Good afternoon. My name is Natalia Aristizabal, Deputy Director at Make the Road New York. On behalf of our 27,000+ working class immigrant members and staff, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today and to express our outrage that the Mayor has proposed increasing the NYPD's budget for FY2025 while cutting essential programming such as libraries, education, and youth programming that are critical to true public safety. We urge the City Council and the Mayor to listen to New Yorkers, substantially cut the NYPD budget, and re-direct that funding to community-based programming and infrastructure.

The Mayor’s proposed NYPD budget comes at a high-water mark of scapegoating of immigrant communities, including in New York City. We remind the Council that New York City is a city of immigrants who strengthen[[1]](#footnote-0) our city. Welcoming immigrants is core to who we are as New Yorkers. We also want to be clear that in spite of anti-immigrant messaging[[2]](#footnote-1), there is no evidence[[3]](#footnote-2) of a “migrant crime wave” in New York City.

Despite this reality, the NYPD press/communications team has issued misleading press statements which stoke fear about immigrants and lead to anti-immigrant bias. In one recent example, in January of this year, the NYPD issued statements and edited footage about the so-called Times Square brawl in which the NYPD claimed that immigrants attacked officers after refusing to disperse. However, as *The City*[[4]](#footnote-3) and *NY Mag*[[5]](#footnote-4) reported, recently released body-cam footage contradicts the NYPD’s narrative. Rather than proving an “immigrant crime wave” as the NYPD suggested, the footage shows that the immigrant man at the center of the incident had been walking away when a NYPD officer grabbed him by the collar and rammed him against a wall. Unfortunately, by the time this body-cam footage was released, the NYPD’s original narrative had already taken hold, unjustly fueling anti-immigrant rhetoric.

One area of the NYPD budget that we urge the Council to cut is its press/communication office, which is responsible for such misinformation and which helps fuel the myths of crime waves that lead to overinflated police budgets in the first place. We urge the Council to cut the NYPD’s press/communications budget by at least 50%.

More generally, we urge the Council to substantially reduce the NYPD’s overall budget and send the NYPD a clear message that its record of violence, obstruction, overspending, and refusal to fire officers who unjustly kill, brutalize and violate the rights of New Yorkers is unacceptable. Without accountability, we fear that the NYPD will continue to be emboldened to act violently and with impunity, harming all New Yorkers, including our newest members. For example, just last week, a NYPD officer beat and used a stun gun against a father holding his 1-year-old baby at a Queens shelter for recently-arrived immigrants[[6]](#footnote-5). Everyone should be appalled by this. No matter how long someone has called New York home, they deserve to be treated with compassion and care – not stun guns and separation.

We also want to express our alarm that, at a moment when violent crime rates on our subways are at historic lows,[[7]](#footnote-6) the Mayor has announced randomized bag checks of subway travelers. As we saw during the Giuliani era, over-policing such as stop and frisk and bag checks do not make us more safe, and instead lead to greater harassment of Black and brown New Yorkers. In fact, just last week, the Data Collaborative for Justice at CUNY's John Jay School issued a report[[8]](#footnote-7) showing that in the past ten years, racial disparities in policing remain widespread in NYC and, in some cases, have worsened. We urge the Council to stand up to regressive police tactics through this budgetary process and affirm that all New Yorkers, especially vulnerable ones like immigrant New Yorkers, have the right to travel freely on the subway without the fear of randomized searches.

As an organization that frequently takes to the streets to make sure our communities’ voices are heard about important issues such as environmental justice, housing, immigrant rights, LGTBQ rights, and policing, we also want to urge the City to disband the NYPD’s Strategic Response Group (“SRG”). The SRG is widely known as the most violent division in the NYPD when it comes to responding to protests and has harassed, assaulted, and unconstitutionally arrested protestors, legal observers, and members of the press during mass protests. The SRG’s illegal practices have resulted in numerous lawsuits leading to historic payouts[[9]](#footnote-8) to plaintiffs, but little or no consequences to the NYPD itself. We urge the City to defend New Yorkers’ First Amendment rights and hold the NYPD accountable for its own illegal activity by defunding and disbanding the SRG.

Finally, I want to end by noting that our budget is a moral document and should not only reflect what we stand against but also what we stand for: investing in our communities. I want to uplift the testimony of youth leaders with Make the Road NY’s Youth Power Project, who appeared before the Council this Monday and spoke about the dire need to reinvest the over 400M spent on school policing towards restorative justice, mental health support, counselors, social workers and community schools - services and support young people need to succeed and thrive. We urge the Council to listen to young people who are calling for an immediate hiring freeze of school police, elimination of the vacant school police positions and redirect those resources to those supports. As youth leader and Staten Island 8th grader Juliett Da-Cruz testified on Monday, “The safest and most welcoming schools have the most resources NOT the most police. It’s past time to take action and listen to the youth - look at Chicago and Oakland - they did it. Why can’t we?. New York needs to step up and lead the way.”[[10]](#footnote-9)

Juliett is right: NYC needs to step up and lead the way. On behalf of Make the Road NY’s 27,000+ working class immigrant members and staff, I urge you to take bold and immediate action to substantially cut the NYPD budget, and make deep and sustained investments in creating strong, healthy and safe communities.

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3. Cusicanqui, Ashley, *CBS 6 Albany*. “Despite recent NYC assault, studies show immigration actually improves public safety” (February 9, 2024), available at <https://cbs6albany.com/news/local/despite-recent-nyc-assault-studies-show-immigration-actually-improves-public-safety>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Hogan, Gwenn, *The City*. “New Videos Contradict NYPD Account of Lead-Up to Times Square Attack on Cops”(February 8, 2024), available at <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/02/08/times-square-migrants-arrests-body-camera-footage-contradicts-nypd-account/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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7. Robbins, Christopher, *Hell Gate*. “Hochul Is Sending the National Guard Into the Subway to Search Your Bag Because of Vibes” (March 6, 2024), available at <https://hellgatenyc.com/hochul-national-guard-subway-bag-search> . [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Koppel, Stephen and Rempel, Michael. (2024). Assessing Progress in Reducing Racial Disparities in New York City Law Enforcement, 2013-2022. New York, NY: *Data Collaborative for Justice, John Jay College of Criminal Justice*, available at <https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Law_Enforcement_Tools_Final.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Offenhartz, Jake. *NBC New York*. “NYC agrees to pay $13 million to George Floyd protesters arrested, beaten by NYPD” (July 20, 2023), available at <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/nyc-agrees-to-pay-13m-to-george-floyd-protesters-arrested-beaten-by-nypd/4520642/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. X (“Twitter”), Make the Road NY (March 18, 2024), available at <https://twitter.com/MaketheRoadNY/status/1769856467853574519>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)