

THE PEOPLE'S COALITION FOR SAFETY AND FREEDOM

1994 Crime Bill

The '94 Crime Bill contributed to mass incarceration, over-policing, and mass criminalization, destabilizing an entire generation of families in the United States, with a particularly destructive impact on Black communities.

By endorsing and financing ineffective and damaging policies and practices at the state and local levels, the 94 Crime Bill encouraged the growth of police and prison infrastructure and failed to prioritize community investments that would have increased public safety, particularly in under-resourced communities.

At the time of its passage, the '94 Crime Bill faced widespread criticism from community activists, incarcerated people, criminologists, civil rights lawyers, and numerous members of Congress.

'94 CRIME BILL MAJOR PROVISIONS

Prison:

- Authorized nearly \$10 billion in subsidies to expand state prisons
- Eliminated Pell Grants (higher educational grants) for people in prison
- Established system to compensate states for incarcerating undocumented immigrants

Sentencing:

- Implemented a “three strikes” rule (mandatory life imprisonment without parole for committing a serious violent felony when the person has two prior felony convictions, one of which must be a serious violent felony but the other could be a “serious drug offense”)
- Permitted 13-year-olds to be tried as adults
- Created 60 new death penalty offenses
- Enhanced penalties for drug-related offenses
- Established new and increased criminal penalties for immigration violations
- Added dozens of new federal offenses

Policing:

- Established **Community Oriented Policing Services (the “COPS office”)** and appropriated \$8.8 billion for 1995 to 2000; COPS has granted over \$14 billion to local law enforcement agencies through grants and information sharing since its establishment
- Established the **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**, which placed the vast bulk of resources and funding for addressing violence against women into punitive legal systems, including deepening police involvement and criminal prosecution as means to reduce domestic violence

Gun Safety:

- Established the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (prohibiting the manufacture of 19 semi-automatic firearms, which expired in 2004 and was not renewed)

Oversight:

- Established federal authority to investigate patterns or practices of misconduct by law enforcement and government officials in juvenile justice systems.

'94 CRIME BILL:

BY THE NUMBERS

\$30.2 billion

The 94 Crime Bill authorized a total of \$30.2 billion over six years, from 1995-2000. The bulk of these dollars was designated for law enforcement and prison infrastructure, contributing significant financial resources to policing, mass incarceration, and criminalization:

Authorized a combined \$23.1 billion for law enforcement and prison construction, as compared to \$7.1 billion to “Crime Prevention” (for example, grants for combating “violent crimes against women,” drug courts, after-school programs, and employment and business development programs, among others).²⁷ Some of this “Crime Prevention” money also included direct and indirect resourcing for law enforcement programs.

Authorized a total of \$10.8 billion for several programs to assist state and local law enforcement. Most of the funds—\$8.8 billion—were to support hiring additional police officers.

Authorized \$9.7 billion for states to build and operate prisons, including for the incarceration of undocumented immigrants.

+28%

The number of police officers increased 28%, from 699,000 to 899,000, from 1990 to 1999, an increase partially funded by the Bill.

Over \$680 million

Between 1996 and 1998, 28 states received over \$680 million in Truth-in-Sentencing Incentive Grants from the federal government. By 1999, 42 states had truth-in-sentencing laws.

7,242 School Resource Officers (SROs)

The COPS office has funneled more than \$1 billion to fund the expansion of policing and surveillance infrastructure in schools. The Cops in School program, for example, funded hiring 7,242 School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools throughout the US between 1999 and 2005, and even more SROs were funded through other COPS programs. After the Cops in Schools funding ended, local school districts had to fund these SROs.