



June 26, 2020

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007
Via Email

Speaker Corey Johnson
City Hall
New York, NY 10007
Via Email

NYC Councilmembers
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007
Via Email

Re: Cuts to NYPD Budget and Investing in Communities

Dear Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Johnson, and City Councilmembers:

This week, the city’s public defender offices joined hundreds of organizations to call on Mayor de Blasio and the City Council to cut at least \$1 billion from the NYPD’s expense budget for FY 2021 **and** to redirect those resources to the communities of color across New York City that have been devastated by over-policing and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor de Blasio’s proposed budget for FY 2021 leaves the NYPD’s budget untouched while making deep cuts to social and human services. We write now to reiterate our support for shifting much-needed funds from the NYPD’s budget to investments in the city’s Black, Latinx, and other communities of color. We offer our unique perspective as the public defenders who work for and represent people directly impacted by the NYPD’s violent policing.

Our clients are disproportionately stopped, ticketed, arrested, and punished because of the color of their skin and the communities in which they live. As public defenders, we see firsthand how the NYPD undermines public safety, perpetuating and exacerbating the conditions that trap people in a cycle of poverty and criminal legal system involvement through Broken Windows

policing. We witness how targeted policing of communities of color reinforces state violence that too often costs Black and Latinx New Yorkers their lives. And now the general public has witnessed these atrocities, too. In recent weeks, viral videos of police officers violently abusing their power have increased the broader public's awareness of what Black and Latinx New Yorkers have long known: It is long past time for transformative change.

New Yorkers recognize that bold action is necessary. Transformative change must start with divesting at least \$1 billion directly from the NYPD's almost \$6 billion FY21 expense budget, but it cannot end there. We must dramatically shrink the footprint of law enforcement and reverse our decades-long defunding of social services and public infrastructure. It's time to reject the impulse to arrest, punish, and incarcerate our way out of complex social problems. It hasn't worked. Instead, as [recommended by Communities United for Police Reform](#), New York City must invest in "strong, accessible, and culturally competent systems and infrastructure that center the needs of low-income Black, Latinx, and other communities of color."

Over the last few weeks, we have seen the beginnings of a reckoning with our country's white supremacist history. The deaths of Black Americans killed at the hands of police officers — like George Floyd, Breona Taylor, Tony McDade, and Eric Garner — have led to unprecedented calls for police accountability and a wholesale reimagining of the role of the police. Likewise, the lack of justice for Layleen Polanco, a transgender Afro-Latinx woman who died of a seizure in solitary confinement on Rikers Island, and other outrageous tragedies prompted tens of thousands across the country to rally for Black trans lives. In the midst of a pandemic that has highlighted and exacerbated the harms caused by centuries of institutionalized racism, New Yorkers have taken to the streets to protest not only recent instances of police brutality, but also a legacy of deep structural inequity. We stand in solidarity with these protesters. We are these protesters. This mass movement has already inspired Speaker Johnson and others in the City Council to propose significant cuts to the NYPD's budget. We echo Communities United for Police Reform in calling for at least \$1 billion in cuts directly from NYPD's FY 2021 expense budget, without moving officers to other agencies or counting budgets outside of the NYPD expense budget. We are especially concerned that Mayor de Blasio has so far rejected calls for transformative change to the NYPD budget, despite having run a campaign centered on racial justice.

In the past few months, we have seen our clients face new challenges — fatalities, hospitalization, inability to access healthcare, and pronounced economic insecurity — while still living with the discriminatory and abusive policing of their communities. As the city finalizes the FY 2021 Budget, it must prioritize the communities hardest hit by COVID-19. The NYPD's bloated budget has not made NYC safer. We call on Mayor de Blasio and City Council to cut at

least \$1 billion from the NYPD's budget and to shift those funds to crucial services and programs that center the needs of our city's most marginalized communities.

Sincerely,

The Bronx Defenders
Brooklyn Defender Services
Legal Aid Society
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
New York County Defender Services
Queens Defenders