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Public Safety Funds: Where Are They Going?

BOSTON – A new report underscores the lack of clarity around how federal and state public safety grants are distributed to Massachusetts cities and towns. [Where Are Public Safety Funds Going?](#), a new study published by Pioneer Institute, recommends changes to how to track these funds and ensure fair and data-driven distribution, as well as accountability for resulting improvements on key public safety measures.

In 2001, after the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, which distributes public safety funds to state and local governments, local administrators turned their attention to the distribution of funds. They also questioned the rationale for the allocation of funds across a range of communities rather than a need-based system. This discord came at a time when state and federal funds were being directed towards national defense efforts, resulting in a near eradication of discretionary grant funds for local public safety needs.

In Massachusetts, direct access to state and federal grants by local public safety leaders is impacted by the homeland security focus and the idea that regional distribution was the most logical way to allocate funds. In truth, the concept of regional approaches to public safety and funding allocation in the Massachusetts public safety context is not common. Over the past decade, the change in the level and nature of grant funds available to local public safety agencies and the method in which funds are distributed has been significant.

“It may not be surprising that the City of Boston receives the bulk of the money,” said author Dr. Brenda J. Bond. “However, we did find that Boston and the Metropolitan area receive more money per capita than any other area of the state.”

The [study](#), authored by Dr. Bond and research assistant Gabrielle Aynwylde, makes it clear that future research and policymaking would benefit from a more specified and standardized definition of public safety. Rather than group a variety of matters into one category, the study suggests that a narrower criterion be defined to facilitate measurement. Also, data on the amount of grant funds received and clarity on which agency received them would be more useful if it were coupled with data on the impact these resources are having at a local level.

Finally, the study concludes that a centralized agency to track public safety grant funds at the state level is necessary to understand the public safety funds and for what purposes they are being used. The absence of a link between funding and outcomes makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the strategies that address public safety issues.

“This would enable a strategic use of much-needed resources instead of a fragmented distribution that results in an inefficient use of funds and undesirable outcomes,” stated Maria Ortiz Perez, Pioneer’s Program Manager for Middle Cities and Transparency Initiatives.



[Pioneer Institute](#) is an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization that seeks to change the intellectual climate in the Commonwealth by supporting scholarship that tests marked solutions against the conventional wisdom of more governmental involvement in Massachusetts public policy issues.