



The People's Priorities

An interim report on
People Budget Birmingham's
community survey on
budgetary priorities



PEOPLE'S BUDGET BIRMINGHAM

is a coalition composed of these member organizations





INTRODUCTION

The People’s Budget Birmingham coalition (PBB) sparked a public process of participatory budgeting, gathering input from the Birmingham community on their budgeting and spending priorities for the City in fiscal year 2021. This project emerged in response to a history of enduring an inaccessible, elitist, and non-transparent budgeting process. It is PBB’s belief that a budget *for* the public should be determined *by* the public, and that mechanisms of accountability should ensure that information is accessible to everyone, empowering community members to make informed decisions when selecting officials who manage their finances.

Here we present the People’s Priorities for FY2021. These priorities are based on 872 survey responses, 2.7 times more survey responses than gathered by the City for one of their most [recent community needs assessment](#). People from all districts in Birmingham participated, as well as other community stakeholders from the Birmingham-Metro area. Considering the implications of how the current proposed FY2021 budget underfunds communities during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the information presented here is even more important as it also contains information about respondents who are dealing with food, job, and housing insecurity.

An ongoing national uprising has occurred in response to police murders, with many Black-led organizations in Birmingham mobilizing huge numbers of people to demand the City “defund the police” – calling on city officials to redirect funds from already bloated police and policing budgets into our communities. In response to this call, Mayor Woodfin made the unconscionable decision to propose a budget that dramatically increases the police budget by \$11.2 million (\$104 million in total funding), while making severe deductions to libraries, public works, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. The Mayor also decided to indefinitely furlough approximately 400 employees, with no guarantee of ever being able to return to their positions. The Mayor’s priorities for investment and divestment as outlined in the FY2021 budget will damage our communities now, and will continue to devastate them well beyond 2021, compromising the future of our city.

This interim report presents the People’s Priorities – alternative funding priorities to the Mayor’s proposed FY2021 operations budget. **We believe that the people should speak and be heard by our elected officials.**



METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

Our document and data both reveal a clear referendum: **invest in universal needs** (e.g., housing security, public health/health care, mental health and wellness, etc.) and **divest from areas of unnecessary spending**, such as policing. **Here's a summary of our methodology and results:**

- **Hundreds of people engaged in the People's Budget Birmingham's survey**, which we used to develop a holistic picture of the community's funding priorities for fiscal year 2021. Out of the 872 responses, 690 respondents were from the Birmingham area.
- **Thousands of community members engaged in our participatory budgeting process in real time on Zoom and Facebook Live** – where we conducted community popular education sessions about the meaning, history, and importance of participatory budgeting, the budget process, and public hearings. Survey responses were also collected through an online platform, where community members could respond remotely.
- We structured a survey that weighed the results of budget priorities such as:
- **Neighborhood/Community Aid & Empowerment, Public Health and Crisis Management, Infrastructure and Public Works and Public Safety & Law Enforcement**, creating a mechanism for gathering public prioritization for each category.
 - The survey also identified sub-items within these larger budgeting categories that respondents. For example, after asking respondents about Community & Neighborhood empowerment, we also asked them to rank their priorities for housing security, economic assistance/empowerment, child & youth development, and neighborhood associations to gather a clearer picture of their prioritization of Community & Neighborhood Empowerment.

The respondents rank their top five budget item priorities as:

1. **Child and Youth Development** (e.g., public schools, after school programs, child care support, neighborhood youth programs, youth centers, etc.)
2. **Food Security** (e.g. access to healthy and affordable foods, food distribution, funding for community owned grocery stores, community owned farms)
3. **Alternative Criminal Justice Models** (e.g., job training and employment programs to reduce recidivism, community groups trained in early intervention for gang membership and violence, reparations to victims, etc.)
4. **Routine Mental Healthcare and Wellness** (e.g. family and individual counseling, access to mental health care professionals, mental health care crisis intervention, substance addiction support programs, etc.)
5. **Environmental Justice and Sustainable Living** (e.g., neighborhood clean-ups, addressing illegal dumping, air quality and toxic chemical monitoring and correction programs, recycling programs, cleaning our drinking water sources, renewable energy, etc.)



Many respondents were very clear about which budget items they are absolutely deprioritizing for fiscal year 2021:

- 45.8% designated they would give minimally invest or divest completely from Parking & Traffic enforcement
- 41.6 % identified they would minimally invest or divest completely from Police Department & Law enforcement
- The City Attorney's Office and the Municipal Court were also identified as two significant areas where divestment or minimal funding were preferred.

We implore the Mayor and Birmingham Council to take action and adopt a budget that aligns with the priorities of the people who they have been elected to represent.

TABLE INDEX

- **TABLE A – INVESTMENT AND DIVESTMENT PRIORITY RANKING**
 - The following table shows the top 10 investment and divestment priorities identified by respondents in the survey by ranking, with one (1) representing a top priority for investment or divestment and ten (10) representing the tenth priority for investment or divestment.
- **TABLE B – INVESTMENT VERSUS DIVESTMENT PRIORITIES: OVERALL CATEGORIES**
 - Table B represents a preference on a scale of zero (0) to three (3) for investment and divestment for four overall budgeting categories of Infrastructure & Public Works, Neighborhood/Community Aid & Empowerment, Public Health & Crisis Management, and Public Safety and law Enforcement. 0 represents complete divestment or minimal funding, while 3 represents a preference for maximum funding. The percent (%) represents the percent of total respondents who selected each 0, 1, 2, or 3.
- **TABLE C – INVESTMENT VERSUS DIVESTMENT PRIORITIES**
 - Table C shows several sub-categories under the original four budgeting categories (see Table B), and represents a preference on a scale of zero (0) to three (3) for investment and divestment. 0 represents complete divestment or minimal funding, while 3 represents a preference for maximum funding. The percent (%) represents the percent of total respondents who selected each 0, 1, 2, or 3.

TABLE A – INVESTMENT AND DIVESTMENT PRIORITIES RANKING

Ranking	Investment Priorities	Divestment Priorities
1	Child and Youth Development	Parking & Traffic Enforcement
2	Food Security	City Attorney’s Office
3	Alternative Criminal Justice Models	Municipal Court
4	Routine Mental Healthcare and Wellness	Police Department & Law Enforcement
5	Environmental Justice & Sustainable Living	Parks & Recreation
6	Housing Security	Community Investment & Neighborhood Empowerment
7	Healthcare and Mental Health Care Emergencies	Fire Department
8	Public Transportation	Public Works
9	Libraries	Public Health Crisis & Natural Disaster Response
10	Routine Healthcare & Wellness	Economic Assistance

TABLE B – INVESTMENT VERSUS DIVESTMENT PRIORITIES: OVERALL FUNDING CATEGORIES

Overall Funding Categories	Total # of Respondents	0	1	2	3
		(Divest/Maximum Defunding)			(Maximum Funding)
Infrastructure & Public Works	869	0.69%	7.83%	50.86%	40.62%
Neighborhood/Community Aid & Empowerment	872	2.41%	5.28%	28.30%	64.00%
Public Health & Crises Management	871	1.49%	4.59%	30.31%	63.61%
Public Safety & Law Enforcement	871	25.95%	35.71%	24.00%	14.35%

TABLE C – INVESTMENT VERSUS DIVESTMENT PRIORITIES
HIGHLIGHTED NUMBERS – FUNDING AREAS OF HIGH CONCERN

Category	Total # Respondents	0 (Divest/Maximum Defunding)	1	2	3 (Maximum Funding)
Alternative Criminal Justice Models	872	2.5%	4.2%	19.2%	74.1%
Child & Youth Development	872	0.9%	3.2%	16.4%	79.5%
City Attorney's Office	872	19.2%	47.1%	24.2%	9.5%
Community Investment & Neighborhood Empowerment	872	5.9%	20.9%	34.3%	39.0%
Economic Assistance	872	1.2%	6.5%	33.9%	58.4%
Environmental Justice	872	1.2%	7.5%	20.8%	70.6%
Fire Department	872	0.1%	8.8%	43.5%	47.6%
Food Security	872	1.7%	5.1%	16.2%	77.1%
Healthcare and Mental Healthcare Emergencies	872	0.9%	4.4%	28.2%	66.5%
Housing Security	872	1.5%	7.9%	20.5%	70.1%
Libraries	872	0.8%	9.8%	28.3%	61.1%
Municipal Court	872	18.0%	42.1%	29.7%	10.2%
Parking & Traffic Enforcement	872	45.8%	38.0%	10.1%	6.2%
Parks & Recreation	872	1.4%	15.0%	46.2%	37.4%
Police Department & Law Enforcement	872	41.6%	31.0%	13.8%	13.7%
Public Health Crisis & Natural Disaster Response	872	1.7%	9.6%	35.0%	53.7%
Public Transportation	872	1.4%	8.3%	25.0%	65.4%
Public Works	872	0.1%	9.4%	39.8%	50.7%
Routine Healthcare & Wellness	871	2.5%	7.9%	29.2%	60.4%
Routine Mental Healthcare & Wellness	872	2.4%	4.7%	21.3%	71.6%

REIMAGINING POLICING

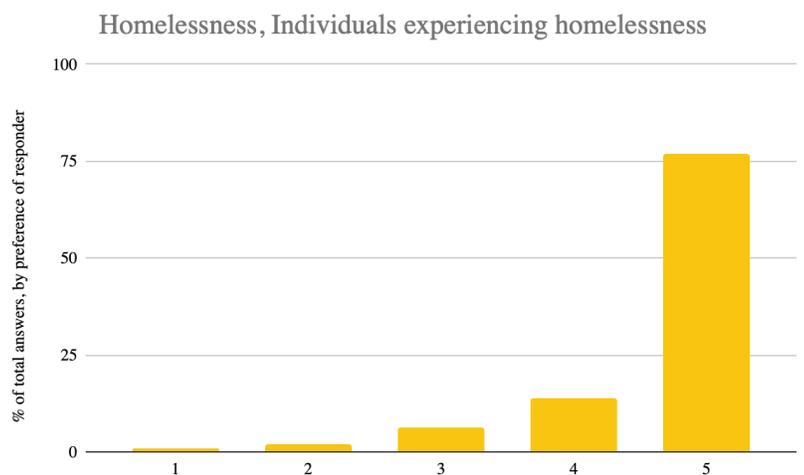
The People’s Budget Birmingham Survey asked respondents to elaborate on the types of police functions they would like to fund within the public safety budget. We asked respondents to rank on a spectrum (x-axis) one (1) representing the desire for police intervention and five (5) representing the desire for a non-police first responder (i.e.: social worker, mental health professional, community member, etc.). The y-axis represents the percent (%) of respondents. The data reveals that in every category, **at least 50% of all respondents preferred a non-police first responder** to traditional police intervention in that specified situation, including domestic violence situations and welfare checks. The detailed results are as follows:

Legend (x-axis)

- 1 – Preference for Police Response
- 2 – Mostly Police Response
- 3 – Mixed Preference for Police and Non-Police Response
- 4 – Mostly Non-Police Response
- 5 – Preference for Alternative Intervener/First Responder (non-police response)

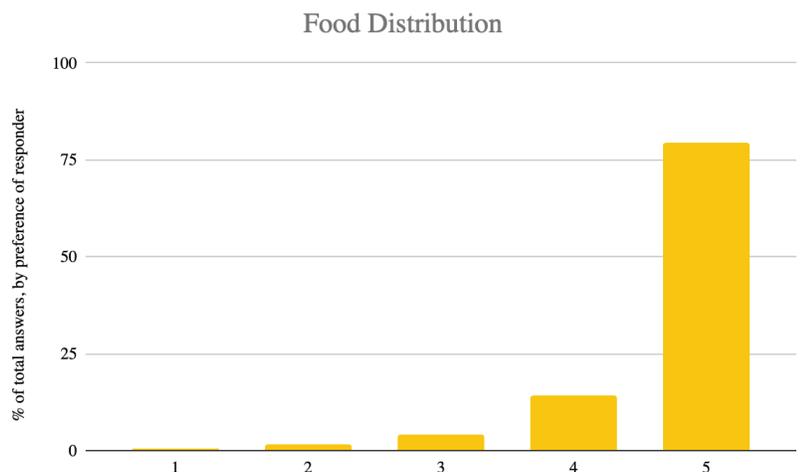
Addressing Homeless Issues

Many respondents (76%) feel strongly that there should be non-police employees handling issues related to homelessness. Only 1% feel that this should definitely be a task that police officers should perform.



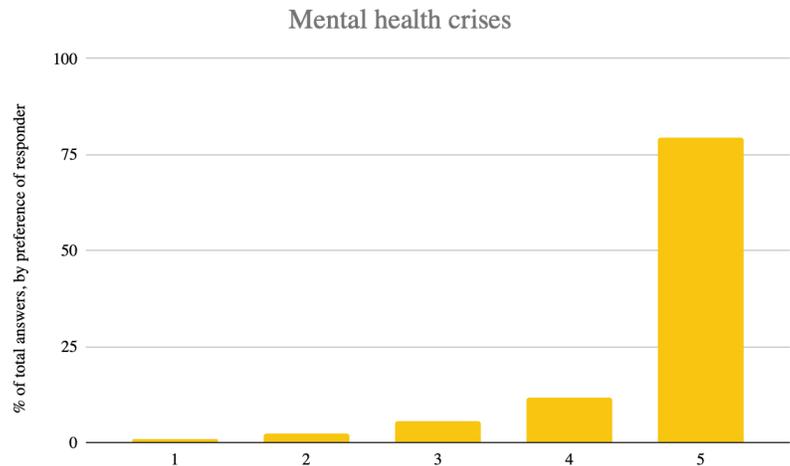
Food Distribution

Most respondents (79%) feel strongly that police should not have the role of distributing food in the community



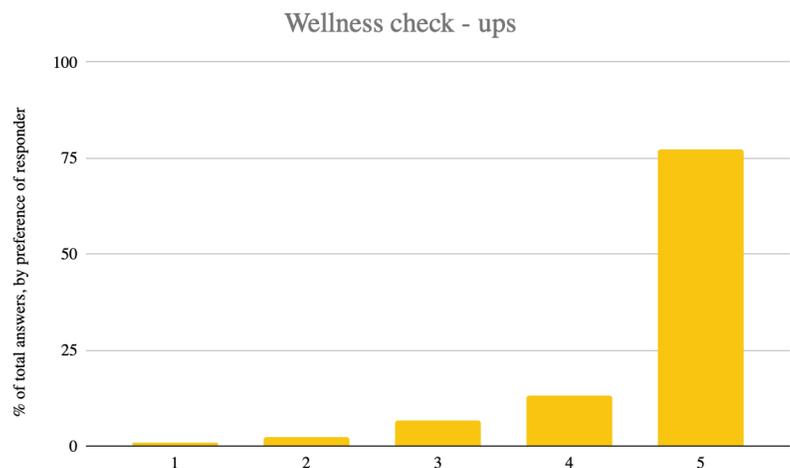
Mental Health

Although police are often called to respond to serious mental health crises, 79% of respondents believe strongly that mental health workers/behavioral and crisis specialists are best suited for those types of interventions.



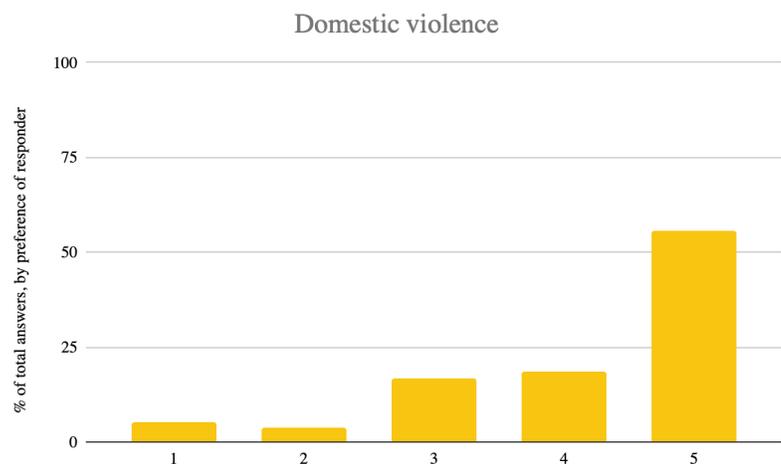
Wellness Checks

77% of respondents believe strongly that wellness-checks are something that armed-officials may not have to be designated for.



Domestic Violence

Domestic violence calls are very complex in social dynamics. At least 55% of respondents believe that intervention should be handled by a role other than police. Almost 20% percent of respondents seriously question the designation of armed officers intervening in these situations as opposed to trauma and crisis intervention specialists.



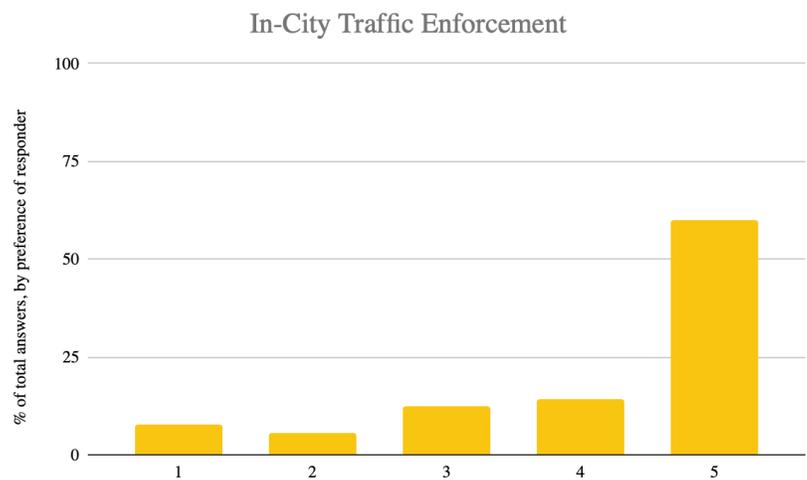
Parking Enforcement

53% of respondents strongly believe that parking employees can be used in lieu of police officers for any parking enforcement roles.



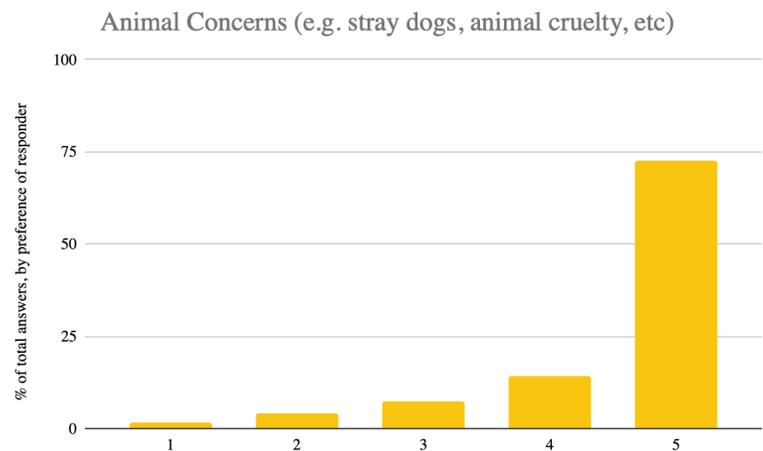
In-City Traffic Enforcement

65% of respondents believe that either traffic cameras or other officials can be used for in-city traffic enforcement. Almost 14% lean heavily towards this concept as well.



Animal Control

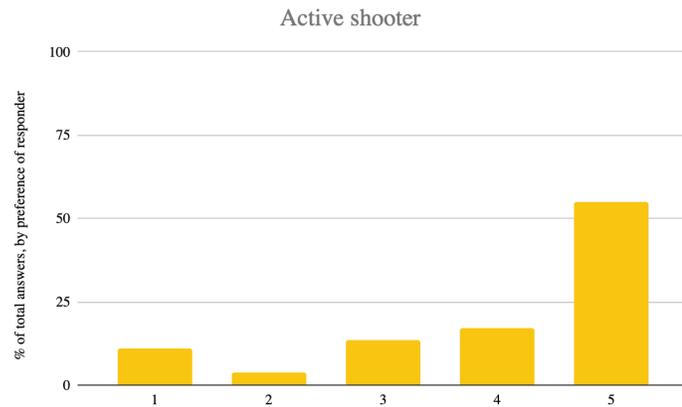
Over 72% of respondents believe that issues with animals should be handled by animal control employees and should be funded. Under 2% strongly believe that police should handle this duty.





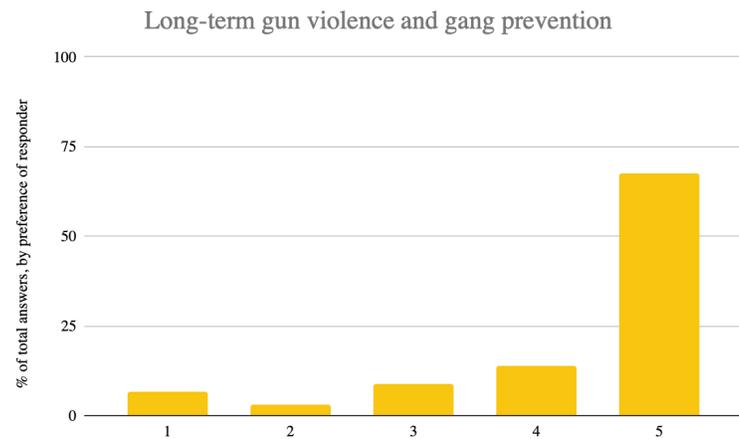
Active Shooter

55% respondents strongly believe that the city should use a rapid response team trained in de-escalation tactics for active shooters rather than any other way of responding to these scenarios.



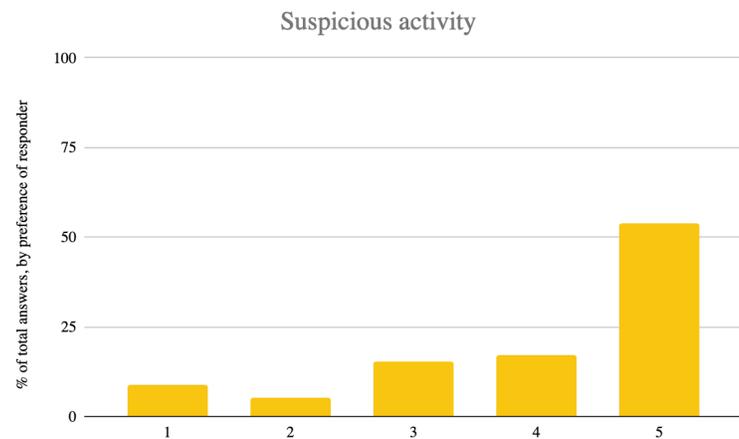
Long Term Gun Violence/Gang Intervention

Developed specialized intervention teams partnered with community groups are preferred over police officers to address gang activity and gang intervention/prevention.



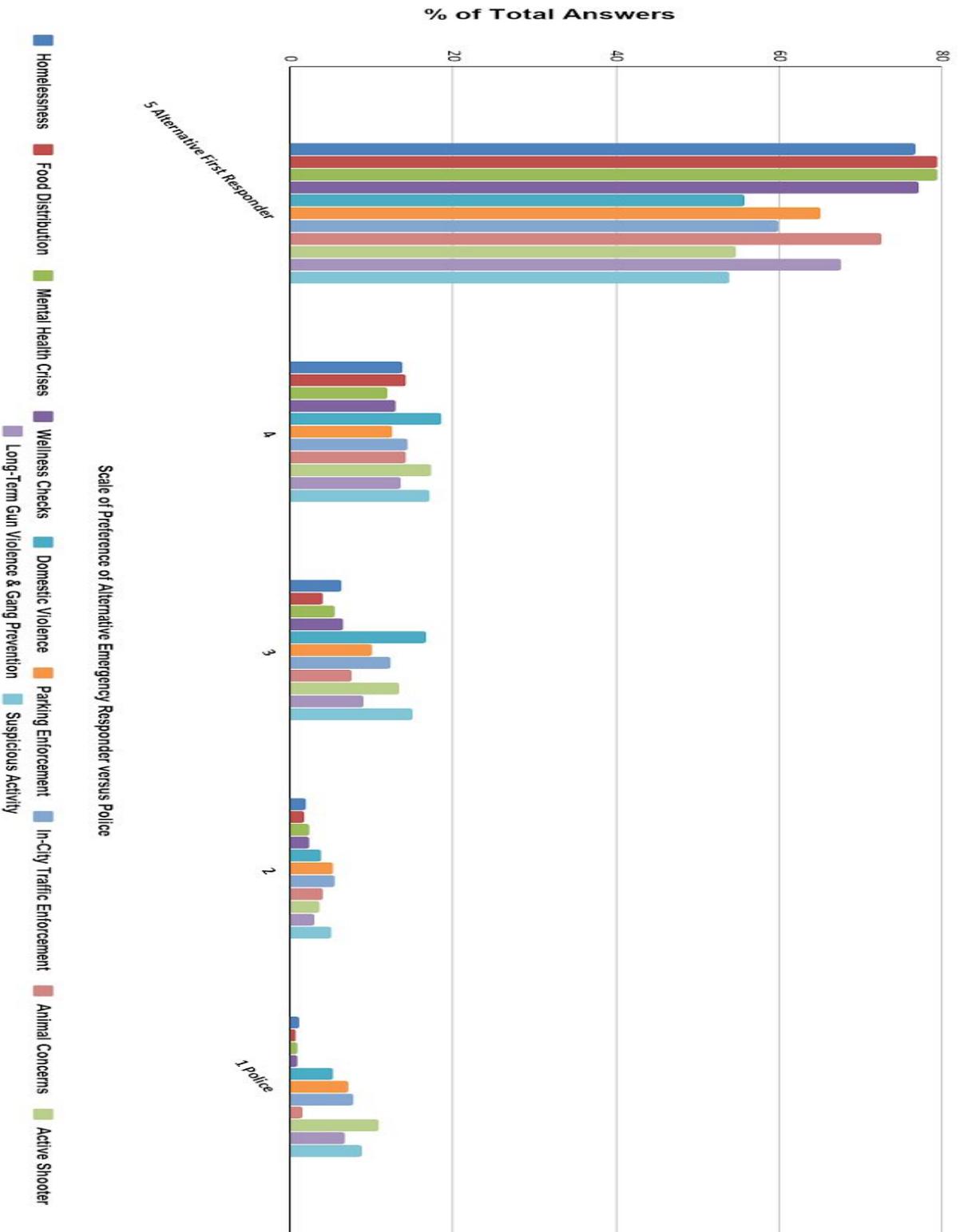
Suspicious activity

Un-armed neighborhood-based intervention groups are preferred as an intervention for “suspicious” activity.





Preference for Alternative Emergency Response Services v. Police





MOVING BIRMINGHAM FORWARD IN FISCAL YEAR 2021

ADOPT A PEOPLE'S BUDGET

We believe that the government should be responsive to the needs, priorities, and demands of the people. The City Charter enables Council to pass or reject the Mayor's budget proposal. In a democracy, the Council should listen to the will of the people and pass a People's Budget that centers the priorities that Birminghamians have listed as central to them. We ask that

- The **people are participants** in selecting budget priorities/adopt the people's budget
- The **process of public hearings and other mechanisms of transparency** be **administered in a way that is accessible** to everyone regardless of ability, race, gender, sexual orientation, social economic status, language, proximity to power, or other factors that exclude.
- The **budget be presented and available** in a way in which citizens will have access to the information without unnecessary burden
- The city **adopt of practice of participatory budgeting**
- The **city respond to requests for budget information** in a timely fashion before public hearings

ABOUT PEOPLE'S BUDGET BIRMINGHAM

The People's Budget Birmingham is a coalition of eight community organizations:

- Adelante Alabama Workers Center
- Birmingham Earth Coalition
- Black Lives Matter Birmingham Chapter
- Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)- Birmingham
- Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust
- Faith & Works
- S.W.E.E.T Alabama (Sustainable Water, Energy, and Economic Transition in Alabama)
- When We Fight

Our fight for a People's Budget has engaged the residents of Birminghamians in a way that has likely never been done before. More people are paying attention than ever. We are just getting started in the fight for transparency, participation, and accountability!

For more information find us at:

Website: <https://peoplesbudgetbirmingham.org/>

Facebook: People's Budget Birmingham (@peoplesbudgetbirmingham)

Instagram: @peoplebudgetbhm

Twitter: @PeopleBudgetBHM

Email: peoplesbudgetbham@gmail.com

– People's Budget Birmingham Coalition