New York City Council, Committee on Public Safety
Oversight Hearing on Community Policing in NYC
March 3, 2015
Testimony submitted by Keeshan Harley, Member of Make the Road New York

Dear New York City Council Members:

Thank You for inviting me here to testify today. My name is Keeshan Harley, I am here as a youth leader of Make the Road New York (MRNY), though I am also here representing Communities united for Police Reform (CPR) and Researchers for Fair Policing (RFP).

The massive mobilizations that we have seen in New York City and across the country should come as no surprise. For the last two years, I have participated in documenting the decrease of legitimacy and trust between communities of color and the New York Police Department (NYPD). This research has happened through a partnership between Make the Road New York and The Public Science Project at The CUNY Graduate Center. Our youth research is a comprehensive study with the purpose of understanding experiences with and attitudes of police with a specific focus on youth. We collectively designed a survey that was distributed in NYC schools as well as online. 1,084 surveys were collected from youth ages 14-25. Other methods included focus groups and a research archive that included writing, art, documentary shorts and video interviews/testimonials.

Our research relied on both quantitative and qualitative methods, was deeply collaborative, and was motivated by a desire to understand New Yorkers' everyday experiences of being policed and to envision what "fair policing" might look like in our neighborhoods.

Key Findings:

Communities of color report experiencing persistent and aggressive policing.
For nearly two decades the NYPD has been practicing a style of policing that focuses on minor offenses and misdemeanors arrests. Often referred to as "order-maintenance" or "zero tolerance" or "Broken Windows" policing, it relies on the frequent use of surveillance practices such as "stop and frisks", asking for ID, or preventing people to publically assemble (asking them to "move along"). By removing what is understood as "disorder", the NYPD argues these techniques maintain order and prevent incidents of serious crime – though there is little evidence.

In 2011, the NYPD recorded almost 700,000 police stops citywide (nearly all – 88% - had done nothing wrong). These stops amounted to very little considering the disruption and sense of violation they caused. Our survey confirmed this level of police contact and gave us insight into how frequent, violent, and disrespectful these encounters are for many residents living in "high crime" neighborhoods (See table below). Not only do aggressive policing strategies like these violate individual freedoms, they eat away at residents' ability to connect with each other, to socialize, and build community.

Researchers for Fair Policing Survey	Percentages reflect youth experiences from 2010 to 2013 or 2014
The following two rows provide data about **witnessing police activity** and provide an indication how common police activity is in the respondents' communities.	
88%	% who witnessed someone getting stopped by police in the neighborhood
71%	% who witnessed family or friends stopped by police in the neighborhood
The following four rows provide data about **personal experiences of police surveillance** and provide an indication of both the variation and regularity of this level of police scrutiny.	
52%	% stopped by police at least once
76%	If stopped, % stopped by police more than once
27%	% asked to show identification in or just outside their apartment

58%	% asked to move by police
The following four rows provide data about the proportion of **people stopped by police within marginalized categories** and provide evidence that this is not only a young black male issue.	
39%	% women who were stopped by police
52%	% identified as LGBTQ who were stopped by police
43%	% undocumented who were stopped by police
73%	% recently homeless who were stopped by police
The following three rows provide data about the **types of negative contact** with police and provide evidence for strained police community relationships among some residents.	
31%	% who were spoken to disrespectfully by police
20%	% who experienced extreme physical force by police
9%	% who experienced inappropriate sexual harassment/violence

Communities of color express mistrust, fear, and anger towards the NYPD.

In NYC, aggressive policing is disproportionately practiced in communities of color and commonly understood within these communities as discriminatory and abusive. The police are in the hallways of their apartment buildings, in schools, subway stations, and streets.

One participant observed, *"They target blacks and they target Latinos. Sometimes I see 30-40 police around this neighborhood, and they're just harassing everybody they could find."* People report fearing involvement with the criminal justice system every time they set foot outside their apartment door, whether it's to go to work, spend time with loved ones, or run an errand to a store or bank. One youth participant stated, *"It makes me feel like I shouldn't even come outside anymore if I'm just gonna get harassed by a policeman that's supposed to be protecting me."*

There is awareness that policing is not uniform and equitable across the City, and residents ask questions like, "Why is it considered disorder when people drink alcohol on a South Bronx stoop but not when they drink alcohol on a blanket in Central Park?" Our surveys captured some of these negative sentiments (See the tables below.)

Researchers for Fair Policing Survey	Percentages reflect youth experiences from 2010 to 2013 or 2014
The following five rows provide data on attitudes about **abuse of power and authority** and help provide evidence for lack of legitimacy by many residents.	
65%	% who believe police abuse power
66%	% who feel the police discriminate
50%	% who feel police are unfair
84%	% who feel targeted by police
59%	% who feel that when people get stopped they usually did nothing wrong
The following five rows provide data on attitudes about **diminished trust and respect** and help provide evidence for a weakened sense of legitimacy by many residents.	
55%	% who feel police are dishonest
50%	% who feel police create problems
50%	% who feel police are untrustworthy
48%	% who feel police are poor role models
57%	% who feel dissatisfied with police's job

Unfavorable attitudes like these were commonly reported in our studies, revealing delicate community police relationships. Across our research, youth and adults describe the heavy toll aggressive policing has taken both on individuals and communities. Participants in our studies repeatedly expressed a deep frustration with police and a strong desire for change.

Key Considerations

1. **Investing in community development is an important strategy for police reform**.
Public safety is not solely about policing and the criminal justice system. Public safety involves vibrant schools, living-wage jobs, affordable housing, and overall socio-economic investment in low income and communities of color. Increased police surveillance and control does little to address the deeper roots of community safety. At the same time that people of color are being policed on an everyday basis, rents are going up while paychecks are not, families are being displaced from their neighborhoods, and school discipline and suspension rates are increasing while graduation rates are decreasing. With this in mind, our research suggests using an assets-based approach to strengthening communities and building capacity.

2. **The everyday experience of policing impacts the whole community.**
Policing is not only focused on young men of color, but experienced collectively as a community under siege. Our research demonstrates the intense police presence in the everyday spaces of people's lives, most importantly the home, school and neighborhood public spaces. Our research also shows the impact of policing upon family members, mothers who worry about their sons, little brothers & sisters watching their big brother handcuffed and grandmothers answering the door to the police. The over policing of communities tears the fabric of community relationships and creates a hostile environment. At the same time, not only are young men of color targeted by the police, our research demonstrates the discriminatory policing of other community members, including LGBTQ, young people, women, undocumented community members, homeless people, and Muslims.

3. **Repairing trust between individuals, communities, and police requires addressing systemic racism in policing practices and policies.**
Our research demonstrates that communities of color desire "respectful and dignified" not "discriminatory and biased" policing on both an individual and structural level. It's not a matter of a "few bad apples" in the police force. When communities experience negative police activity on the street, all positive activity remembered disappear.
[Hillard, 2003: It takes ten positive interactions to balance one negative encounter.]

4. **Communities of color must be included in a democratic process of influence and oversight on how they are policed.**
A collaborative approach needs to be developed to support community involvement in policing. Some of these structures already exist and need to be reformed to facilitate careful, meaningful citizen engagement in how communities are policed. A first step includes revitalizing the broken Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB). A second step involves facilitating structured conversations that promote higher levels of thinking on policing. It is not enough to simply hold town halls for community feedback sessions.

Thank You again for the opportunity to testify today.