminate significant hurdles to progress on multiple fronts. By challenging PFOs, we challenge the very structures that perpetuate and shield police violence, maintain structural inequalities, and prevent our collective liberation.**



# POLICE FRATERNAL ORGANIZATION FAQ

## What follows are answers and responses you can use to commonly asked questions:

### ARE PFOs PART OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT?

**Police Fraternal Organizations often act in direct opposition to the interests of organized labor movements.** In addition to directly suppressing strikes and labor actions, PFOs support policies, legislation, and candidates who directly oppose labor positions at all levels of government. PFOs enjoy preferential treatment and benefits at the bargaining table that are denied to other public sector unions, and provisions protecting them from budget cuts, discipline, and oversight are often legislated into their contracts by Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights and other state laws. Despite rarely aligning with or supporting policies and positions of organized labor, they maintain outsized political influence in mainstream labor organizations like the AFL-CIO, limiting mainstream labor's willingness to directly confront police power and violence. [\*For more information see *Why is it Important to Focus on Police Fraternal Organizations; Alienate Them from Labor*]

### DOES ATTACKING PFOs OPEN UP AN ALL OUT ATTACK ON PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS?

**No.** It is easy to distinguish between police, who are organizing for the right to engage in violence with impunity and unlimited resources, and who

already enjoy preferential treatment over public sector workers at the bargaining table and in the budget, and public sector unions like teachers, health care providers, parks personnel, library staff, and sanitation workers who provide life giving services and who are fighting for their members' rights to a living wage, safer working conditions, and freedom from violence of all kinds - including police violence. For decades, police unions have been successful in ensuring that they are "carved out" or exempted from anti-labor policies, and there is ample justification for ensuring that they are "carved out" from pro-public sector union policies. [\*For more information see *Why do we say Police Fraternal Organizations; Alienate from Labor; Focus Labor on a Just Transition*]

***"It's a big difference between police and city workers. In terms of police, when they leave their job, their 9:00 to 5:00, they still identify as police. When we leave our job, we don't identify as sanitation workers. I don't identify as a plumber working for the city or somebody working in solid waste. I just identify as another brother out here. When we're talking about police accountability, city workers do not feel like that means 'they going to come down on me.' They know it's different."***

**– ANGAZA LAUGHINGHOUSE, FORMER PRESIDENT UE LOCAL 150 AND MEMBER OF REFUND RALEIGH**



## AREN'T POLICE JUST WORKERS LIKE ANY OTHER PERSON WHO HAS A JOB?

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**No.** Being required to complete work tasks does not make you a worker in the political sense of the word - particularly when your work is to enforce structural inequality with violence, to enforce exploitation of workers and protect the ruling class. The labor movement understands workers as a class of people whose interests are aligned in resistance to oppression and exploitation, who are fighting for a better world for all of us, not just themselves.

## AREN'T POLICE CONTRACTS DECIDED JUST LIKE ANY OTHER MUNICIPAL CONTRACT?

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**Police contracts are negotiated behind closed doors in backroom deals between politicians and PFOs who endorse them.** Not only are PFOs afforded rights by law denied to other public sector unions, management gives up tremendous power they never cede to other government employees and private contractors in a kind of extortion racket in which police demand an ever increasing share of our collective resources in exchange for an elusive “public safety” they never – and were not designed to – deliver. Police wield greater political power than working class public sector unions because they are on the same side as the people negotiating their contracts. By claiming to be essential to maintaining the political and economic status quo, police seek to stifle any public discourse around negotiations or opposition to their contract demands. And by making it politically risky to challenge the police contract in the same way elected officials challenge public sector contracts, police place the economic and other terms of their contracts beyond question, meaning there is always less money for other municipal workers. [\*For more information see *Target Police Contracts; Alienate from Labor*]

## WILL ENDING POLICE FRATERNAL ORGS DO ANYTHING?

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**Yes.** PFOs are still relatively new - they have only been around for 60 years - but their power and influence has grown tremendously in that time period, making them one of the principal political forces blocking efforts to build safer, sustainable and liberatory communities, primary purveyors of authoritarian, white supremacist ideology, and significant supporters of Right wing, authoritarian political candidates. To put it simply, we can't get the things we want with them in the way.

## IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO END PFOs?

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We can build toward a society where no one has the right to organize to kill, cage, violate, and criminalize people with impunity. **PFOs exist only because the public allows them to exist.** Our job is to build the power that can effectively dismantle them, their power, and their influence on our imaginations of what is possible. Anyone who has imagined a world without police has already envisioned a world without police unions. [\*For more information see *Why now?*]

# STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGING AND SHRINKING THE POWER, RESOURCES, AND LEGITIMACY OF PFOs

There are a number of plays you can choose from to strike at the power, resources, relationships and legitimacy of PFOs:

- **Target contract negotiations**
- **Limit their power through litigation or legislation (repeal LEOBRs)**
- **Alienate PFOs from labor organizations and movements**
- **Starve them of funding**
- **Make PFO endorsements toxic to politicians**
- **Challenge PFO copaganda**
- **Expose their political vision and affiliations**
- **Build labor investment in a just transition to a non-carceral economy**

Each of these can be played offensively, or defensively in response to a PFO play outlined by Color of Change in the [Police Union Playbook](#).

In each section we outline the core strategy, point to organizations that have used it and how, and list some pros and cons and factors to consider when deciding how to use it.



**TARGETING POLICE CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS** is one of the most common ways organizers have sought to reduce the power of PFOs.

### SOME OF THE MOST COMMONLY USED PLAYS ARE:

- **Increase transparency** of police contract negotiations
- **Increase public participation and power** over police contract negotiations
- Organize decision-makers and legislators to take action to **block, eliminate, or change specific contract provisions**
- Organize decision-makers and legislators to take action to **change the way police contract disputes are resolved**
- Organize decision-makers and legislators to take action to **take things off the bargaining table**

### BEFORE CONSIDERING WHETHER ONE OF THESE PLAYS IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CONDITIONS:

- **Find out when your police contract expires** by looking in this [database](#) or by checking Appendix A [here](#) (please note that because both of these resources were created in 2020, the information may be out of date or the contract may already have been renegotiated for a new term). **Generally speaking it will be helpful to have a year or more to research your police contract negotiation process and build power to impact it.**
- **Read through the contract. What does it say? What does it mean?**
  - ✓ Highlight provisions affecting investigation and discipline for instances of police violence, wages, benefits, and control over police budgets, and how the police department functions. Are there easily identifiable contract provisions that will make a material difference in how policing and public safety plays out in your city?
  - ✓ Compare the existing contract to previous contracts - how has it changed?
  - ✓ Search local and state civil service laws for “police” and “law enforcement” to find out which provisions are set by law and how.
- **What is the negotiation process?**
  - ✓ Who negotiates police contracts on behalf of the city? It may be the city manager, or a designee from the Mayor’s office, or

someone else. For instance, in Phoenix, AZ, the city's negotiating team always has at least 3 high ranking police officials, along with members of the city's Human Relations department.

- ✓ Who negotiates police contracts on behalf of the PFO? Most rely on professional regional or state firms to handle negotiations, and these firms may negotiate multiple contracts in the area. This means that you may be able to get more information about what is coming to the next round of negotiations by looking to what has been negotiated in neighboring areas.
- ✓ How and when is the contract negotiated?
- ✓ What are common tactics used in negotiations?
- ✓ What can/can't be bargained for and why? (because of civil service laws, executive policy, past practice, or pure police power?)
- ✓ What happens if an agreement can't be reached? If there is an "evergreen" clause - a provision that stipulates that the existing contract will remain in place until a new one is negotiated, then the current contract will continue? If not, the municipality may issue a "last best offer" that the PFO must work under until an agreement is reached.

→ **Who are the players? Find out:**

- ✓ Who has ultimate power of approval over police contracts - this may not be the same person or body who negotiates them (it may be the City Council, City Manager, Mayor's office, or someone else) - and how many votes are needed to approve it - and
- ✓ Who has the power to veto them (like the City Council, state labor relations board or public service commission)

→ **Power map your ability to impact**

- ✓ The person/body who negotiates the police contract
- ✓ The person/body who has final approval over the police contract
- ✓ The person/body who has the power to veto the police contract

→ **Find out what local and state legislation has to say about public access to information and oversight of police contracts**

→ **Find out what local and state legislation has to say about the contents and proper subjects of negotiation for police contracts**

- ✓ Look at the NAACP LDF's Police Contract Toolkit to see if your state has a Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights
- ✓ Check your state's public service laws to see if there are special provisions governing police and/or first responders
- ✓ Transparency:
  - ✓ What do local and state laws say about the police contract negotiation process?
  - ✓ What do the PFO and municipality have to disclose to the public and when?
  - ✓ What role could community members play in the negotiation process?

→ **Find out what PFOs are saying about the negotiation process – sign up for their newsletters, read their press releases, and follow them on social media. Generally speaking unions engaged in contract negotiations offer periodic updates on the status of demands and responses to their members, and will often negotiate through the press and in the court of public opinion.**

→ **How have PFOs in your area navigated police contract negotiations in the past? Have they:**

- ✓ Taken advantage of provisions extending contracts indefinitely until a new contract is negotiated to wait for advantageous conditions to negotiate a new contract?
- ✓ Fought to keep negotiations secret until the contract is finalized?
- ✓ Ramped up copaganda and narratives of high crime rates right before contract negotiations?
- ✓ Threatened “blue flu” or inability to fill vacant positions as a way of influencing contract negotiations?

## **THEN, AFTER POWER MAPPING THE PLAYERS IN POLICE CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS, YOU CAN DECIDE WHICH OF THESE STRATEGIES ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE IN A CAMPAIGN TO LIMIT PFO POWER:**

- **Demand that information about police contract negotiations**, including all offers and counteroffers made by any party, be made public. **When doing so, remember that transparency is a means to an end.** It’s not enough to shine a light on the fact that PFOs are bargaining for the power to harm with impunity and railroading us out of public money, we have to do something about it! We don’t want transparency for transparency’s sake - we want to use the information we gain through increased transparency to highlight the scope of police power and the privileges they enjoy compared to public sector unions, in order to attack their power and legitimacy.
  - ✓ For instance, Poder in Action filed a lawsuit against the Phoenix PFO for failing to disclose their contract proposal as required by local law. For more information on Poder’s litigation, see case studies.
  - ✓ As part of their campaign to defund the Seattle Police Department, Seattle

organizers pushed their City Council to make the PFO contract negotiation process more public. As a result, there are now several observers who sit at the bargaining table: one from City Council, one from the Community Police Commission, one from the Office of Inspector General, and one from the Office of Police Accountability. However, observers don’t have any decision-making power, and aren’t able to discuss the negotiations publicly. Seattle organizers have renewed demands for public police contract negotiations in the wake of the release of footage of Daniel Auderer, Vice President of the Seattle Police Officer Guild, laughing and joking that the life of 23-year-old Jaahnavi Kandula, who was killed by Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave, was of “limited value.”

- **Fight for a seat at the table with clear roles and decision-making power.**
  - ✓ For example, Louisville’s 490 Project mounted a social media and organizing campaign demanding that the City Manager appoint community members to the bargaining team. For more information on the 490 Project, see case studies.
- **Pressure negotiators and final decision-makers to negotiate or take a firm position around specific contract provisions.** *For more information about which provisions to target, please see below!*
- **Pressure local and state legislators to repeal your state’s Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights and change public service provisions that favor PFOs over other public sector unions.** *For more information on this play, please see: Limit PFO power through legislative campaigns and ballot initiatives.*
- **Consider a ballot initiative to change local or state law to repeal your state’s Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights or change**

public service provisions that favor PFOs over other public sector unions. For more information on this play, please see: *Limit PFO power through legislative campaigns and ballot initiatives.*

## WHAT CONTRACT PROVISIONS SHOULD WE TARGET?

You will need to make strategic decisions regarding which contract provisions to target:

- Provisions affecting department policy and processes;
- Provisions affecting transparency of negotiations, subjects and process;
- Provisions affecting police power, positions, and budgets.

## DEPARTMENT POLICIES AND PROCESSES

As outlined in *Color of Change's Police Union Playbook*, PFOs fight for provisions that:

- Take disciplinary matters out of police chiefs' and civilian oversight bodies' hands;
- Prevent cops from being interrogated immediately after being involved in an incident;
- Give cops access to investigative materials when they are the subject of a complaint;
- Require officers who kill or seriously injure people to continue to be paid while under investigation or on suspension;
- Allow police to erase or remove disciplinary records from their own files.<sup>42</sup>

Generally speaking, the focus of advocacy and organizing around police contracts has

been on provisions that govern after the fact investigation of incidents of police violence, transparency of employment and disciplinary records, and procedural aspects of disciplinary proceedings, including arbitration and final disciplinary authority.<sup>43</sup> There are pros and cons to this approach, with the biggest con being that these provisions only come into play after harm has occurred or a complaint has been made, and exceptionalize the issue of police violence to individual cops rather than systematically limiting police power to do harm.

While increasing the visibility of police violence and limiting individual cops' power to escape consequences and continue to enact violence on our communities are important goals, limiting our focus to these provisions leaves the lions' share of police power on the table.

## NEGOTIATION PROCESSES

In order to have a greater and more systemic impact on police discipline and consequences for violence and harm, **you can pressure negotiators and legislators to:**

- Fight for clauses that shift the balance of power in the negotiation process. For instance, you can organize to:
  - ✓ Force the government to hire outside negotiators who are not connected to or beholden to law enforcement, with a clear mandate to limit police power over public safety and public coffers. This play pushes the government to level up their negotiating team, which is frequently out-matched by PFO contract negotiation consultants.
  - ✓ Force the government to impose limits on the length of contract term - i.e. refuse "evergreen clauses"

[ 42 ] Color of Change, *Police Union Playbook* (2021), available at <https://policeunionplaybook.org/page-1/>

[ 43 ] See, e.g., Campaign Zero, "Fair Police Contracts," <https://archive.campaignzero.org/contracts.html>; NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, *Police Contract Toolkit*, available at: [www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF\\_07242020\\_PoliceContractToolkit-9b.pdf](http://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF_07242020_PoliceContractToolkit-9b.pdf)

## TYPES OF PFO CONTRACT PROVISIONS AND BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF TARGETING THEM

TYPE OF PROVISION	TYPICAL LANGUAGE	BENEFITS OF TARGETING THIS PROVISION	LIMITATIONS
<b>Delays interviewing cops accused of harm</b>	Cops are given 48 hours or a “reasonable period of time” after a “critical incident” before they are interviewed.	Limits the time police have to review evidence, speak to each other, and manufacture or align a narrative around the incident.	Only comes into play after harm has already been done.  Does not have an impact on overall police power or budgets.
<b>Limits on time periods for imposing discipline</b>	A cop must be disciplined within a specific time period (ranging from 14 days to 18 months) after the incident.	Extending time limits creates more time for people to come forward to file complaints, and allows for typical investigation times by civilian oversight agencies.	Only comes into play after harm has already been done.  Does not have an impact on overall police power or budgets.
<b>Requirements that complaints be signed or sworn</b>	In order to file a complaint, a person must swear under oath, under penalty of perjury	These provisions preclude anonymous complaints (which are particularly important for undocumented people and criminalized populations vulnerable to retaliation) and complaints filed by third parties (such as parents, witnesses, or community organizations) and often deter people from filing complaints for fear of being prosecuted for perjury if a cop or the agency disagrees with their version of events.	Only comes into play after harm has already been done.  Does not have an impact on overall police power or budgets.
<b>Transparency and availability of disciplinary records</b>	Typically provides that complaints and discipline will be removed from a cop’s personnel record after a certain period of time (1-5 years) and that complaints and discipline will not be available to the public  May also prohibit release of names of cops in incidents of violence	These provisions make it more difficult to identify individual cops’, units’, or departments’ patterns of violence and harm.	Only come into play after harm has been done.  Individualizes the problem of police violence by focusing on individual officers rather than the system that promotes and condones the harm.

# TYPES OF PFO CONTRACT PROVISIONS AND BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF TARGETING THEM

TYPE OF PROVISION	TYPICAL LANGUAGE	BENEFITS OF TARGETING THIS PROVISION	LIMITATIONS
<b>Disciplinary authority</b>	Typically limits authority to discipline cops to the Police Chief or a disciplinary body made up entirely or partially of law enforcement officers  Typically allows cops to appeal any disciplinary decision to an arbitrator	Targeting these provisions creates cracks in police power over police discipline.  Takes ultimate power over police discipline away from invisible and unaccountable arbitrators.  <b>Most effective challenge to these provisions is incorporating provisions imposing mandatory discipline for specific infractions</b> , taking power and discretion away from police and arbitrators.	Civilians are often equally, if not more, lenient when it comes to disciplining police.  Individualizes the problem of police violence by focusing on individual officers rather than the system that promotes and condones the harm.
<b>Use of vacation or other leave time in lieu of suspension</b>	Allows cops to use vacation or other kinds of leave to make sure they are paid during suspensions	Eliminating these provisions increases the financial impacts of suspensions on individual cops.	Only come into play after harm has been done.  Assumes discipline changes behavior in a system that encourages or requires it.  Individualizes the problem of police violence by focusing on individual officers rather than the system that promotes and condones the harm.

*Please note that any of the provisions listed above may be enshrined in state law under a Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights or public service legislation, and may require legislative action to remove.*

- ✓ Limit the length of the negotiation process.
- ✓ Require ratification of police contracts by referendum, particularly when they involve:
  - ✓ Large increases in compensation outpacing that of lower paid public sector employees or inflation
- ✓ Changes to pension systems or contributions
- ✓ The contract has lapsed
- Limit the scope of what is in the police contract and negotiations to:
  - ✓ Exclude disciplinary process altogether – in other words, PFOs would not be able to systematically avoid consequences



for officers who kill, maim, or violate people by limiting who will decide the consequences of their actions to people favorable to law enforcement.

- ✓ For instance, Washington DC passed [legislation](#) retaining the city’s exclusive power over discipline (However, this still leaves discipline at the discretion of the police chief - the more disciplinary discretion that can be taken out of law enforcement hands through a set of mandated consequences for harm, the better).
- ✓ Eliminate or severely limit arbitration provisions – currently, even if cops are disciplined by their department, arbitration clauses allow them to appeal the decisions to a private arbitrator - someone who is neither publicly known or accountable. In some cases, the arbitrator is determined by contract or by mutual agreement, virtually guaranteeing that they will be someone favorable to cops. As a result, 52% of disciplinary decisions are overturned by arbitrators according to an academic study.<sup>44</sup>
- ✓ For instance, legislators in [Delano, CA](#) retained the power to overrule a decision by an arbitrator in their police contract.
- ✓ Eliminate limitations on information that can be used in administrative disciplinary hearings or performance reviews, including previous lawsuits, discipline, and findings of misconduct.

## LIMITING POLICE POWER AND RESOURCES

Police contract provisions governing wages and working conditions have profound impacts on municipal budgets and resources, as well as

our collective capacity to create safety beyond policing. For instance:

- “Cop-only perks” that come at the expense of other unions, such as pension bumps, pension spiking, and retirement age formulas.
  - ✓ Pension spiking is when police unions negotiate large raises or bonuses to artificially inflate their compensation in the period immediately preceding retirement of officers in order to ensure that they receive larger pensions than they otherwise would be entitled to receive. This artificially inflates the pension payments due to the retirees.
  - ✓ Pension bumping is when police unions negotiate the use of “retention” bonuses or off-duty incentives to pad the compensation formulas that are used to determine their pensions. For instance, when you see cops sitting at road construction sites, depending on the contract stipulations, they may be “off-duty” and not working on behalf of the city, but all of those hours (\$) count towards their pension calculations.
  - ✓ Retirement age formulas are used to calculate how long a cop needs to be on the job before they are eligible for a pension. They are calculated using a sliding scale based on age, years of service, and the percentage of the total pension that the cop is eligible for at any given moment. For instance, a 50 year-old cop with 20 years on the job would qualify for 100% of their pension based on their current pay. But a 27 year-old cop with only 5 years on the job would only be eligible for 10% of their pension. These formulas are determined state to state and sometimes at the discretion of cities and counties – which is where contracts come into play. **Retirement age formulas for cops are different for**

[ 44 ] Stephen Rushin, “Police Arbitration,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, June 1, 2020), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3654483>.

**every other public sector worker – with earlier retirement thresholds and larger pension payouts.**

- Provisions that increase police overtime pay. Police departments routinely exceed their overtime budgets - often exponentially. Yet once they do, municipalities are powerless to refuse to cover cost overruns due to labor laws mandating payment of overtime - which are intended to benefit workers, not guarantee police unlimited access to public money. Such provisions include:
  - ✓ Provisions that mandate that municipal police provide security at public, sporting, or private events (virtually guaranteeing overtime for cops)
  - ✓ Provisions that require a minimum period of overtime pay for performing certain tasks (like processing arrests or appearing in court), creating a financial incentive for cops to increase the frequency and duration of those tasks
  - ✓ Scheduling provisions – we have all heard that there is a “shortage” of cops, that police departments are understaffed, and that cops should be paid higher wages in order to recruit more cops. Those claims are false by many measures, but one of the biggest is how cop schedules are set through a highly inefficient system controlled by police unions through police contracts that benefit cops with the most seniority. For instance, cops with more seniority get to set/pick favorable shifts (like Monday to Friday, 9 to 5), leaving gaps in coverage for weekends and overnights - UNLESS they offer overtime to the cops with more seniority. Letting the police union set schedules through the contract is a racket. Forcing police departments to make scheduling an independent, data-driven process would

lead to significant reductions in police overtime budgets

- Provisions that financially reward cops for doing what they are already required to do - for instance, police contracts that mandate bonuses for wearing body cameras or attending trainings, or even just coming to work (“attendance bonuses”)
- Provisions establishing recruitment and “performance” bonuses to attract and retain more cops to the force
- Provisions mandating that the department remain at a specific size (either a specific number or percentage of the population), or even increase over time
- “No layoffs” clauses that prevent reductions in force
- Provisions mandating the existence of particular units or maintaining control over removal of particular functions (like responding to mental health crisis calls) which handcuff communities to cops and criminalization as the primary or sole response to community needs
- Provisions known as “evergreen clauses” which leave a contract in place until a new one is negotiated (regardless of the contract end date), potentially tying communities to contracts indefinitely regardless of economic conditions, and enabling PFOs to delay negotiations and wait for/create favorable conditions while continuing to benefit from the previous contract
- Off-duty officer hiring and compensation provisions

**We should also fight for clauses that limit PFO members’ ability to build police power on the public’s dime by:**

- Requiring time cards and banning automatic overtime for PFO-related activity

- Expressly banning the use of public resources for electoral and lobbying activity, with an annual audit of PFO spending and financial penalties for violations
- Prohibiting PFO representatives from serving on public boards (e.g. planning and zoning) or commissions (e.g. oversight). This limits their influence at City Hall, as well as their ability to collect graft from developers, businesses, chambers of commerce, etc.
- Requiring police unions that fulfill “government functions” (e.g. pension administration) to comply with public records laws
- Banning the use of taxpayer funds to cover county/state law enforcement association membership fees
- Banning taxpayer subsidies for travel to/from PFO conferences and activities

**While public sector workers in “right to work” states are already subject to these restrictions, PFOs are often given exemptions. Even where these restrictions are not written into law, they are discriminatorily imposed on public sector unions while PFOs escape similar constraints.**

## **ASSESSING YOUR CAMPAIGN:**

- **What did you learn from using this play?**
- **How did you build power and with who?**
- **How will you track the implementation of any changes to the police contract you won and their impacts on day to day policing?**
- **What is your next target? How will you build toward it?**

## CORE STRATEGY

# LIMIT PFO POWER THROUGH LEGISLATIVE CAMPAIGNS AND BALLOT INITIATIVES



As noted in the section on targeting police contracts, sometimes the scope of negotiations and content of police contracts is dictated by statute. This is particularly true in the 20 states which currently have Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEBOR) on the books (and the 20 more as many have similar provisions spread throughout their state laws) — which give cops special rights not afforded to other public sector workers. But regardless of whether your state has an LEBOR or not, your state or local public service law may include provisions that govern the process or transparency of contract negotiations, dictate what is and isn't on the bargaining table, mandate or prohibit arbitration, impose or limit discipline, or increase or limit police power.

### SOME POTENTIAL PLAYS ARE:

- **Repeal your state's LEBOR.**
- **Pass legislation that mandates transparency of police disciplinary records**  
For instance, New York State and California passed legislation mandating disclosure of police disciplinary records.
- **Pass legislation removing discipline and other matters from negotiations**  
For instance, Washington DC passed legislation retaining the city's exclusive power over discipline (However, this still leaves discipline at the discretion of the police chief - the more discipline can be taken out of law enforcement hands and the more limitations on discretion through a set of mandated consequences for harm, the better).
- **Pass legislation prohibiting or eliminating provisions impacting police budgets or size of force**  
For instance, in response to widespread organizing to defund police departments, Florida,<sup>45</sup> Texas,<sup>46</sup> and Georgia<sup>47</sup> all enacted laws preventing municipalities from cutting police department budgets.
- **Repeal provisions which allow police contracts to circumvent and supercede city and state law.**
- **Target state law enforcement funding.**

[ 45 ] "Florida Governor Vows to Defund Cities That Defund Police," WESH, September 21, 2020, <https://www.wesh.com/article/florida-governor-defund-police-response/34099353>.

[ 46 ] "Abbott Implements Laws to Punish Cities for Defunding the Police | Kvue.Com," accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.kvue.com/article/news/police/gov-abbott-rules-punish-cities-defund-police/269-97121a7c-19e9-4fd7-b266-de821772a52f>.

[ 47 ] "Kemp Signs Bill Aimed at Banning 'defund the Police' Efforts | AP News," accessed October 6, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/george-floyd-racial-injustice-police-police-reform-government-and-politics-a11edff75f6ef955fa074dc4e1d3a6fa>.

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THESE PLAYS:

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- **Check whether local or state labor or public service legislation offers special treatment to PFOs** compared to public or private sector unions when it comes to negotiations or contract provisions. You can often do this by searching your state or local public service law for the words “police” or “law enforcement.”
- **Find out what local and state legislation has to say about public access to information and oversight of police contracts.** You can often do this by searching your state or local public records, freedom of information, open records or “sunshine” law for the words “police” or “law enforcement.”
- **Look at the NAACP LDF’s Police Contract Toolkit** to see if your state has a Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights, and check your state’s public service laws to see if there are special provisions for police.
- **Powermap your ability to move a local or state legislative campaign** – these are often heavy lifts, especially in pro-police states or communities. **In order to mount a legislative campaign around police contracts and powers, you will likely need the support of state and local labor organizations – or at least a guarantee that they will not oppose your efforts.** For more information on building alliances with labor, see page 33.

## WHICH LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS SHOULD WE TARGET?

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As with campaigns targeting police contracts, legislation increasing transparency and community engagement and power over police contract negotiations is necessary, but not

sufficient to achieve the goal of limiting PFO power. Similarly, legislation eliminating special protections for police in investigations and disciplinary matters after harm has happened does not prevent police violence or address the systemic forces that make it possible. It is important to focus on provisions that will bring about systemic change, and limit PFO resources, power, and control over our collective resources through police contracts. Please see the *Targeting Police Contracts* section for more information on what types of provisions or negotiation processes you may want to impact through passage or repeal of local or state legislation.

## BALLOT INITIATIVES AND REFERENDUMS

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Ballot initiatives are a way to put a question about changing a state constitution, city charter, or state or local legislative code directly onto the ballot of an upcoming election rather than going through the state or local legislative process. Some legislative changes – particularly changes to state constitutions or city charters – are required by law to be put directly to the voters in what is then called a referendum. Often this strategy is an effective way to leapfrog over the process of lobbying specific elected officials to introduce, fight for, and vote for specific legislation, and instead placing the issue directly before the people, although in some jurisdictions, the City Council must vote to approve the ballot language – they can also challenge the validity of the signatures obtained in support of the ballot initiative. And anyone, including the city, can challenge the language of the ballot measure as unclear. Usually a ballot initiative can be on the November ballot as part of general elections or on a special ballot (usually in February). Most importantly, a ballot initiative is a way of starting, fueling, or shaping a conversation around police power, funding, or contracts, even if the initiative does not pass.

## Putting a question about changing a law on the ballot generally requires:

- A minimum number of signatures by registered voters on a petition to put the provision on the ballot, *and/or*
- Passage of a bill by legislators mandating that a provision be put to a public vote

Ballot initiatives have been used to pass or repeal city charter provisions mandating the size or funding level of police departments. In the 1960s, in response to popular resistance to rampant police violence and challenges to the legitimacy of police departments enforcing segregation and targeting civil rights organizing, PFOs mounted campaigns across the country to amend city charters to guarantee that police departments would be funded at a specific level tied to population size, and were successful in several places. Since 2020, several ballot initiatives to both repeal and impose mandated police staffing levels have been introduced.

- In 2020 San Francisco voters passed a **ballot initiative** eliminating mandatory police department staffing levels
- In 2021 Austin successfully fought back a PFO ballot initiative to impose mandatory police department staffing levels No Way on Prop A (for more information, see case studies)
- The Yes4Minneapolis campaign secured 60% voter support for an initiative that would have removed mandated budget and staffing levels for the deadly Minneapolis police department from the City Charter
- Act4SA has mounted several ballot initiatives, including one that challenged a PFOs' status as a public sector union and their right to collectively bargain (For more information on Act4SA's campaign on Prop B, see case studies)
- Mano Amiga mounted a successful ballot initiative to overturn a police contract in Hayes County, Texas

- Both Act4SA and Mano Amiga are now working on a ballot initiative to change the state civil service laws affecting investigation, discipline, and termination for public sector employees in Texas.

Even where ballot initiatives focused on police department size and funding and police contracts have not succeeded, they have fostered robust public discourse around policing and public safety, creating opportunities to build a base, create stronger alliances across sectors and movements, and make a case for safety beyond policing, forcing politicians and policy makers to take a position, and draining PFO coffers in efforts to pass or oppose them.

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS BEFORE USING THIS PLAY:

- **Ballot initiatives require a strong ground game** – you need extensive capacity to canvass your community to collect a sufficient number of petition signatures, and to get out the vote in favor of your ballot measure.
- **They also require a strong public relations game** – PFOs whose power and resources are challenged will mount an aggressive counter offensive designed to confuse and scare voters.
- **They also require legal support** – ballot initiatives are often the subject of legal challenges by both the city, municipality or state and PFOs and their allies, focusing on the validity of the process for gathering signatures to petitions to place a question on the ballot or the language of the proposed ballot question and explanatory text to be placed on the ballot.
- **Do you have access to resources that are not limited by non-profit status?** Remember that nonprofit organizations are strictly limited in their ability to lobby for passage of legislation – including ballot initiatives. Consult with a lawyer experienced in non-profit and elections law about the rules of the road in your jurisdiction.

→ **Consult with the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center**, the leading progressive organization that assists people to research, plan and run ballot initiative campaigns.<sup>48</sup>

→ **Check out Act4SA’s advice on planning and running a ballot initiative below:**

## 1 PRE PLANNING

WHEN IS MOST STRATEGIC TO RUN THIS?  
WHAT IS THE GOAL?  
WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?  
WHO WILL PARTNER ON THE GROUND?  
WHO WILL FUND THIS?  
WHAT’S OUR MESSAGING?

- Policy Research
- Signature Requirements
- Framing of Language
- Timeline
- Cost
- Coalition Building
- Infrastructure Needed
- Fundraising
- Polling

## 2 PETITIONING

PETITIONS SHOULD BE EVERYWHERE IN THE COMMUNITY  
VALIDATE AS YOU GO  
BE READY FOR SHIFTS IN COLLECTION

- PAID FIELD PROGRAM
- VOLUNTEER FIELD PROGRAM
- DATA VALIDATION
- LEGAL CHALLENGES
- BE AHEAD OF OPPOSITIONAL MESSAGING
- FUNDRAISING
- HOLD EDUCATIONAL EVENTS W/ PETITIONS THERE
- GIVE FOLKS OPTION TO PRINT PETITION AT HOME

## PSA ON PETITIONING

THE ABSOLUTE WORST THING YOU CAN DO IS NOT VALIDATE AS YOU GO ALONG!!!!

NEVER TURN IN SIGNATURES WITHOUT KNOWING YOU HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH

EVEN IF YOU'RE SCRAMBLING TO VALIDATE AT THE END, PLEASE GET ALL PETITIONS SCANNED SO YOU CAN ENTER THEM INTO VAN/EVERYACTION AND MARKED AS PETITION SIGNERS.....THESE PEOPLE ARE YOUR FUTURE DONORS, VOLUNTEERS, AND VOTERS & YOU NEED TO FOLLOW UP WITH THEM!!!!

## WHILE SIGNATURES ARE BEING VALIDATED BY CITY

YOU WILL NEED A PAC TO TRACK CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES ONCE ON THE BALLOT. THIS IS THE TIME TO SET IT UP IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY

PACS FILED WITH IRS AS A 527 POLITICAL ORGANIZATION CANNOT RECEIVE C3 FUNDING...HOWEVER.....

IF YOU SET UP A PAC ATTACHED TO A C4 AND FILE THE 8976 INTENT TO OPERATE AS A 501C4 WITH THE IRS FOR THE PAC THEN IT CAN RECEIVE C3, C4, AND PAC MONEY!!!

## 3 ON THE BALLOT

FUNDRAISING NEVER STOPS  
SPREAD MESSAGING EVERYWHERE!!  
FOCUS ON REGULAR VOTERS, BUT BRING IN NEW ONES TOO

- FUNDRAISING
- PAID FIELD PROGRAM
- VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
- COALITION BUILDING
- POLLING
- BE AHEAD OF OPPOSITIONAL MESSAGING
- CAMPAIGN SWAG
- TARGETED MESSAGING
- POLL WATCHING PROGRAM
- ENDORSEMENTS

## FINAL TIPS

- Never stop fundraising
- Building coalition/partnerships is key
- Tier your partnerships- the higher the tier the more involved they should be; pay to play is a thing
- Set aside money for legal challenges
- Validate signatures as you go
- Polling multiple times is critical



## 3 POST ELECTION

NO MATTER WHAT, THIS IS A WIN FOR THE COMMUNITY IN SOME SENSE OF THE WORD

"An organization that's now coming together with a grassroots effort without the political establishment behind us, was almost able to defeat the most powerful police union in the nation," Fix SAPD organizer James Dylman said. "This proposition is sending a message."

- THANK EVERYONE
- FIND YOUR WINS AND TOUT THEM
- PREPARE FOR LEGAL CHALLENGES
- OVERSIGHT OF IMPLEMENTATION
- USE THIS AS BASEBUILDING, NARRATIVE BUILDING
- KEEP ENGAGEMENT GOING

[ 48 ] “Home Page - Ballot Initiative Strategy Center,” accessed September 1, 2023, <https://ballot.org/>.

## WHAT ABOUT LITIGATION?

**Remember that when PFOs violate existing laws, litigation is always an option.**

→ For instance, Poder in Action filed a lawsuit against the Phoenix PFO for failing to disclose their contract proposal as required by local law.

**And, remember that if you pass legislation limiting police power, you need to be prepared to defend it against likely litigation by PFOs to repeal it.** Litigation is one of PFOs most predictable defensive plays.

→ For instance, Communities United For Police Reform waged a year-long battle against PFOs efforts to repeal legislation mandating disclosure of police disciplinary records.

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR OFFENSIVE OR DEFENSIVE LITIGATION:

→ **Do you have a strong and accountable relationship with labor lawyers or movement lawyers with expertise in labor, public service, or freedom of information laws, or with the local chapter of the ACLU or NAACP LDF?** You will need attorneys committed to waging a long and hard and potentially

expensive legal battle in ways that are transparent and accountable to communities – police frats are notoriously litigious, and have large coffers to fund even the most frivolous lawsuits to stall implementation of any legislation that limits their power or funding.

→ **Can you sustain an organizing campaign that continues to bring outside pressure and sustain your base's interest during a long period of complex litigation?**

✓ For instance, Communities United For Police Reform waged a year-long battle against PFOs efforts to repeal legislation mandating disclosure of police disciplinary records.

## ASSESSING YOUR LEGISLATIVE OR BALLOT INITIATIVE CAMPAIGN:

→ **What did you learn from using this play?**

→ **How did you build power and with who?**

→ **How will you track the implementation of any changes to the police contract or operation of PFOs you won and their impacts on day to day policing?**

→ **What is your next target? How will you build toward it?**



## CORE STRATEGY

# ALIENATE PFOs FROM PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS AND LOCAL LABOR MOVEMENT



Campaigns to limit the power and resources of PFOs and police often will require engagement with the labor movement — to build support for our demands, to get them to speak out against PFOs, and to isolate PFOs from labor movements and challenge their legitimacy as a “union.”

### SOME POTENTIAL PLAYS ARE:

- **Engage in and support labor education around the history and politics of PFOs.**
- **Demand that labor federations and unions reconcile their stated mission and values with membership of and allegiance to PFOs.**

As outlined in previous sections, PFOs not only legitimize and radicalize violence against the working class, their lobbying efforts enable them to raid public coffers, depriving other public services and industries represented by organized labor of funds. Campaigns pushing back against PFO power and to defund and divest from policing more broadly are, at their heart, pro-working class campaigns.

The Community Resource Hub has created a resource outlining potential ways to engage with labor organizers and entities around challenging the power of PFOs.<sup>49</sup>

### POTENTIAL PLAYS:

#### ENGAGE IN AND SUPPORT LABOR EDUCATION AROUND THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF PFOs.

When engaging in conversations with traditional labor unions about challenging PFO power, meet people where they are in their understanding of the problem and take time to address concerns they may have about the potential negative impacts on organized labor.

- **Always refer to police “unions” as PFOs** and explain why using the arguments in this playbook.

[ 49 ] Community Resource Hub, “Research Memo: Police and Organized Labor,” January 2023, <https://communityresourcehub.org/resources/police-and-organized-labor/>.

→ **Declare and show your support for public sector unions**

→ **Compare police funding and special treatment in law and contract negotiations** to the ways public sector employees (like teachers, childcare workers, parks and recreation, library staff, health care workers, or janitors) are compensated and treated.

→ **Address potential misunderstandings or concerns around the relationships between PFOs and traditional labor unions.** For example, critics of expelling PFOs from labor federations often claim that an attack on PFOs is an attack on all public sector unions. Use the arguments in *Why Do We Say PFOs?* to address these concerns and collectively build strategies to ensure that challenges to PFOs negotiating power, transparency, contract provisions, and capacity to build police power on the public dime do not unintentionally harm public sector labor unions.

→ **Support and engage in political education of union members** that highlights the history of PFOs and why they were formed (to distance themselves from the labor movement and continue to engage in suppression of labor and civil rights movements with impunity) and the dangers that police and PFOs have posed to labor unions throughout history.

- ✓ An excellent public education tool is the MPD150 comprehensive timeline of policing in Minneapolis, Minnesota that documents the historic tensions between police and organized labor.<sup>50</sup> These materials can be used with traditional labor union members as well as with the general public.
- ✓ Eve L. Ewing’s 2020 article for *Vanity Fair*, “Blue Bloods: America’s Brotherhood of Police Officers,” is a

good introduction to the history of police unions, providing a concise overview of police as antagonists to the labor movement, citing both the Fraternal Order of Police and labor historians.<sup>51</sup>

- ✓ Check out and share *Interrupting Criminalization’s* forthcoming sample labor education curriculum on policing, labor, and abolition.

## **DEMAND THAT LABOR FEDERATIONS AND UNIONS RECONCILE THEIR STATED MISSION AND VALUES WITH MEMBERSHIP OF AND ALLEGIANCE TO PFOs.**

- Affiliated members of the AFL-CIO, including the United Auto Workers Local 2865 and the Writers Guild of America, East have pointed to the mission statement of the AFL-CIO when calling upon leadership to cut ties with the International Union of Police Associations
- The Professional Staff Congress, City University of New York’s 25,000 member professional and staff union has also vehemently called for the ouster of police fraternal organizations from the ranks of the labor movement, in addition to calling on the Mayor of New York City to block police from campus events.<sup>52</sup>
- Cop Free AFSCME ([copfreeafscme.com](http://copfreeafscme.com)) is a group of American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) workers organized to kick police out of their union. They have developed a sample resolution that can be adapted for other unions:

***AFSCME Local ### calls on AFSCME District Council join the Writers Guild of America, East and call on the Executive Council of AFSCME and the AFL-CIO to enact the process described in Article X, section 8(b) of***

[ 50 ] MPD150. “MPD150 Report,” 2020. <https://www.mpd150.com/report>.

[ 51 ] Eve Ewing, “Blue Bloods: America’s Brotherhood of Police Officers,” *Vanity Fair*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2020/08/americas-brotherhood-of-police-officers>.

[ 52 ] James Dennis Hoff, “CUNY Union Calls to Kick Cops out of the AFL-CIO,” *Left Voice* (blog), June 29, 2020, <https://www.leftvoice.org/cuny-union-calls-to-kick-cops-out-of-the-afl-cio/>.

the AFL-CIO Constitution to suspend the AFL-CIO's affiliation with the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA) and other law enforcement unions, on the constitutional grounds that the policies or activities of the IUPA and others are consistently directed toward the "achievement of the program or purposes of authoritarianism, totalitarianism, terrorism and other forces that suppress individual liberties and freedom of association and oppose the basic principles of free and democratic trade unionism;" and

Be it further resolved, that AFSCME Local ### calls on AFSCME District Council to ask all candidates it endorses to take the No Cop Money pledge to reject donations from police or correctional officer unions or associations in their run for political office and donate any money they have received to Black-led organizations; and

Be it finally resolved, that AFSCME Local ### will work with other rank-and-file AFSCME members to demand change within AFSCME and the AFL-CIO."<sup>53</sup>

- Like Cop Free AFSCME, SEIU Drop the Cops (DTC) is a group of rank and file members trying to remove police from SEIU's ranks. Julia Wallace, an SEIU 721 member described the reasoning behind the campaign by stating that the police are

*"completely antithetical to the workers movement, completely antithetical to the union movement and to black people and black community who are continually harassed assaulted raped and beaten by police. We have no business defending them protecting them giving them our representation or any kind of legitimacy when what they have done has positioned themselves to attack us, attack us as working-class people, attack our community and the labor movement"*

The sentiment is echoed in SEIU DTC's powerful demand to their union:

*We demand an SEIU beyond policing and prisons. We demand SEIU divest from campaigns organizing law enforcement officers, jail and prison guards, probation officers, and armed security officers. We demand SEIU invest in union organizing campaigns to protect, empower and expand sectors where workers prevent violence or harm as their work, such as essential workers, educators, healthcare workers, social workers, and food service workers. We demand a strong, unionized movement to eliminate policing, both as an action against the community and as a profession providing employment opportunities, to enact transformational social change beyond policing and prisons.<sup>54</sup>*

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THESE PLAYS:

- **Is the PFO a member of a local labor council or federation?**
- **Are there progressive labor unions (including locals of the unions mentioned above) in your community?**
  - ✓ Which unions come out on the right side of racial or economic justice issues?
  - ✓ Which unions have memberships that reflect communities targeted by police?
- **When do local unions have upcoming contract fights?**
  - ✓ Are the local unions in a position of fighting against funding cuts while police budgets continue to increase?
  - ✓ Did the union's last contract negotiations go poorly?
  - ✓ Have the cops ever targeted local unions' labor actions?

[ 53 ] "Resources – Cop-Free AFSCME," accessed September 1, 2023, <https://copfreeafscme.com/resources/>.

[ 54 ] Action SEIU DTC, "SEIU: Drop the Cops! Demand Letter," accessed September 1, 2023, <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/seiu-drop-the-cops>.

- **Are there radical caucuses in local unions in your community?**
  - ✓ Is there a slate of union members who are attempting to take over a union?
  - ✓ Is the union in a leadership battle currently?
- **Is there an existing culture of political education among local union and community organizations?**
  - ✓ Does the union host political education regularly for their members?
  - ✓ Do union members regularly attend movement political education events?
- **Do community organizations currently collaborate with other local unions in your community?**
  - ✓ Are there ongoing campaigns that both community organizations and labor locals are on board with?
- **Are there community members in local organizations that are also members of local labor unions?**

## POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR USING THESE PLAYS:

- **Survey your members to find out who is a member of a union or in relationship with someone who is.** Ask for a meeting with local leadership to discuss PFOs and explore opportunities to host political education events and strategy sessions for removing PFOs from local labor councils and federations.
- **Start attending public meetings hosted by public sector unions to better understand their concerns and how PFOs might be impacting the wellbeing of their members, resources, or their negotiating power.**
- **Research which public sector unions' contracts might be up for negotiation at the**

**same time as the PFOs – and what's at stake for each of them.** Reach out to leadership and members of those unions to discuss a strategy to support them and highlight the tensions between their interests and PFOs. You can find a substantial list of these contracts at [bargainingforthecommongood.org/mapping-landing/](http://bargainingforthecommongood.org/mapping-landing/)

- **Make explicit demands to raise the wages or improve the working conditions of public sector workers as part of your campaign to defund and divest from policing.**
- **Identify private sector unions that represent workers who create the things we want instead of policing** – like housing, health care, schools, parks and public spaces – and build relationships with them focused on how many more resources would be available to keep their members working for good wages under better conditions if less money went to police!

Check out the Refund Raleigh, Seattle Solidarity Budget, and Labor Against Cop City case studies on page 56 for more information on groups who have tried these strategies!

*“I started noticing the rift between some of these public departments and the police too, because these public departments, they're dealing with stuff like, last year they had brothers dying from heat stroke, brothers [in the public works department] dying because they're working on the highway. There's supposed to be a truck behind the car on the highway with the lights and everything to make sure nobody gets too close. The city didn't have that truck, so somebody got ran over after that. It's departments where Black and Brown, low-paid workers are working that aren't being funded. You compare that to the police budgets, these big huge police budgets. They're feeling like the forgotten stepchildren. It was just the perfect time to dive into it, find new allies.”*

– ANGAZA LAUGHINGHOUSE, FORMER PRESIDENT UE LOCAL 150 AND MEMBER OF REFUND RALEIGH

## **ASSESSING YOUR SUCCESS:**

- How successfully have you been in making distinction between PFOs and labor unions in your messaging, political education, and organizing strategy?**
- How successful have you been at building relationships with local labor leadership and membership?**
- How successful have you been in driving a wedge between public sector unions and PFOs in budget fights?**
- How can you build stronger and deeper relationships with labor? What are the barriers and challenges? How can you strategize with groups across the country around how to overcome them?**



*This section was written in collaboration with Kelcey Duggan, Senior Research Associate at the Community Resource Hub for Safety & Accountability*

It's no surprise that PFOs are incredibly well resourced — they protect the interests of corporations and the capitalist state. While their primary source of income is generally member dues, they fundraise from the public and foundations, sometimes receive state subsidies, and are sometimes paid with public dollars to manage police pension funds or overtime systems. They are also sometimes funded or resourced through collaboration and relationships with police foundations.

## SOME POTENTIAL PLAYS ARE:

- **Target PFO fundraising efforts, including annual fundraising drives or public fundraising events.**
- **Monitor their Money.**
- **Highlight Disparities in Funding for PFOs compared to Public Sector Unions.**
- **Highlight How Much (Unseen) Public Money goes to PFOs.**
- **Stem the flow of cash to PFOs from individuals, businesses and foundations.**
- **Pressure corporations to stop collaborating with or supporting police foundations and PFOs.**

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THESE PLAYS:

- **Identify how your PFO is categorized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), then map out their funding streams:** For example: the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) — one of the largest PFOs in the US — is classified by the IRS under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(8) as a fraternal society (membership is based on a common tie). A fraternal society

must operate in a lodge system, with a parent organization like the state or national FOP and subordinate chartered lodges/branches that are largely self-governing, like the Philadelphia FOP Lodge 5. A Fraternal Society will provide membership benefits like life, sick, accident, pay, etc. A Fraternal Society classified by the IRS under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(10) does not provide those benefits but must use any money it gets on charitable/fraternal purposes and be located/operating within the U.S. For

## PROPUBLICA NONPROFIT EXPLORER:

**Check the [ProPublica NonProfit Explorer](#) to find out which of these entities (and others) your PFO operates. ProPublica also provides links to the Form 990s that all non-profit entities, including PFOs, must file annually, summarizes and creates visualizations of relevant data, and offers the option to sign up to be notified when new data drops.**

instance, the Philadelphia FOP has multiple auxiliary financial entities that serve different purposes, including:

- ✓ the general lodge membership, regulated by the IRS under section 501(c)(8),
- ✓ A legal services trust fund, regulated by the IRS under section 501(c)(9),
- ✓ A home association social club regulated by the IRS under section 501(c)(7),
- ✓ A charitable foundation regulated by the IRS under section 501(c)(3) like many non-profit organizations.

- **How big is your local PFO's budget?**
- **Is your PFO funded by the city to perform public functions like scheduling and overtime or pension fund management?**
- **Are there contract provisions allowing public dollars to be used for PFO lobbying, conferences, and events?** (See *Targeting Police Contracts*)
- **Does your local PFO host regular fundraising drives and events?**
  - ✓ **Use the IRS Form 990s available through [Guidestar](#) to map out where your PFO is getting funds from, where the money is going to (compensation of officers/ employees in the FOP Lodge only, travel,**

**ads, gift/donations, etc.), and who is getting paid.**

- ✓ For example, Philadelphia FOP Lodge 5 501(c)(8) Vice President Steve Weiler was compensated at a rate of approximately \$171,000 in 2022 for playing that role. He is also the Administrator of the FOP legal services trust fund, classified as a 501(c)(9) entity, and was compensated \$130,000 in the same year for playing this role. Both of these salaries were paid in addition to his base police officer salary and any other income he may receive from any other position he holds within the FOP or outside of police employment.

- **Assess your capacity to withstand a counter-attack by the PFO – if PFOs feel like their power or resources are threatened they are likely to push back – hard.**
  - ✓ Make sure you have lined up an attorney experienced with legal actions known as SLAPP suits (strategic lawsuit against public participation) – lawsuits brought by individuals and entities to dissuade their critics from continuing to produce negative publicity. By definition SLAPP suits are largely without legal basis, but are intended to wear critics down until they withdraw their statements or claims.

- ✓ Make sure you have individual and digital security plans. PFOs have been known to disclose personal addresses, arrest records, and any other information they can dig up on their opponents. Equality Labs is a great resource for digital security, with many training modules available at [Equalitylabs.org](https://equalitylabs.org). Similarly, Vision Change Win offers many digital and community safety trainings and resources – visit <https://visionchangewin.com/services-and-programs/community-safety/> for more information.

## POTENTIAL PLAYS:

### TARGET PFO FUNDRAISING EFFORTS, INCLUDING ANNUAL FUNDRAISING DRIVES OR PUBLIC FUNDRAISING EVENTS

- **Provide your base and the broader public with information about what PFOs are raising money for – to defend members who have done harm, to buy weapons, and to lobby for more criminalization, incarceration, and police power.**
- **Give them a script to answer PFO fundraising calls.**
- **Mount a competing fundraising campaign to fund community needs and responses instead of PFOs, using or spoofing their fundraising messaging.**
- **Target foundations and private donors who fund PFOs.**
  - ✓ For instance, Arizona organizers mounted a direct action at a PFO gala and targeted mainstream corporate donors for their support of the PFO. Most of those donors did not support the gala the following year, and the gala itself was smaller, with less publicity.

## MONITOR THEIR MONEY

- **Identify and publicize any potential PFO tax code violations.** The sections of the Internal Revenue Code under which each type of entity operates create very specific conditions of operations and reporting requirements. By tracking PFO activities, you may find evidence that they may be violating those conditions, or using funds for something other than their intended purpose, or that they are not in compliance with reporting requirements. Failure to comply with reporting or public disclosure requirements can be grounds for litigation or fodder for a campaign.
  - ✓ For example, The San Antonio PFO was fined for a political spending ethics violation during the Prop B campaign.<sup>55</sup>
  - ✓ El Paso PFO’s former president Ron Martin fraudulently used thousands of dollars in funds in 2019.<sup>56</sup>
  - ✓ Highlight how much PFO officials are being paid once their PFO salaries, perks, benefits, and regular salaries and overtime are taken into account, establish a pattern of double or triple (or more) dipping.

### HIGHLIGHT DISPARITIES IN FUNDING FOR PFOs COMPARED TO PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS

- **Highlight disparities in PFO pay and perks compared to public and private sector workers’ unions** as part of a larger effort to drive a wedge between PFOs and organized labor (for more on this strategy, please see *Alienate from Labor*)
- **Highlight differences in operating conditions and reporting requirements for PFOs compared to labor unions,** which

[ 55 ] “SA Police Union Fined for ‘hidden’ Spending in 2021 Ballot Fight,” TPR, June 30, 2023, <https://www.tpr.org/san-antonio/2023-06-30/sa-police-union-fined-for-hidden-spending-in-2021-ballot-fight>.

[ 56 ] “Past President of the El Paso Municipal Police Officer’s Association Arrested - KVIA,” accessed September 4, 2023, <https://kvia.com/news/2023/01/05/past-president-of-the-el-paso-municipal-police-officers-association-arrested/>.



are regulated under 501(c)(5), with strict reporting requirements<sup>57</sup> as part of a larger effort to drive a wedge between PFOs and organized labor (for more on this strategy, please see *Alienate from Labor*).

- **Highlight “release time” afforded to cops for working at the PFOs.** File open records requests for the names and compensation of recipients, and compare the information received with what is permitted by contract or civil service law regulations, and what is afforded to public sector unions.

## HIGHLIGHT HOW MUCH (UNSEEN) PUBLIC MONEY GOES TO PFOS

- **Highlight membership dues cops pay to the PFO** (which ultimately come from the collective resources we use to pay police salaries). You can find the total amount of membership dues paid to PFOs on their 990, under Statement of Revenue Part 8. You can also check PFO websites, social media, etc. for indications of issues like dues raises, priorities for raising dues, complaints, etc. **Importantly, defunding police and decreasing the size of the force will decrease membership dues going into PFO coffers.**
- **Highlight any additional subsidies PFOs receive from federal, state, and local governments.** This can include invoices submitted to municipal or state agencies for travel to PFO trainings, conferences, and events that are generally not specifically tracked or published as a budget category.
- **Target police contract provisions that provide for PFOs to manage scheduling, overtime, and pensions, often with little or no oversight.** If those provisions don't appear in the police contract, look for separate contracts between the city and PFOs connected to management of police personnel benefits or pension funds in public procurement records.

- **In many major cities, the taxpayer subsidies for release time for police union work is a huge source of funding.** For instance in Phoenix, the PFO is assigned 6 full time cops on the city's dime + 1,859 hours/year for “Associate Release” time to be used among a pool of cops. The 6 full time cops are paid \$167,000/year on average, and the costs of the “Associate Release” time averages out to around \$66.28/hr. In other words, the public pays roughly \$720,000 a year for police union reps to lobby, defend cops, and produce and promote copaganda. That equates to \$1.2 million in staff & benefits to the PFO in addition to the \$1.5 million collected from member dues.

## STEM THE FLOW OF CASH TO PFOS FROM INDIVIDUALS, BUSINESSES AND FOUNDATIONS

- **Identify corporate and business donors by checking PFOs websites, newsletters, and social media.** For example, the Philadelphia FOP website has an entire page showcasing their supporters.
- **Offer community members a script to use when PFOs call during annual fundraising drives or to target fundraising events.** Disrupt the commonly held notion that getting a “sticker” from the local PFO by donating will keep them safe from traffic or parking tickets. Please note that, depending on how you do it, this play may pose some risk of individual and collective retaliation – please consult with a lawyer and develop a collective safety plan before engaging!
- **Find out if PFOs or PFO leaders are connected to other businesses or corporate entities** using Form 990s or by searching Secretary of State or Corporation Commission websites/agencies where applicable. Check to see if these businesses (like private security businesses) also have city contracts or connections with real estate development, prison construction, etc.

[ 57 ] A small minority of PFOs, including the New York City Police Benevolent Society, Texas CLEAT, and the Seattle Police Officers' Guild, are registered under 501(c)(5).

**And, remember, any challenge you pose to the power of PFOs forces them to expend funds to defend against it** – for instance, Act4SA’s ballot initiative forced the local PFO to spend \$ 2 million dollars to oppose it – that’s \$2

million less to spend smearing people harmed by police, defending the cops who harmed them, and lobbying for more policing, more criminalization, less accountability, and larger police budgets.

## ASSESSING YOUR SUCCESS:

- **Were you able to substantially challenge the legitimacy of payments to PFO leadership or funds flowing into PFOs?**
- **Were you able to stem or reduce the flow of funding to a PFO?**
- **Were you able to raise awareness of disparities in financial treatment of PFOs compared to public sector unions and contribute to driving a wedge between the two?**
- **What is the next PFO funding stream you want to tackle? How?**

## POLICE FOUNDATIONS

While they may or may not directly fund or collaborate with PFOs, police foundations actively advance their interests and power by pouring money into police coffers. According to a [report](#) on police foundations by Color of Change,

*Police foundations are private organizations that funnel corporate money into policing, protecting corporate interests and enabling state-sanctioned violence against Black communities and communities of color. ...There is a police foundation in nearly every major American city, behind almost every police department, backed by wealthy donors and giant multinational corporations.... providing a corporate slush fund for police.*

*Where there’s a police department, there’s likely a police foundation in its shadow, acting as a mouthpiece to provide PR spin in public, or hosting exclusive galas for the wealthy and well-connected to rub elbows with police brass in private...Police foundations also “hide” in plain sight, partnering*

*with major sports teams for events, sponsoring “Crime Stoppers” tip lines, or installing CCTV cameras in heavily-trafficked, predominantly Black neighborhoods...<sup>58</sup>*

Like PFOs, police foundations are powerful political players. For instance, according to #StopCopCity organizer Micah Herskind,

*The Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) is a key power broker in Atlanta. Making a tidy \$300 thousand salary as of 2019, APF’s President and CEO Dave Wilkinson is a core player in Atlanta politics, drawing on a broad array of political and corporate connections stemming from both his work at APF and his 22 years serving U.S. presidents in the Secret Service. Most recently, Wilkinson was named to newly-minted Mayor André Dickens’ transition team.*

*With significant funding, corporate backing, deep relationships, and a direct line to the police, APF’s leaders have direct access to the mayor’s office and city council members, and expend significant resources lobbying them for police expansion.<sup>59</sup>*

[58] Color Of Change, “Police Foundations: A Corporate-Sponsored Threat to Democracy and Black Lives,” 2023.

[59] Micah Herskind, “Cop City and the Prison Industrial Complex in Atlanta,” Mainline, February 8, 2022, <https://www.mainlinezine.com/cop-city-and-the-prison-industrial-complex-in-atlanta/>.

Police foundations often have close ties with PFOs, including having PFO members on their boards and jointly sponsoring events and initiatives.

- For example, the Louisville police foundation cosponsored a pro-police rally with the local Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) lodge.
- FOP leadership serves on the board of the Philadelphia Police Foundation along with the Police Commissioner and numerous corporate representatives.

The corporations and philanthropic entities that support police foundations fund them to purchase weapons and equipment without public oversight or accountability (often bankrolling programs and technologies that don't have broad public support), spend money to defend cops when they do harm, politically support candidates who will vote in favor of police interests, and influence the corporate media. According the Little Sis [report](#) "Corporate Backers of the Blue,"

***Police foundations across the country are partnering with corporations to raise money to supplement police budgets by funding programs and purchasing tech and weaponry for law enforcement with little public oversight. Annual fundraising events and parties like the St. Paul Police Foundation's "Blue Nite Gala" and the Chicago Police Foundation's "True Blue" event are huge moneymakers. The NYC Police Foundation reported that it raised \$5.5 million from its annual benefit in 2019.<sup>60</sup>***

Little Sis gathered a number of examples of how police foundations, claiming to support "underfunded" police departments, fuel police violence:

- The Houston Police Foundation has an entire page on its website showcasing the equipment it purchased for the police department, including SWAT equipment, LRAD sound equipment, and dogs for the K-9 unit.

- The Philadelphia Police Foundation purchased long guns, drones, and ballistic helmets.
- The Atlanta Police Foundation helped fund a major surveillance network of over 12,000 cameras and is behind the \$90+ million plan to build Cop City.
- In Los Angeles, the police used foundation funding to purchase controversial surveillance software from Palantir. If the LAPD purchased this technology through its public budget, it would have been required to hold public meetings and gain approval from the city council. By having the foundation purchase it for them, the LAPD was able to bypass that oversight.

Organizations supporting police foundations range from Wall Street banks to retail giants to big tech to fossil fuels to airlines, Amazon, Starbucks, and beyond. Many corporations see a seat on the police foundation board as a key mechanism of influence. While often operating in secrecy, many police foundations proudly list their corporate sponsors directly on their website. Many are registered as not-for-profit 501(c)3 organizations and therefore are required to report some information publicly. Sites like [guidestar.com](#) are free and allow people to find this reporting information (called a "form 990"). Using this information, you can often find out the size of the foundation's endowment or assets and learn who the key players and corporate backers are.

## POTENTIAL PLAYS:

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While police foundations offer the police and PFOs enormous resources and influence, they, and the corporations that back them, are also vulnerable to targeted campaigns. To starve police foundations of funding you can:

- **Pressure corporations to stop collaborating with or supporting police foundations and PFOs through:**

[60] Derek Seidman, "Corporate Backers of the Blue: How Corporations Bankroll U.S. Police Foundations," *Eyes on the Ties*, June 18, 2020, <https://news.littlesis.org/2020/06/18/corporate-backers-of-the-blue-how-corporations-bankroll-u-s-police-foundations/>.

- ✓ **Public shaming:** For instance, Coca-Cola withdrew from the Board of the Atlanta Police Foundation under public pressure.<sup>61</sup>
- ✓ **Shareholder organizing:** Groups like Majority Action and SEIU have used their positions as shareholders in corporations to force conversations at federally mandated annual shareholder meetings. Under the right conditions, questions on the corporation’s business dealings can be put on a ballot for decisions by all shareholders.
- ✓ **Demanding that pension funds divest from police foundations:** Through significant campaigning, some pension funds have purposefully divested from corporations they hold shares in – most notably over fossil fuels or weapons manufacturing.<sup>62</sup> Similar organizing could be done with large pension funds, who often represent some of a public corporation’s largest investors, over support of PFOs.
- ✓ **Learning more about labor and community corporate campaigns in your area that have focused on the particular corporation you are targeting and reaching out to share information and collaborate.**

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THIS PLAY:

- **What is the relationship between your local PFO and police foundation?**  
Check out IC’s Mapping the PIC [guide](#) and [workshop](#)
- **Who are the primary funders of the police foundation in your area? Is the foundation registered as a non-profit organization? Is information about their Board members, etc. available online?**  
You can also find out more about specific police foundations from Little Sis [here](#) and Color of Change [here](#). Are the funders publicly facing people or brands that could succumb to public pressure?
- **Be prepared for PFO pushback!** Do you have a strategy or safety plan in place in case PFOs strike back by targeting your organization, leaders, or members? Targeting their resources goes to the heart of their power, and PFOs are likely to fight back! For more information, check out organizations like Vision Change Win and Equality Labs who each offer resources on how to stay safe.

## ASSESSING YOUR CAMPAIGN:

- **Were you able to raise public awareness of how police foundations are funded (including public funding) and of their budgets?**
- **Were you able to cut off or substantially reduce resources available to your local police foundation?**
- **Were you able to limit or make contributions to the police foundation toxic?**
- **What source of police foundation funding could you target next?**

[ 61 ] Color Of Change, “Police Foundations: A Corporate-Sponsored Threat to Democracy and Black Lives,” 2023.

[ 62 ] “New York City Pensions to Divest Future Private Equity Holdings from Fossil Fuels,” The City, April 6, 2023, <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/4/6/23673297/public-pensions-divest-fossil-fuels>.

## CORE STRATEGY

# MAKE THEIR POLITICAL POWER TOXIC



**PFOs throw a tremendous amount of money around to win influence from public officials. Making their financial support or endorsement toxic is a key potential strategy to fight back against PFOs because it strikes at their main lever of influence.**

This strategy has long been in use by organizers targeting corporations. For instance, there have been successful campaigns to stop many elected officials to stop accepting campaign funds from Big Pharma<sup>63</sup> after highlighting both the

rapaciousness and harm that pharmaceutical companies have bought their way into being able to engage in. PFOs enjoy an equally if not greater broad level of influence that buys them resources and cover for tremendous levels of harm.

### SOME POTENTIAL PLAYS ARE:

- **Find out and publicize which politicians are taking PFO money.**
- **Organize candidates and elected officials to explicitly and publicly refuse funds from PFOs, support and celebrate them.**

### POTENTIAL PLAYS:

- **Find out and publicize which politicians are taking PFO money.**

Open Secrets, the leading data source for statewide and federal political donations, has a searchable resource where users can look up information about specific PFOs or political candidates.<sup>64</sup> The Open Secrets database has cataloged well over \$71 million in political spending to state candidates alone by PFOs in the last decade.<sup>65</sup>

Many of the candidates funded by PFOs are most often Right-wing politicians and proven supporters of the police. However, some PFOs also vie for the support of Democrats who either hope the financial support they receive from PFOs remains under the radar, or, more often than not, proudly claim it as evidence that they are a “law and order” candidate.

Exposing PFO support to candidates and the potential influence this gives police over policymaking forces the elected official to

[63] Ryan Grim Sirota Lee Fang, Sara, “Democrats Find Their Big Pharma Bag Is Making It Inconvenient to Take On Big Pharma,” The Intercept, October 29, 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/10/29/big-pharma-donations-medicare-drug-pricing-democrats/>.

[64] Open Secrets et al., “OpenSecrets.Org,” OpenSecrets, accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.opensecrets.org/>.

[65] Open Secrets et al., “Police Unions Spend Millions Lobbying to Retain Their Sway over Big US Cities and State Governments,” OpenSecrets News, June 16, 2022, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2022/06/police-unions-spend-millions-lobbying-to-retain-their-sway-over-big-us-cities-and-state-governments/>.

pick a side. A campaign forcing a candidate or elected official to declare “which side are you on” can be extremely effective if we build sufficient power to make the choice to ally with PFOs over allying with the community toxic. This strategy requires that we lay our critiques of police at the feet of the candidates they support. In the same way that in just a few years donations to candidates from real estate interests have gone from universal to toxic,<sup>66</sup> the culture around accepting donations from PFO can change fast.

- **Organize candidates and elected officials to explicitly and publicly refuse funds from PFOs, support and celebrate them.** Organizers behind NoPoliceMoney.org document and lift up elected officials at all levels who take their No Police Money pledge. Their goal is to eliminate the financial influence of police from electoral politics entirely. Elected officials must publicly state: “I pledge not to take contributions from police unions or associations, not to seek their endorsement and to publicly reject their independent expenditures. I will instead prioritize the wellbeing and safety of every member of our community.”<sup>67</sup> The site currently lists over 20 signatories and is open for anyone to sign provided they commit to reject all donations and public support from the police. People’s Budget LA has similarly invited local politicians to take the pledge.<sup>68</sup>

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THIS PLAY

- **Do local politicians claim to be on the side of the people?**
- **Do you have access to local political spending data?**
- **Have local politicians made sympathetic statements after incidents of police abuse in the past?**
- **Is the PFO a significant funder of local politicians running for office?**
- **Is the leader of the PFO an unsavory public figure? (regularly making inappropriate public statements)**

[ 66 ] Victor Porcelli, “Campaign Donations from Real Estate Lobby Drop Dramatically as Democrats Decline Them,” Gotham Gazette, accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.gothamgazette.com/state/9565-campaign-donations-real-estate-lobby-drop-dramatically-democrats-decline-new-york>.

[ 67 ] No police money in politics, “NO POLICE MONEY IN POLITICS,” NO POLICE MONEY IN POLITICS, accessed September 1, 2023, <https://www.nopolicemoney.org>.

[ 68 ] “No Cop Money Pledge | People’s Budget LA,” People’s Budget LA, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://peoplesbudgetla.com/pledges/nocopmoney>.



**Copaganda is a term used to describe how police manipulate public perception of violence, crime, and safety, and falsely depict themselves as the “thin blue line” standing between order and chaos through public relations, media, and culture.**

PFOs are among the primary copaganda machines, using their resources and power to supplement the already significant media and public affairs operations of police departments. As highlighted in Interrupting Criminalization’s *Don’t Be a Copagandist guide*,<sup>69</sup> mainstream media contribute by amplifying PFO and police messaging without question or investigation, fueling criminalizing narratives and calls for increased police power and resources.

*“Facing one of the greatest crises of legitimacy in a generation, and on the heels of one of the largest uprisings against police violence in U.S. history, cops and pro-police forces reached for their most reliable weapon to consolidate power: fear.”*

**—COPS DON’T STOP VIOLENCE: COUNTERING NARRATIVES USED TO DEFEND INSTEAD OF DEFUND THE POLICE.<sup>70</sup>**

### SOME POTENTIAL PLAYS ARE:

- **Call out the copaganda.**
- **Pressure cultural workers and institutions to stop the flow of copaganda.**
- **Host workshops for journalists and cultural workers on how not to be a copagandist.**
- **Highlight how PFO money is spent to promote a public image of police as equivalent and necessary to public safety.**
- **Highlight violence, fraud, and betrayals of the public trust by PFO leaders and members.**

[69] “Don’t Be A Copagandist: #StopCopCity Indictments,” Interrupting Criminalization | Research In Action, 2023, <https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/resources-all/dont-be-a-copagandist-atlanta>.

[70] Community Resource Hub, Interrupting Criminalization, and Borealis Philanthropy, “Cops Don’t Stop Violence,” 2021.

## POTENTIAL PLAYS:

- ✓ **Call it out.** Challenge commonly used tropes like a cop “saving the day,” the notion that incidents of police violence are the product of “a few bad apples,” language that erases the violence of policing like “officer involved shooting,” or efforts to smear opponents and people who experience police violence. Police and PFOs realize that media spin is crucial to their operations and spend millions on media crisis management firms to spin stories after disasters and promote their public narratives.

For example, one major firm in California boasts Emmy award winning journalists working as “Transparency Engagement Advisors” who “help our clients be direct and socially in-tune as it relates in the heat of pressured situations.”<sup>71</sup> In reality, emails uncovered by the Vallejo Sun and KQED show the firm launched a heavy push in the wake of the murder of George Floyd to sell their media relations work to police departments and PFOs.<sup>72</sup> The cracks in the stronghold of copaganda created by the uprisings of 2020 turned out to be a business boom for PR firms specializing in copaganda.

*“Social media videos of police officers kneeling, hugging protesters, or posts of them offering snacks and their tears to little Black girls and boys, as the fearful children shake and cry, are promoted by the general public, and even allies and activists. The focus of these videos is supposed to be on the kind nature of individual police officers, but it’s important to remember that each friendly officer also has a gun on their hip”<sup>73</sup>*

– PALIKA MAKAM, TEEN VOGUE

While copaganda might be compelling to some, juxtaposing the reality of policing (no matter what they are doing, they have a gun and the power to enact violence on communities) can be helpful to shake people from the grips of intense media spin.

- **Pressure cultural workers and institutions to stop the flow of copaganda.** Police often use the entertainment media to boost their reputation in the face of plummeting public opinion. In fact, the television show *Dragnet*, created in collaboration with the LAPD in the wake of corruption scandals as a public relations tool, is one of the original examples of modern forms of copaganda.
  - ✓ NYPD’s PFO paid famed director Spike Lee \$200,000 to help produce content that would “Aim to strengthen the partnership between the NYPD and the communities it serves.”<sup>74</sup>
  - ✓ The PFO also hosts an annual gala featuring celebrities like Tony Danza and Wynton Marsalis.<sup>75</sup>
- **Host workshops for journalists and cultural workers on how not to be a copagandist** – you can use Interrupting Criminalization’s “Don’t Be a Copagandist” series of fact sheets as a resource.<sup>76</sup>

- **Highlighting how PFO money is spent to promote a public image of police as equivalent and necessary to public safety, and targeting the corporations, celebrities, and public figures who help spin copaganda is an effective play.**

It can also be effective to fight fire with fire. PFO leaders never seem to shy away from an opportunity to say something brash, violent, and revealing of their politics and motivations in the press or engage in embarrassing and immoral acts.

[ 71 ] “Sectors We Serve | Cole Pro Media | Online Reputation Management,” Cole Pro Media (blog), accessed September 4, 2023, <https://www.colepromedia.com/sectors-we-serve/>.

[ 72 ] “When Police Need PR Help, Many Turn to One Firm in Vacaville,” KQED, December 6, 2021, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11898051/when-police-need-pr-help-many-turn-to-one-firm-in-vacaville>.

[ 73 ] Palika Makam, “What’s So Harmful About Copaganda?,” Teen Vogue, August 5, 2020, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-is-copaganda-explainer>.

[ 74 ] “Spike Lee Paid \$200,000 By NYPD For Consulting On Ad Campaign - Okayplayer,” accessed September 3, 2023, <https://www.okayplayer.com/culture/spike-lee-paid-200000-by-nypd.html>.

[ 75 ] “New York Police Foundation Annual Gala,” accessed September 3, 2023, [https://blacktiemagazine.com/society\\_2014\\_april/New\\_York\\_City\\_Police\\_Foundation\\_Annual\\_Gala.htm](https://blacktiemagazine.com/society_2014_april/New_York_City_Police_Foundation_Annual_Gala.htm).

[ 76 ] “Don’t Be A Copagandist.”



*“I’ve been involved in three shootings myself and not one of them has bothered me.”*

– BOB KROLL, PRESIDENT, MINNEAPOLIS PFO

*“The big buzzword they had was de-escalation... Certainly cops, that’s not in their nature.”*

– BOB KROLL, PRESIDENT, MINNEAPOLIS PFO

*“When the NYPD retreats the violence will come...BEWARE! [Y]ou’ve been WARNED!”*

– ED MULLINS, PRESIDENT, NEW YORK CITY PFO

*“We can have four more years of President Trump or you can have no safety, no justice, no peace.”* –PAT LYNCH, PRESIDENT, NEW YORK CITY PFO

*“We don’t want to be forced to do anything.”*

–JOHN CATANZARA, PRESIDENT, CHICAGO PFO

*“We are the only thing standing between order and anarchy.”* – NATIONAL FOP

### The list of dirty deeds by Police Union leadership is too long for any document, but it includes:

- Minneapolis PFO’s former president Bob Kroll is barred from working in several counties due to his outrageous treatment of protestors during the 2020 Uprisings as a result of a lawsuit brought by the ACLU of Minnesota in 2023.<sup>77</sup>
- Boston PFO’s former president Patrick Rose pled guilty in 2022 to sexual assault and child rape over a 27-year period.<sup>78</sup>
- Former New York PFO president Ed Mullins pled guilty in 2023 to wire fraud and stealing more than \$600,000 from the New York City Police Department Sergeants Benevolent Association between 2017 and 2021.<sup>79</sup>

→ Franklin, NH PFO president Jacob Drouin was fired for falsifying worker’s compensation claims in 2023.<sup>80</sup>

→ San Jose PFO’s executive director Joanne Marian Segovia used home and office computers and the PFO’s UPS account to order and distribute opioids and other pills purchased from India, Hong Kong, Hungary, and Singapore.<sup>81</sup>

→ Massachusetts PFO’s former president Dana Pullman took money from PFO members to buy thousands of dollars of flowers and gifts for family members and someone he was having an affair with, as well as meals, vacations, cars, and caviar.<sup>82</sup>

→ Dearborn PFO’s president Walter Anhut’s wife called 911 on him during a domestic violence incident which led to his suspension.<sup>83</sup>

→ Washington DC PFO’s Vice Chair committed fraud by secretly working at Whole Foods while receiving a paycheck as a cop in 2023.<sup>84</sup>

→ Bossier City, LA PFO’s president embezzled money from the PFO to use for unprescribed opioids.<sup>85</sup>

Highlighting violence, fraud, and betrayals of the public trust by PFO leaders and members is an effective way to counter narratives framing police officers as heroes and their stories as truth.

### ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THIS PLAY:

- **We always recommend using this play.** Contradicting PFO propaganda helps to delegitimize them as an institution.

[ 77 ] Jon Collins, “Former Minneapolis Police Union Leader Bob Kroll Barred from Policing in 3 Counties,” Sahan Journal, April 5, 2023, <http://sahanjournal.com/news-partners/bob-kroll-former-minneapolis-police-union-president-barred-policing/>.

[ 78 ] “Patrick Rose Victims File Lawsuit against Boston Police, Union, DCF over Sex Abuse Investigation Failures,” accessed September 4, 2023, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/06/08/patrick-rose-sex-abuse-victims-lawsuit-boston-police>.

[ 79 ] Maria Sole Campinoti, “Former NYPD Union Leader Gets 2 Years in Prison for Theft Scheme,” CNN, August 5, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/05/us/former-nypd-sergeants-union-president-sentenced/index.html>.

[ 80 ] JON DECKER Sun The Laconia Daily, “Franklin Police Union President Terminated Ahead of Personnel Hearing,” The Laconia Daily Sun, July 11, 2023, [https://www.laconiadailysun.com/news/local/franklin-police-union-president-terminated-ahead-of-personnel-hearing/article\\_e1b70f4e-110d-11e1-ba2d-fff8838ad0c2.html](https://www.laconiadailysun.com/news/local/franklin-police-union-president-terminated-ahead-of-personnel-hearing/article_e1b70f4e-110d-11e1-ba2d-fff8838ad0c2.html).

[ 81 ] Kris Sanchez · · ·, “SJPOA President Responds to Drug-Related Charges Against Union’s Executive Director,” NBC Bay Area (blog), March 30, 2023, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/san-jose-police-union-opioids-drugs/3194097/>.

[ 82 ] “Ex-MA State Police Union Head Dana Pullman, Lobbyist Guilty of Racketeering – NBC Boston,” accessed September 4, 2023, <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/ex-head-of-mass-state-police-union-gets-prison-for-fraud-racketeering/3042305/>.

[ 83 ] “Dearborn Police Union President Suspended after Domestic Violence Arrest,” WXYZ 7 Action News Detroit, March 6, 2023, <https://www.wxyz.com/news/local-news/investigations/dearborn-police-union-president-suspended-after-domestic-violence-arrest>.

[ 84 ] Mitch Ryals, “Former D.C. Police Union Vice Chair Arrested for Felony Fraud,” Washington City Paper, February 6, 2023, <http://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/588113/former-d-c-police-union-vice-chair-arrested-for-felony-fraud/>.

[ 85 ] Joseph Cox, “FBI Arrest Police Union President, Investigating Alleged ‘Fake Fundraisers,’” Vice (blog), August 31, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/93a3py/fbi-arrest-police-union-president-investigating-alleged-fake-fundraisers>.

## CORE STRATEGY

# FOCUS LABOR ON A JUST TRANSITION FROM A CARCERAL ECONOMY



The term “just transition” initially emerged within the realm of environmental justice, describing a process by which an economy heavily reliant on polluting industries could shift towards a more sustainable focus without compromising the livelihoods of workers.

According to the United States Census Bureau there are nearly 1 million police officers employed in the US.<sup>86</sup> That’s more police than architects, dentists or social workers. We need to consider what to do with the people who are currently employed as violence workers – and millions more who engage in carceral practices or prop up carceral economies. Confronting this reality head on can help strengthen the labor movement without accepting that police must exist in perpetuity.

There are legitimate concerns about how to transition police out of positions where they have been trained and enabled to criminalize and enact violence with impunity. Police have been selected by, taught, and empowered

by a violent racist sexist abusive system. It is irresponsible to assume that they can simply be placed in another outward facing public service job without carrying over the same criminalizing practices and proclivities.

A just transition plan away from carceral work and economies would need to be multi-faceted, require comprehensive training, and constant re-evaluation by community members to assess progress. It can begin at the starting point: by stemming the tide of people entering the field. Organizers can build on decades of fights to block military recruitment on school campuses and in low-income communities of color to highlight the harms of engaging in policing and everyone’s right to jobs with living wage salaries

### SOME POTENTIAL PLAYS ARE:

- Focus on comprehensive training and progress.
- Focus on new work and careers in infrastructure building, renewable energy, and other functions in a new employment system that is not based on violence.
- Look at which aspects of your own jobs feature aspects of policing and imagine a world without carceral culture.

[86] US Census US Census Bureau, “National Police Week: May 14-20, 2023,” Census.gov, accessed September 4, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/police-week.html>.

and good benefits that doesn't require them to engage in surveillance, criminalization, and violence for a living.

When it comes to existing cops, there is a tremendous amount of work to do in the world that doesn't require public interaction. There's no shortage of need for people to engage in life giving work things like infrastructure building, generating renewable energy, and many more functions that don't require interaction with the public for the most part. These positions – with minimal opportunities to engage in policing practices – could provide at least a neutral ground for former police to be employed. The framework of the Jobs Guarantee, championed by economic scholars like Pavlina Tcherneva, is consistent with a just transition and would provide a system to find new employment for police in a way that is driven by the needs of society.

Finally, all workers should look at which aspects of their own jobs feature aspects of policing. For instance, the [Beyond Do No Harm Network](#) of Interrupting Criminalization invites health care providers and public health workers to critically look at the work they do and whether or not they are themselves promoting, engaging in, or condoning policing.<sup>87</sup> We can imagine a world where all workers engage in the same self-reflection, and work to eliminate the aspects of their jobs and performance that require them to engage in policing in some form, including at the bargaining table.

- For example, during the foreclosure crisis, teachers in St. Paul, MN bargained over the ability of their employer, the government, to foreclose on children during the school year.<sup>88</sup>
- Los Angeles Teachers bargained to block ICE from accessing school campuses.<sup>89</sup>

### All workers can at least ask themselves two primary questions:

1. What functions of my job directly or indirectly constitute policing or increase people's vulnerability to policing?
2. What functions of my job give access to or increase legitimacy of the police? Your place of employment might have a standing operating procedure that requires people to call the police on people in certain circumstances. That policy can be challenged along with other working conditions. Challenging employers to eliminate carceral aspects of all jobs is a key way labor can support a just transition toward a non-carceral economy and society.

## ASSESSING CONDITIONS FOR USING THIS PLAY

### → We always recommend using this play.

Figuring out what to do with the nearly 1 million police officers and other aspects of the prison industrial complex are central to our success in fighting police power.

[ 87 ] "Beyond Do No Harm," Interrupting Criminalization | Research In Action, accessed September 4, 2023, <https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/beyond-do-no-harm>.

[ 88 ] "St. Paul Teachers Bargaining for Better Schools and Stronger Communities - Bargaining for the Common Good," February 18, 2016, <https://www.bargainingforthecommongood.org/st-paul-teachers-bargaining-for-better-schools-and-stronger-communities/>.

[ 89 ] "LAUSD Just Made It Harder For ICE To Walk Onto Their School Campuses | by We Are Mitú | Medium," accessed September 4, 2023, <https://medium.com/@mitunetwork/lausd-just-made-it-harder-for-ice-to-walk-onto-their-school-campuses-7c64aee98eb1>.

# CAMPAIGNING AND POWER BUILDING CRASH COURSE

While there are unique challenges to organizing and power building to dismantle PFOs, basic principles of organizing and campaigning are always a good starting point.





# BEFORE LAUNCHING YOUR CAMPAIGN IT IS HELPFUL TO CONSIDER:



## WHAT IS OUR VISION?

**You need to have a vision of what you want to achieve and what you want the future to look like in your local area before you move forward.**

Are we all moving towards the same vision? How can we refine our vision? Does our vision presume the continued presence of policing or does it move us beyond policing? Is our vision compelling? Can we see the breadth and vibrance of our community in our vision?



## HOW ARE WE CUTTING THIS ISSUE?

**This is a decision only you and the co-leaders of your campaign can make.**

What issues do people feel most strongly about in relation to PFOs? Do these specific problems correspond to the broader objectives of reducing the power and resources of PFOs and moving toward a just transition to a non-carceral economy?



## RESEARCH?

**Research for research's sake does not change material conditions.**

The purpose of campaign research is to develop tactical information. Who are the decision makers we are targeting? What avenues are available for us to get to our goal? What is the power map of the opposition? What are the opposition's biggest vulnerabilities? How does money flow? Have there been attempts at this campaign before? There may be many other questions that are specific to your campaign, so brainstorming a list of questions is crucial.



## CAPACITY AND POWER

**It doesn't help anyone to be unrealistic about your campaign capacity or your power to move your opposition or defend against their plays.**

Ask yourself if you have the capacity and power within your grouping to run this campaign effectively, or if you could properly build that capacity. Is there another organization that agrees with your vision that you could pull on to add capacity? Can we see this through? What's our ability to hold the win when we get there?

## IS THIS MOVING US TOWARD A JUST TRANSITION TO A NON- CARCERAL ECONOMY?



**Borrowing from “So is this actually an abolitionist proposal or strategy?” organizing toolkit created by Interrupting Criminalization and Critical Resistance, ask yourself these shortcut questions:**

1. Does it (as a whole or in part) legitimize or expand the carceral system we’re trying to dismantle?
2. Does it benefit parts of the Prison Industrial Complex, industries that profit from the PIC, or elected officials who sustain the PIC?
3. Do the effects it creates already exist in a way we have to organize against? Will we, or others, be organizing to undo its effects in five years?
4. Does it preserve existing power relations? Who makes the decisions about how it will be implemented and enforced?
5. Does it create a division between “deserving” and “undeserving” people? Does it leave out especially marginalized groups (people with criminal records, undocumented people, etc.)? Does it cherry-pick particular people or groups as a token public face?
6. Does it undermine efforts to organize and mobilize the most affected for ongoing struggle? Or does it help us build power?

**It’s important to struggle through all of these questions. This list is not exhaustive or perfect, but deep political struggle around these points will prevent harmful reform campaigns.**



## PARTNERS

**None of us can do it alone – nor should we want to. Ask yourself who your main allied organizations are.** Are there other orgs that share our vision and politics? Are there orgs that don’t agree with us 100% but have an overlapping interest in a way that would be beneficial to us? Will this campaign complicate things for some of our comrades and if so, have we spoken to them about it?



## MESSAGING

**What is the headline you'd like to see in the paper?** What is the thing you'd say at the doors to the general public? What is the thing you'd say at the doors to potential supporters? Does your message hold true to your values? Is it compelling? Is it adaptable? Is it visionary?



## ROLES AND STRUCTURE

**How will the campaign be structured?** Who makes decisions? How? What roles will people take? What roles do you need someone to take? How will you maintain the safety of your structure from outside actors?



## STEPPING STONE

**Does this campaign set us up for the next campaign?**

# CASE STUDIES

**In this section we lift up organizations and communities that have challenged or are currently fighting police contracts.**

While context and conditions are different in every circumstance, case studies can help show the breadth and variety of strategies and campaigns that can be deployed to take on PFOs around the country. These case studies are not meant to be an exhaustive chronicle of the entire campaign, nor do they represent an exhaustive accounting of organizing against PFOs across the US. Nor are these case studies meant to be a roadmap for how to run campaigns in your particular city. We learn from each other's successes, setbacks, challenges, and wins. You may find pieces in one or all of these case studies that are helpful in some way to your work.





# ATLANTA



## HIGHLIGHTING TIES BETWEEN POLICE FOUNDATIONS, PFOS, AND VIOLENCE AND BUILDING WITH ORGANIZED LABOR

Since 2021, the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) has been pushing forward plans to build a Public Safety Training Center, dubbed “Cop City” by organizers, on 381 acres of forest land in Atlanta on Mvskogee Creek territory, next to a working class Black neighborhood, where police from across the country and around the world would be trained in “urban warfare.” Organizers are using a wide range of tactics to stop the construction of the facility.

APF is sponsored by many major corporations from Georgia and beyond, which have become public targets for their support of APF. Organizers have also focused on how much money such a facility would cost the taxpayers of Atlanta at a time when much more is needed to help residents. The mayor, city council and other elected officials are also being targeted as being complicit with militarization of the police and environmental destruction. All of these tactics have been accompanied by actions on the ground, engaging new allies, communicating through social and traditional media, and making the role and interests of the APF clear. Read more at [StopCopCity.org](http://StopCopCity.org) and in the Fall 2023 issue of *Forge Organizing*.<sup>90</sup>

Organizers have intentionally engaged the organized labor movement, getting hundreds of signatures from individuals and organizations in support of efforts to #StopCopCity. The #LaborAgainstCopCity sign on campaign offers an opportunity to engage in political education with workers and labor organizations around policing issues, and build solidarity in resistance.<sup>91</sup>

[ 90 ] “The Struggle to Stop Cop City—By Any Means Necessary,” *The Forge*, September 5, 2023, <https://forgeorganizing.org/article/struggle-stop-cop-city-any-means-necessary>.

[ 91 ] “Laboragainstcopcity.Org,” Labor against cop city, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://www.laboragainstcopcity.com>.



# AUSTIN



## OPPOSITION TO PFO BALLOT INITIATIVE

In 2021, Austin voters headed to the ballot box to vote on Proposition A, which would have established a new ordinance chaining the city to a minimum number of cops, increasing police staffing and funding. This was the same kind of mandate that organizers in Minneapolis were organizing to strike down that year, and which San Francisco repealed in 2020. Implementation of Proposition A would have cost an estimated \$271.5 million, bringing the total police budget 598.8 million over and above the approved budget, mostly to pay for an additional 400+ police. Conservative forces led by the President of the Austin Police Association raised over a million dollars to put Prop A on the ballot and fund its campaign.

The opposition to Prop A was able to raise a significant amount of money and engage in widespread campaigning across the city. They found allies in the labor movement, including the firefighter's association, AFSCME and more. The Mayor, multiple city council members and the Democratic Party all came out in opposition to the proposition.

**The No Way on Prop A** campaign was able to successfully highlight how the PFO was irresponsibly putting nearly all other city services in the city by seeking a mandatory police department size. With such an enormous increase in police funding, Austin would have no choice but to cut hundreds of millions of dollars from elsewhere in their budget. That message was able to mobilize many voters. While this was a defensive fight, it did successfully block what would have been a disastrous increase in policing and budget cuts.



# LOUISVILLE



## ORGANIZING FOR INCREASED TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN POLICE CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

The 490 Project in Louisville, KY started a campaign in 2021 focused on increasing transparency and community engagement in police contract negotiations and challenging provisions in the River City FOPs contract that prohibit layoffs, permit erasure of police disciplinary records, limit oversight, and require that police be issued riot gear. In a previous phase of their campaign, they laid out their demands in the chart below and published them in a widely disseminated social media toolkit.<sup>92</sup>

DEMANDS	WHY
<b>Add community experts to the City’s negotiation team</b>	Transparency is key to community building. If the community is on the team, the community can give input.
<b>Renegotiate for observers in FOP contract negotiation process</b>	Transparency is key to community building.
<b>Renegotiate to permit the parties to reveal and discuss proposals with the public and media</b>	Transparency is key to community building. This begins to provide accountability to the community.
<b>Clarify when discipline and other grievances go through grievance/arbitration to Police Merit Board or to court</b>	The public should know what happens if an officer engages in misconduct.
<b>Remove no layoffs clause</b>	This hinders police department divestment. Virtually no other CBA, private or public sector, has this clause.
<b>Stop providing riot gear</b>	Police should not be militarized. Who are they at war with?
<b>Stop erasing police misconduct records</b>	Misconduct complaints are destroyed after two years and are not included in an officer’s disciplinary record. Tracking officer misconduct is difficult if complaints aren’t connected to a particular officer’s file.

[ 92 ] “Louisville, KY: Toolkit for Confronting FOP Power via Contract Process,” accessed September 4, 2023, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CEsf1APlkegcRj1yRmsEVTEM78GccSi crvfu46bbjS8/edit>.

DEMANDS	WHY
<b>Remove suspension without pay pending language</b>	Police who are under investigation should not be given what is essentially paid time off.
<b>Stop restricting or delaying interrogations</b>	Officers are not interviewed right away. They are given >48 hours. This gives them time to work with a union representative & others involved to corroborate a story.*
<b>Clarify to ensure that all unjustified use-of-force is a fireable offense</b>	Unjustified use-of-force is always a fireable offense.
<b>Clarify to determine the nature of and efficacy of the proposed training.</b>	It isn't clear what type of training or that the training required will assist police in overcoming explicit or implicit racial and gender bias. Research indicates that more training does not always result in less police misconduct.
<b>Mandate release of public records in police personnel files without the officer's express permission</b>	The public should have access to public records regardless of where they are stored. Why does the officer have to give permission? Why are these records not included in Open Records Law?
<b>Change this provision to retain all supervisory records in a permanent personnel file.</b>	Patterns of misconduct and poor performance cannot be tracked if supervisory records are destroyed.
<b>Stop requiring the city to pay for officers' misconduct</b>	Your tax dollars go towards legal fees, settlements, etc. for bad officers.*
<b>Clarify volunteer clause; what organizations qualify for volunteering, etc?</b>	The way this article is currently written will allow officers to volunteer wherever, whenever, and for whoever. This could include very problematic organizations or events.
<b>Mandate Metro Council ratifies all police contracts and all police contract extensions</b>	Without Metro Council's ratification, the entire process could be held in secret by the Mayor & FOP.

In early 2022 the Metro Council approved a version of the FOP contract that contained all but 3 of the challenged provisions.

EDITORS' NOTE: *Challenging or changing who pays compensation to people harmed by police is more likely to limit reparations to the victims of police violence than stop the violence from happening in the first place. For more information, please read [bit.ly/DontFixate](https://bit.ly/DontFixate).*<sup>93</sup>

[ 93 ] "In Calling to Defund Police, Don't Fixate on Costs of Police Settlements | Truthout," accessed October 6, 2023, <https://truthout.org/articles/in-calling-to-defund-police-dont-fixate-on-costs-of-police-settlements/>.



# SEATTLE



## DRIVING A WEDGE BETWEEN PFOS AND LABOR

**After years of challenging the violence and structural racism of the Seattle Police Department, organizers in Seattle and surrounding King County succeeded in pushing the local MLK Labor Council to oust the Seattle Police Officers Guild during the 2020 Uprisings, as members of labor inside of the council lifted up their experiences of policing as Black residents of Seattle.**

While the move was opposed by some within the labor council, its success left SPOG without the support of the labor movement and serves as an inspiration for labor councils around the country. The decision to oust SPOG blocked their ability to use the political capital of the council even when their interest did not align with other members.

The Seattle Solidarity Budget Campaign continues to build alliances with organized labor by calling for the over 32% of Seattle's budget that goes towards policing and criminalization to fund guaranteed income, housing, health, transportation, communication, climate action, care, food and living wage guarantees.<sup>94</sup> The demands drew direct connections between decreased wages and funding of the public sector and the bloated policing budget, and called for funds to be diverted to increased wages for public sector workers.<sup>95</sup>

[ 94 ] "Seattle Solidarity Budget," Seattle Solidarity Budget, accessed August 25, 2023, <https://www.seattlesolidaritybudget.com>.

[ 95 ] MLK Labor Council, "MLK Labor Cut Ties with the Seattle Police Officers Guild," MLK Labor, June 21, 2020, <https://www.mlklabor.org/news/mlk-labor-cuts-ties-with-spog/>.



# RALEIGH



## BUILDING COMMUNITY-LABOR COALITIONS IN MOVEMENTS TO DIVEST FROM POLICING

Refund Raleigh organizers, many of whom were experienced organizers raised in labor families, made organizing with members of the United Electrical Workers Local 150, who represent North Carolina's Public Sector Workers, a priority in their campaign to defund the Raleigh Police Department and refund public services.

*"We were thinking Raleigh is this place where so many people have been killed by police, but also so many people are exploited as workers, are being pushed out of their houses. They're getting brutalized, and then don't have work, don't have bus stops."*

– SUNNY OSMENT, REFUND RALEIGH

*"If we're talking about divest from police budgets and investing back into the community, they can find an excuse, a way to talk around everything else we asking to change, except for raising the wages of city employees. There should be no excuse for why people who work for a city can't even afford to live in that city when the city can just, with a stroke of a pen, just a city resolution, change all that right now. I pitched it to Refund Raleigh, they hopped on immediately, I went back to the union. The union was like, "Oh, these young folks want to work with us? Absolutely. Let's make it happen." We dove in from there and it's been like a marriage ever since then."*

– ANGAZA LAUGHINGHOUSE, REFUND RALEIGH AND FOUNDER AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF UE LOCAL 150

*"The goal was just to create demands that resonated with people, but would make immediate and material impacts in people's lives. Having an immediate increase in your income is something that you can see and visualize and feel immediately. That will make a material impact and difference in your life in that moment. We wanted people to be able to literally visualize that, "Oh, these dollars could be used for this, and that's something that I can get behind."*

– SAMONE BULLOCK, REFUND RALEIGH

*"All throughout the year we've done a whole lot of political education with union members too. The union leaders get it, union members get it too, but they're still community folks. You got to educate them the same way you do the education in the community. We did that and then also each time we went to do some community canvassing, we brought union workers out there, city workers out there to connect with other people that we run into that happen to work for the city as well too.... I think it's*

*really built some real comraderie between us when they see me and others out there actually helping them do the organizing, do the agitation, come into their union meetings and conventions just to talk about the issue and build these connections too. All of that together, us doing education together, doing outreach together, and then steady doing organizing together has really built the strong relationship between us.”*

– ANGAZA LAUGHINGHOUSE, REFUND RALEIGH AND FOUNDER AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF UE LOCAL 150

*“We would say poverty is a police violence program. A living wage - or we try to say a thriving wage - is a safety program.”*

– SUNNY OSMENT, REFUND RALEIGH



# SAN MARCOS



## ORGANIZING CITY COUNCIL TO VOTE AGAINST A POLICE CONTRACT, TARGETING STATE CIVIL SERVICE LAWS THROUGH A BALLOT INITIATIVE

Mano Amiga in San Marcos pushed their city council to enact a set of ordinances aimed at decreasing and deescalating encounters with police. The 2020 cite & release ordinance, passed by city council and the only of its kind in Texas, uses the force of city law to compel officers to issue citations for many minor offenses like possession of marijuana, graffiti, theft, and criminal mischief while requiring the tracking of arrests and citations. Previous to the ordinance, 75% of citation eligible police encounters ended in arrest even for something as simple as an invalid license or a small amount of marijuana. Today all citation eligible encounters end with a citation as required by city law.

The San Marcos Police Fraternal organization was in firm opposition to the passed ordinance as they expressed worry about officer liability. Mano Amiga organized the progressive city council members, Immigrant Legal Resource Center, and community members to successfully push for the ordinance citing the racial disparity in arrests for low level offenses.<sup>96</sup> In 2022, Mano Amiga successfully brought forth another ballot initiative that decriminalized the possession of marijuana and prevented SMPD from using the smell of hemp or marijuana as probable cause for search and seizure.

In February of 2023, Mano Amiga organized the city council to reject the current police contract and renegotiate. This move sparked a city-wide conversation on the provisions of the police contract, and while a new contract was approved later in the year that did not meet all of the community's demands, Mano Amiga built enough power to start planning a ballot initiative campaign that would directly remove unjust provisions from the contract.

[ 96 ] Local Progress, "Cite and Release to Cite and Divert," <https://www.daretoreimagine.org/case-studies/san-marcos-texas-cite-and-release#:~:text=In%20April%202020%2C%20San%20Marcos,state%20law%20allowing%20as%20much>





# SAN ANTONIO



## TARGETING POLICE CONTRACT THROUGH A BALLOT INITIATIVE

Learning from Mano Amiga’s experience, Act4SA mounted a ballot initiative, Prop B, that would enable organizers to take down the San Antonio police contract as it is presently negotiated, and to allow for a different system of negotiation that would create a pathway to removing disciplinary loopholes, and create a mechanism for community members to be able to take down any future contracts by collecting enough signatures to put the contract on the ballot for a vote, in the hopes that even the threat of having enough signatures to put the contract on the ballot would force city council and police to go back to the negotiating table.

The initiative was widely supported and came close to passing (48.85% YES to 51.15% NO). The opposition consisted entirely of PFOs and their supporters.

San Antonio Proposition B Full Text

CWK  
02/11/2021  
Item No. x

**ORDINANCE**

**ORDERING AN ELECTION TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MAY 1, 2021, IN THE CITY OF SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS ON THE QUESTION OF REPEAL OF THE ADOPTION OF THE STATE LAW THAT ESTABLISHES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, FOR SAN ANTONIO POLICE OFFICERS.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**WHEREAS**, on December 17, 1974, the voters of the City of San Antonio adopted Chapter 174 of the Texas Local Government Code which establishes collective bargaining, for San Antonio police officers; and

**WHEREAS**, on January 8, 2021, the City received a petition seeking an election to repeal the adoption of Chapter 174 for City of San Antonio Police Officers, and the City Clerk certified that the petition was signed by at least 20,282 qualified voters, more than the statutorily required minimum number of 20,000; and

**WHEREAS**, following certification by the City Clerk, the City Council is statutorily required to order a special election for the voters of San Antonio to consider the repeal of the adoption of Chapter 174 collective bargaining for San Antonio Police Officers; **NOW THEREFORE:**

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN ANTONIO:**

**SECTION 1.** A special election is ordered to be held in the various voting precincts of the City of San Antonio on Saturday, May 1, 2021, to submit the following proposition to repeal the adoption of Local Government Code Chapter 174, the state law establishing collective bargaining as applicable to the City of San Antonio police officers, to the qualified voters of the City:

**CITY OF SAN ANTONIO PROPOSITION B**

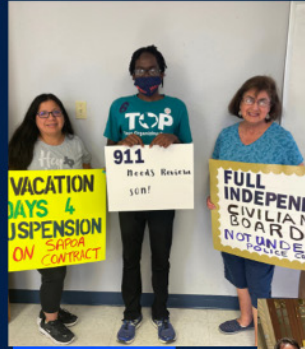
Shall the adoption of the state law applicable to City of San Antonio police officers that establishes collective bargaining if a majority of the affected employees favor representation by an employees association, preserves the prohibition against strikes and lockouts, and provides penalties for strikes and lockouts be repealed?

# ACT4SA

## INTRODUCTION

ACT 4 SA IS BEXAR COUNTY'S FIRST GRASSROOTS ORG TO FOCUS SOLELY ON POLICING AND THE REIMAGINING OF PUBLIC SAFETY...

AND WE ARE BORN FROM THE PROP B BALLOT INITIATIVE



## WHAT WAS PROP B?

BALLOT INITIATIVE TO TAKE DOWN POLICE CONTRACT PAVING WAY FOR A NEW ONE

MORE VOTERS THAN MAYORAL RACE

INCREASE IN BLACK & LATINX VOTE BY ALMOST 25% EACH

CHANGED THE CONVERSATION ON POLICING FOREVER IN SA





# CONCLUSION

**POLICE FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE A DAUNTING POWER STANDING IN THE WAY OF DEMOCRACY, PUBLIC SAFETY, COLLECTIVE WELLBEING, AND FREEDOM IN EVERY WAY.**

We know that, in the words of famed Black labor leader A. Phillip Randolph, “Freedom is never given – it is won.” We must take on the power of PFOs in order to challenge the institution of policing, grow a genuine labor movement and win progress in campaigns toward a just transition to a noncarceral economy. The plays explored in this playbook are just a sampling of how we can fight the power of PFOs. You may in your local area come up with new strategies or tactics for taking on PFOs. **We encourage you to continue to be in community with other organizers around the country, sharing best practices and collaborating on tactics. We will see a day without PFOs that will help bring about a future without the violence of policing.**

**“Freedom  
is never  
given — it is  
won.”**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IC INTERRUPTING  
CRIMINALIZATION