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Washington's police 'reform' endangers public safety and public health

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By [Stephen F. Gambescia](#)

Stephen F. Gambescia is professor of health services administration at Drexel University in Philadelphia

The White House leaders' and many members of Congress's proposed national measures to influence local policing are a danger to our public safety and public health. Local control of the safety and health of the people is a founding principle in the formation of our nation's government. The Founders had the wisdom to understand that those closest to the people are in the best position to protect the safety and health of the people, and they are more invested in their welfare.

An important section of the Constitution — health and welfare — gives strong authority to the states to protect, preserve, and promote the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of their people — often referred to as the police powers. The Constitution does not mention health care per se, but the document is clear about giving local government the power to protect the people's health and safety.

The programs and services stemming from such power benefit all people. Policing and public health are what we call population-based services — i.e., given to all regardless of the people's ability to pay, professed need, or feelings, and in some cases given in spite of the people's objection. Even free riders get police protection and public health services, without favoritism or bias. Much of the policing in a local community to provide public safety has concurrent benefits to public health.

Local authorities naturally understand how to protect their communities and enforce laws. A Barney Fife portrayal of local policing may make for good TV comedy, but it is not the reality. Local police are alert, watchful, and skilled and the first of the first responders to any incident in a community — from the caring rescue of a family cat stuck in a tree to combatting an active shooter in a school. Local police are acutely aware of the people, places, and problems of a community — well above a state or national entity. Thus, they know how to prevent or mitigate what ails their communities.

The Founders understood the appropriate balance of power between federal and state (and local) government entities. Those expressed powers for the national government have served us well for these last few centuries. The national government taking on more power to control how law enforcement protects our person, our property, and our welfare is bad policy. The Founders gave much thought to how much power our national government should be given; they explained that accumulation of too much power "in the same hands ... [is] the very definition of tyranny." Local public health and safety services are consummate examples of the benefits of federalism.

Washington's political actors and bureaucrats currently show no competency to calibrate good policing. Many have abrogated their major responsibility to protect our borders, thus causing a humanitarian crisis by under-policing. Conversely, they are over-policing by erecting a seven-foot fence around the Capitol and calling the National Guard, given that a throng of unarmed knuckleheads stormed their workplace for a brief time. Compare this response with months of verbal and physical assaults endured by local police who were given slight physical protection, peculiar orders to "stand down," and no moral or public support during violent riots — all to appease a Beltway political party agenda

This combination of national government control and social tyranny by some groups is not the route to police reform. These two mindsets are a paradox. The former believe they can play the role of the Leviathan once they break the backs of Americans' penchant for freedom and liberty. The latter have a warped

understanding of human nature, resting on Rousseauian ideals that no rule and order is needed to organize a society.

The Founders recognized the shortcomings of both of these political ideologies — shortcomings that even a sophomore in high school working through a summer reading list comes to know: while we aspire for all to be good, there is plenty of the bad and the ugly to take away our property and assault our person. The Lockean social contract is not perfect but is still the best political system we have.

Local patrol is still the best system to preserve and protect our civil society. Washington policymakers should move on from thinking their parchment fixes will make us safer and that they can design effective public health measures. Those closest to the people are in the best position to protect the safety and health of their citizens.

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