



## 2026 Forum on Criminal Justice Draft Agenda

Please note: All times listed are Eastern Time

### Tuesday, May 12, 2026

#### 1:00-2:15 pm Welcome and Opening Plenary: A-to-Z: Why is the Murder Rate Falling So Fast?

After spiking during the pandemic and the social justice protests of 2020-21, violent crime has fallen sharply over the past three years. Theories abound as to why. How much might be due to changes in criminal justice policies and programs? Or advances in crime detection, investigation and other technologies? What role do broader societal and cultural forces play? Join this session for a fast-paced discussion of the most common—and controversial—ideas by national experts in the field. And bring your questions!

Welcome:

- NCJA President Jennifer Brinkman, Director, Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs

Speakers:

- Thaddeus Johnson, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Criminology, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University
- Ernesto Lopez, Senior Research Specialist, Council on Criminal Justice
- Charles Fain Lehman, Senior Fellow, The Manhattan Institute
- Emily Owens, Deans' Professor of Criminology and Economics and Chair of the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society, University of California, Irvine
- Moderator: Adam Gelb, President and CEO, Council on Criminal Justice

#### 2:15-2:30 BREAK

#### 2:30 -3:00 pm Roundtable Networking Opportunities

Attendees are invited to visit one of the following breakout rooms for peer-to-peer discussion and conversation about current topics of interest. Please come prepared to engage with your colleagues and share ideas, questions, challenges and solutions.

- Drones: Emerging Uses and New Grant Rules
- All Things Grant Administration
- AI Policies and Practices
- Supporting Public Safety Recruitment, Wellness and Training

#### 3:00-3:15 pm BREAK



**3:15-4:15 pm                      Reaching People with Mental Illness and Addiction in Frontier and Rural Communities**

Behavioral health and criminal justice practitioners have made great strides in their understanding and ability to help people with mental health and/or substance use disorder challenges get connected to treatment, so jail is not the only option and so a person's chances of success upon reentry are much greater. But how does that work in frontier and rural communities (and urban, too) where treatment providers are scarce, and the distances people have to travel are prohibitive? In many states, expanded Medicaid has made it possible for the justice-involved population to access treatment, but not if it simply does not exist where they live. Many communities, however, are finding creative ways to connect people to the help they need. Come learn about initiatives that are working.

Speakers:

- Tara Kunkel, Executive Director, Rulo Strategies
- Barbara Pierce, President, ChangeUP Justice
- Sheriff KC Lehr, Sublette County, WY
- Moderator: Karhlton Moore, Senior Vice President of Public Safety, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

**3:15-4:15 pm                      Compliance in Motion: Updating Grantmaking Under Evolving Rules and Requirements**

This workshop brings together pass-through entities to learn from their peers about effective grant solicitation processes. Participants will share approaches to designing solicitations, engaging stakeholders, ensuring compliance, and promoting transparency and equity. The session will include practical lessons learned, common challenges, and how to adapt processes to comply with changing requirements.

Speakers:

- Susie Sher, Bureau Chief, Iowa Department of Public Safety, Office of Drug Control
- Dennis Wiggins, Program Planner, Iowa Department of Public Safety, Office of Drug Control
- Tony Vidale, Executive Director, Arizona Criminal Justice Commission
- Moderator: Kellie Rabenhorst, Director, NCJA Center for Grants Management

**4:15-4:30 pm                      BREAK**

**4:30-5:30 pm                      Everything an SAA Needs to Know about Artificial Intelligence**

State Administering Agencies (SAAs) are increasingly encountering artificial intelligence across policing, courts, corrections, victim services, and grant administration—but what should they do now? This session will provide a practical roadmap for SAAs to assess AI tools, establish governance frameworks and align emerging technologies with federal grant requirements and state policy priorities. Panelists will explore risk management, civil rights protections, procurement standards, data quality, transparency obligations, and the reality that even the casual use of



tools such as ChatGPT requires a careful, informed user who understands issues of confidentiality, accuracy and bias.

Speakers:

- Amy Glasscock, Program Director, Innovation & Emerging Issues, National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO)
- Kyle Schroeder, Gordon Thomas Honeywell Government Relations
- Julian Adler, Managing Director of Innovation, Research, and National Impact, Center for Justice Innovation
- Moderator: Chris Asplen, Executive Director, National Criminal Justice Association

#### **4:30-5:30 pm                      Creative Strategies for Supporting First Responder Health and Wellness**

The health, wellness and retention of the men and women in their ranks is one of the most persistent challenges facing law enforcement, prosecutor and first responder agencies. Stymied by long-standing culture, organizational capacity, availability of mental health professionals and funding, law enforcement is struggling to address officers' mental and physical health needs. Law enforcement officers are 54 percent more likely to die by suicide than the American population in general. They report much higher rates of depression, PTSD, burnout and other anxiety-related conditions. Yet, according to the Howard C. Libengood Foundation, an estimated 62 percent of police agencies do not provide wellness services, less than 5 percent have suicide prevention programs, and many medical providers are unaware of the increased risk of suicide among law enforcement officers. Come to this lively and informative session to hear how first responder agencies are addressing employee needs and, in turn, improving retention rates.

Speakers:

- B.J. Wagner, Executive Vice President for Health and Public Safety, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
- Lorrin Freeman, District Attorney, Wake County, NC and Chair of the National District Attorney's Association Wellbeing Committee
- Lieutenant Joel Lopez, Louisville, KY Metro Police Department Wellness Unit
- Sue Radcliffe, Mental Health Therapist, Dorchester County Health Department and Board Member, Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission
- Moderator: Lori L. Pesci, Esq., Director, Department of Public Safety, Summit County, OH



## Wednesday, May 13, 2026

### **1:00 -2:00 pm                    Maximizing the Potential of DNA Technology: The New NCJA Center for Forensic Policy and Practice**

Advances in forensic DNA are creating new opportunities to increase clearance rates and strengthen criminal investigations. This session will explore the new Arnold Ventures funded NCJA Center for Forensic DNA Policy and Practice which takes a comprehensive approach centered on five key pillars: expanding DNA offender databases; expanding the implementation of Rapid DNA technology; identifying and addressing the causes of untested, lawfully owed DNA samples; improving systemic coordination and hit tracking of DNA evidence; and analyzing and expanding the use of forensic genetic genealogy. Presenters will discuss how aligning policy, practice and technology across these areas can accelerate investigations, reduce backlogs and improve public safety outcomes.

Speakers:

- Rachel Lovell, Associate Professor of Criminology and Director of the Criminology Research Center, Cleveland State University
- Marc Kurpanski, Director of Criminal Justice Policy, Arnold Ventures
- Misty Marra, Research Forensic Social Scientist, RTI International
- Jennifer Brinkman, Director, Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs
- Moderator: Chris Asplen, Executive Director, National Criminal Justice Association

### **1:00-2:00 pm                    Advancing Grant Integrity and Accountability**

Although grant fraud often receives outsized attention, data shows that the vast majority of recipients manage funds responsibly and in compliance with program requirements. This session will examine what the evidence reveals about the true prevalence of grant fraud and explore practical, risk-based strategies for prevention and early detection. Participants will gain actionable insights to strengthen oversight frameworks, reinforce integrity and accountability, and communicate about fraud risk in a balanced and informed way.

Speakers:

- Kellie Rabenhorst, Director, NCJA Center for Grants Management
- Cillian Flavin, Deputy Commissioner, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' Office of Program Development and Funding Justice Services

### **2:00-2:15 pm                    BREAK**



**2:15 -3:00 pm                      Roundtable Networking Opportunities**

Attendees are invited to visit one of the following breakout rooms for peer-to-peer discussion and conversation about current topics of interest. Please come prepared to engage with your colleagues and share ideas, questions, challenges and solutions.

- Building Partnerships to Support Individuals with Mental Illness
- All Things Byrne SCIP
- Forensic DNA Integration Issues
- Advancing Support for Crime Victims

**3:00-3:15 pm                      BREAK**

**3:15-4:15 pm                      Improving Health Outcomes in Jail and at Reentry Through Innovation and Partnerships**

Incarcerated populations experience disproportionately high rates of chronic illness, substance use disorders, and behavioral health conditions that impact both in-custody mortality and post-release outcomes. As local jurisdictions increasingly serve as frontline providers of complex health care, jails and community-based service providers are exploring a range of strategies to improve the quality, coordination, and continuity of care delivered during incarceration and following reentry. Presenters will discuss the new environment for paying for health services and how jurisdictions are working across systems to provide innovative solutions that reduce avoidable emergency care utilization, hospitalization and recidivism.

Speakers:

- Dan Mistak, Acting President and Director of Health Care Initiatives for Justice-Involved Populations, Community Oriented Correctional Health Services
- Sheriff Dave Rhodes, Yavapai County, AZ
- Sodiqa Williams, Chief Program Officer, Safer Foundation
- Moderator: Natalia Bowser, Deputy Director, Montana Department of Corrections

**3:15-4:15 pm                      Understanding and Meeting the Crisis of Children’s Online Safety**

An estimated one in four girls and one in 13 boys in the United States experience child sexual abuse. A far, far greater number are exposed to bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation online and through social media. Keeping kids safe and keeping ahead of the online predators is a daunting challenge. This session will provide a survey of the history, a review of federal, state and local roles and responsibilities, a discussion of current challenges and the Children’s Advocacy Center model for protecting children throughout the investigative process

Speakers:

- Brad Russ, Executive Director, National Criminal Justice Training Center, Fox Valley Technical College



- Kasey Dalke, Chief Executive Officer, Children’s Advocacy Centers of Kansas
- Moderator: Kate McClary, Program Administrator, VOCA Administration Unit, Arizona Department of Public Safety

**4:15-4:30 pm                      BREAK**

**4:30-5:30 pm                      Emerging Approaches to Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention:  
Registries, Data, and Collaboration**

This workshop will examine the growing intersection of domestic violence, homicide, sexual assault and suicide, with a focus on emerging prevention strategies. Panelists will discuss trends in domestic violence-related fatalities and the role of data and technology in reducing risk. Participants will gain practical insights into how data, policy and cross-system collaboration can strengthen early intervention and save lives.

Speakers:

- Gina Carlson, Co-Founder, EnoughDV.org
- Belinda Hagen, Co-Founder, EnoughDV.org
- Kate Bouwkamp, DVFRB Coordinator, District of Columbia Executive Office of the Mayor, Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants
- Amy Bleser, COO, Women Helping Women
- Moderator: Trish Davis, Program Manager, Office of Justice Programs, Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration

**4:30-5:30 pm                      What Happened in This Year’s State Legislative Sessions?**

Most states have concluded their 2026 legislative sessions with new laws on the books intended to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. What were the trends across states? Were there common themes? Where did urban, rural, red and blue states find commonality? Join us as staff from the National Conference of State Legislatures and a panel of State Administering Agencies discuss the outcome of legislative sessions from around the country.

Speakers:

- Sarah Brown, Group Director, Criminal Justice, National Conference of State Legislatures
- Kirsten Kenyon, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency
- Delrice Adams, Executive Director, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
- Elizabeth Klc, Director for Criminal Justice Policy, Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice
- Joshua Broman, Executive Director, Public Safety Planning, Mississippi Department of Public Safety



## Thursday, May 14, 2026

### 1:00-2:00 pm **Innovative Strategies for Supporting People with Mental Illness and their Families**

The National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization with more than 650 NAMI State Organizations and Affiliates who work in communities across the country to raise awareness and provide support and education to people with mental illness and their families. State NAMI chapters work closely with law enforcement and other justice system partners to advance best practices, train officers on de-escalation, divert people at risk of entering the justice system, prevent suicide and ensure ongoing treatment in the community. This panel of three state NAMI chapters will discuss their innovative, successful initiatives.

Speakers:

- Kelli Jensen, Justice Director, NAMI Indiana
- Julie Gomez, Executive Director, NAMI Greater Wheeling, WV
- Ryan Crane, Executive Director, NAMI Iowa
- Moderator: Matthew Lunn, Director, Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice Services

### 1:00-2:00 pm **In It for the Long Haul: Gold Watches or Golden Handcuffs?**

Resiliency planning for staff well-being is just as important as sustainability planning for the organization. It can make the difference in the staff and the organization's ability to mitigate the daily and chronic exposure to traumatized people and traumatic materials. This session will present evidence-based tools and strategies developed specifically for managers and teams to support a workplace that builds resiliency, empowers and sustains staff, and thus the organization.

Speaker:

- Karen Kalergis, President of Mani Partners Strategic Communications

### 2:00-2:15 pm **BREAK**

### 2:15-3:15 pm **Successful Crime Reduction Strategies**

Across the country, jurisdictions are employing innovative ideas to reduce crime and protect public safety. In this session, hear from three graduates of the University of Chicago Crime Lab Leadership Academy about programs they implemented that have not only reduced crime but also sustained those reductions.

The Focused Deterrence through Social Network Analysis project expands Knoxville's successful place-based strategies by overlaying social-network data to target high-risk gun offenders. The North Sacramento Patrol Command addressed its disproportionately high volume of domestic violence crimes by engaging key stakeholders



and various community organizations to identify gaps in addressing this type of crime and providing necessary services. And A Northwest Baltimore project worked to interrupt and prevent youth-perpetrated crimes through several proven policing methods, public health strategies, education, technology, and community involvement.

Speakers:

- Capt. Nevin Long, East District Commander, Knoxville, TN Police Department
- Capt. Neil Cybulski, North Command, Sacramento, CA Police Department
- Major Danita Boyd-Canton, Commanding Officer, Special Investigations Section, Baltimore, MD Police Department
- Moderator: Sandy Jo MacArthur, Director of Curriculum Design, Policing Leadership Academy, University of Chicago Crime Lab

**2:15-3:15 pm                      Electronic Monitoring and the Goals of Decarceration**

When the decarceration movement fails in its goals for reducing the prison population, it is due partly to the lack of political support and the infrastructure necessary to adequately support people returning from prison. While electronic monitoring has long been used as a monitoring tool, panelists argue that newly available technologies allow for most incarcerations to be avoided, increase opportunities for training, treatment, education and rehabilitation, while avoiding the collateral consequences of incarceration.

Speakers:

- Jeffrey Seaman, Levy Scholar, University of Pennsylvania Law School
- Roman Rivera, Assistant Professor of Public Policy, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University
- Moderator: Greg Newburn, Director of Criminal Justice, Niskanen Institute

**3:15 -3:30 pm                      BREAK**

**3:30-4:45 pm                      Closing Plenary Session: Protecting Faith and Community Spaces: Law Enforcement, Crime Analysis, and Community in Coordination**

Antisemitic incidents are at record levels. Anti-Muslim violence is rising. High-profile attacks on people in everyday spaces — houses of worship, community centers, public gathering places — are straining the systems built to protect them. What makes this threat environment especially challenging is that it doesn't hold still: analysts are tracking individuals who move across targets — faith communities, government buildings, law enforcement. Meeting this evolving threat environment requires more than technology or tactics. It requires sectors that historically have not shared the same table learning to work from the same playbook.

This closing plenary brings together three perspectives essential to that coordination: law enforcement, operating at the intersection of operational response and community trust; crime analysis, translating real-time intelligence and



fragmented data into actionable decisions across agencies and organizations; and a faith community leader, grounding the conversation in the human stakes and the realities facing congregations on the front lines.

Together, panelists will examine what effective cross-sector partnerships actually look like in practice — how threat information flows (or doesn't), where resource and communication gaps persist, and what it takes to build the kind of sustained relationships that make communities safer and stronger.

Speakers:

- David Carabin, Managing Director, Threat Management and Information Sharing, Secure Community Network
- Brandy Flack, Executive Director, Margolin Hebrew Academy, Memphis, TN
- Alberto Martinez, Director, Orange County, CA Intelligence Assessment Center and Vice President of the National Fusion Center Association
- Maria Cardiellos, Executive Director, IJIS Institute
- Moderator: Joseph Popcun, PhD, Executive Deputy Commissioner, New York Division of Criminal Justice Services

**4:45-5:30 pm                      Networking and Virtual Happy Hour**

Attendees are invited to gather by region (Northeast/Midwest/South and West) in a breakout room for conversation and games with fellow attendees, hosted by the NCJA’s Regional Chairs. Grab a drink or snack to enjoy during the session. Close out this year’s conference with food, fun and new friends.

Northeast Host: Joe Popcun (NY)

South Host: Caroline Farmer (NC)

Midwest Host: Lori Pesci (OH)

West Host: Tony Vidale (AZ)

