Good afternoon everyone, **my name is Aaliyah Guillory-Nickens.** I currently work as the Campaign Organizer at Youth Represent which is a non profit organization that provides free legal services and mental health support to young people under the age of 26. Additionally, we work on policy and legislation that will help youth in the legal system while also supporting young people who have or haven’t been system impacted to become civically engaged, and training them to become advocates in their community. I’m here today to echo the demands of my comrades at Communities United for Police Reform, which is to cut the NYPD's budget and reallocate that money into the community.In addition I’m also here to express my frustration as a young person living in the city and seeing no efforts to improve public safety for people that look like me but only the continuous use of politricks and playing w people’s lives as if we’re in a video game.

I first want to address the narrative that young people in New York is what’s driving crime or anything alluding to Raise the Age being the reason for any increase in crime. I want to debunk that narrative and ask that the Council do everything in their power to provide jobs, housing and other resources for young New Yorkers that come from neighborhoods like Harlem, East Flatbush, Brownsville, East New York, the South Bronx and other underserved communities. Something I’m going to mention later is what’s driving crime is not people, especially not young people (we need to stop scapegoating them) it’s the lack of adequate resources needed to survive. Nobody wakes up with intentions to commit a crime but unfortunately we are living in a time right now where it’s survival of the fittest and people are being forced to do anything to survive. And instead of giving assistance to them they are being penalized and thrown in headlines as the problem. They are not the problem. The City is not taking enough steps to provide youth in New York with what they need to thrive so all the comments about youth driving crime needs to be kept to a minimum until New York City and the mayor prioritizes its youth.

In the fiscal year of 2023 the NYPD over-spent their budget by more than 1 billion dollars. In 2023 there were 92,879 homeless people in NYC, including 33,399 homeless children. **First example of our priorities not being in the right place.** For the fiscal year of 2025 the NYPD’s preliminary budget is 300 million dollars more of what the Adam’s administration proposed this same time last year. This is all while the Adam’s administration is proposing cuts to libraries, education, ATI programs, prevention programs, and services (all things that help create safer neighborhoods). **Second example of our priorities not being in the right place.**  Right now our city has reached a point where it’s almost unsuitable to live. New Yorkers are struggling with housing, jobs, food, education, battles mentally and we repeatedly pour millions of dollars into the NYPD that have a terrible track record in black and brown communities of keeping us safe.

We are anticipating that for fiscal year 2025 that ends. The first step that the council and the Mayor can take to create a safer and livable New York City is to prioritize care, not criminalization and invest don’t arrest. That would mean to block any budgeted increase of NYPD uniformed headcount and move those funds to real safety infrastructure (including: housing, schools, libraries, and non-police anti-violence programs). It would also mean removing NYPD from youth engagement and city youth programming/services and redirect those funds to youth organizations and community groups that engage in youth organizing, one being Youth Represent. This is my second/third year on staff at Youth Represent and before joining staff I was a 17 year old in High School part of their public speaking training program called YSI which I graduated from. I’m now 21 years old in college studying Criminal Justice fortunate enough to do what Youth Represent did for me which is give youth an opportunity to become leaders. These programs and organizations are doing the work and it is effective, the problem is they are not being funded correctly.

The people who live in the city aren't what’s making the city unsafe, it's the people who are running the city that are making it unsafe. The longer we neglect the needs of people the longer we will never be able to achieve public safety, and public safety is not cops, public safety is community investments. **Again public safety does not equal cops, public safety equals community investments.** To reiterate what these community investments may look like they include fully funding education, investing in restorative justice, counselors, and social workers in schools. It includes employing trained mental health workers and community-based mental health services and programs that can provide general mental health services for people suffering from mental health issues. It includes moving funds into affordable housing and of course it includes providing more jobs that have livable wages and good benefits for New Yorkers.

Thank you all for listening and I hope that sooner rather than later our demands are met so we as a city can meet true public safety.