

**Written Testimony of Communities United for Police Reform (CPR)
New York City Council Committee on Public Safety
May 20th, 2024
Public Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025**

Thank you to Public Safety Committee Chair Yusef Salaam, Public Safety Committee members, and Councilmembers who are concerned about the NYPD budget. My name is Ileana Mendez-Peñate and I am speaking on behalf of Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) is a campaign to end discriminatory policing practices in New York that has monitored and challenged police abuse for over a decade.

The Adams administration has consistently allowed NYPD spending to far exceed its budget while proposing cuts to life-affirming services like early childhood education, libraries, mental health services, migrant services, youth programs and community-led gun violence prevention programs. This preferential treatment hurts New Yorkers and this budget cycle presents an opportunity for the Committee on Public Safety to support a safer New York City by decreasing NYPD budget bloat, curbing overspending, firing abusive officers and making more city funds available for critical services and programs that will help New Yorkers thrive. To create a safer New York City, we call on the City Council and Mayor to take these eight actions during the current budget cycle:

1. Freeze the hiring of school police, cut all funding for vacant school police positions, and invest more heavily in restorative justice, mental health services, and other non-policing practices that help students thrive;
2. Disband the Strategic Response Group (SRG);
3. End the use of police officers in mental health co-response teams and increase funding for programs that strength non-police mental health response;
4. Cut NYPD's press budget by at least 50% including the Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Public Information (DCPI) and other NYPD press or communications infrastructure;
5. End the cruel sweeps of homeless sweeps and remove NYPD from homeless outreach teams;
6. Cut police positions in other agencies, including the Department of Parks & Recreation and Department of Homeless Services;
7. Remove NYPD from youth engagement as well as city youth programing and services;

8. And prevent any further increase in NYPD headcount and invest in evidenced safety solutions like housing, schools, libraries, and non-police anti-violence programs.

New Yorkers need the City Council to intervene on their behalf to make sure that the NYPD's spending is reigned in, especially as so many New Yorkers are struggling. We need the City Council to cut NYPD units that are notoriously abusive, harm New Yorkers, and make the city less safe for everyone and also reign in Mayor Adams police-first approaches to public health issues like mental health and homelessness.. The only way to do this is for the Council to be willing to reduce the NYPD's massive, opaque, and unaccountable budget as part of an overall budget justice strategy.

Freeze the hiring of school police and cut all funding for vacant school police positions: The current mayoral administration has chosen to increase the school policing budgets by \$400 million while cutting school budgets by \$1 billion. Repeatedly, research on public schools has shown that school policing is racially biased and plays an integral role in the school-to-prison pipeline - a trend in which youth are funneled from public schools into the prison system. The presence of police in schools increases the likelihood that students are referred to police for offenses that historically were handled by teachers and school officials.¹ This is especially true for Black and Latinx students in New York City who are much more likely than white students to be arrested or even physically harmed by police. Instead of treating young people like criminals, we call on the mayor and the city to prioritize care by securing a hiring freeze on school cops that does not allow NYPD to fill attrition and by cutting funding for the remaining vacant school cop positions. The funding from these divestments should be used to expand restorative justice practices as well as mental health services and ensure that all schools have counselors and social workers.

Disband the Strategic Response Group (SRG): SRG has primarily served as a tool for suppressing the right to protest of Black and Latinx communities. Groups like NYCLU and Human Rights Watch have monitored and reported on the SRG's capacity for violence as well their racially biased silencing of protestors.² SRG has gone so far as to allow white supremacist counter protestors to commit acts of violence unimpeded and

¹ Jason P. Nance, Students, Police, and the School-To-Prison Pipeline, 93 Wash. U. L. Rev. 919 (2016). https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol93/iss4/6

² NYCLU's protest monitoring team compiled footage of 70 protests between May 2020 and January 2021 - documenting 39 incidents of arrest, 23 instances of kettling, and 25 instances of using force including pepper spray, baton beatings, and even the use of bicycles as weapons. Timeline of NYPD violence against protestors.

<https://www.nyclu.org/en/campaigns/new-york-police-transparency-database/new-york-police-department/timeline-nypd-violence-against-protesters>.

"Kettling" protestors in the Bronx.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/30/kettling-protesters-bronx/systemic-police-brutality-and-its-costs-unit-ed-states>. September 30, 2020.

even escort Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes to his car.³ SRG is a militarized force that has no place in New York City. It must be disbanded and former SRG officers who are placed in other units must not be allowed to carry out SRG functions. It is imperative that NYPD is not allowed to create a new SRG by a different name.

End the use of police officers in mental health co-response teams: People in crisis need mental health workers who respond without violence and connect them to resources. They do not need police. When police respond to mental health crises, the risks are far too great. In 2021, there were at least 104 people who were killed by police because they were “behaving erratically or having a mental health crisis.”⁴ Co-response teams have also been ineffective in connecting people facing crisis to mental healthcare. According to publicly available data, the NYPD Mental Health co-response teams were only able to connect people to services 32% of the time. This outcome data pales in comparison to mental health teams composed strictly of mental health professionals – such teams have a 98% success rate of getting people connected to services. Given its inefficacy and the potential for unnecessary violence, NYPD Mental Health Co-Response teams should not exist and the NYPD should play no role in mental health response. Instead, more funds should be allocated to non-NYPD programs that create and strengthen non-police mental health responses.

Cut NYPD’s press budget by at least 50%: NYPD’s outsized public relations and communications budget has afforded them the capacity to spread misinformation about public policies and use public resources to support their political agenda. NYPD spent over \$Even more taxpayer money is spent on the NYPD spin machine via the Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Public Information, but the exact cost to New Yorkers is hidden and nested under larger budget items, making it nearly impossible for New Yorkers to understand how much monies are being spent by the NYPD spin machine.⁵ Members of CPR as well as members of City Council have seen firsthand how the NYPD exploits public resources to create confusion around public policies as evidenced with the campaign to pass the How Many Stops Act. Cutting NYPD’s extravagant communications spending by 50% would greatly curtail their capacity to repeat these egregious acts in the future.

End the cruel sweeps of homeless sweeps and remove NYPD from homeless outreach teams: NYPD sweeps of homeless encampments are inhumane and ineffective. These sweeps criminalize individuals who deserve safe housing, creating

³ Jegroo, Ashoka. NYPD Unit that Monitored Proud Boys Event has Troubled History. <https://theappeal.org/nypd-unit-that-monitored-proud-boys-event-has-troubled-history/>. The Appeal. October 18, 2018.

⁴ Turner, Nicholas. We Need to Think Beyond Police in Mental Health Crises. <https://www.vera.org/news/we-need-to-think-beyond-police-in-mental-health-crises>. Vera Institute. April 6, 2022.

⁵ FY2025 Preliminary Budget Function Analysis. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/jan24-bfa.pdf>. Page 4.

further instability in their lives by throwing out their possessions and failing to connect people to the housing and social services that they need. According to the Comptroller's audit of these sweeps, only about 5% of homeless individuals were placed in temporary shelters. Moreover, just a few months after those sweeps, 31% of the sites were once again encampment sites for people without housing.⁶ These results should be expected. Any effort to reduce or eliminate homelessness must come with a provision of housing. Instead of funding police to brutalize people who are suffering from homelessness, funding should go towards providing the resources and services that people need to get back on their feet. NYPD should be removed from all homeless outreach teams.

Cut police positions in other agencies, including the Department of Parks & Recreation and the Department of Homeless Services: Despite the NYPD's egregious budget size and record of racial violence, it has been allowed to expand its reach into areas of the budget that are wholly unrelated to criminal activity. There are over 400 officers in the Department of Homeless Services and nearly 400 more in the Department of Parks & Recreation.⁷ The funding for these positions should be divested so that more resources can be put towards improving the scope and quality of homeless services as well as expanding the number and quality of parks.

Prevent any increases to NYPD headcount Mayor Adams has cut crucial staffing positions from schools, libraries, mental health services and other non-police programs that create safety & well-being of New Yorkers. While staffing for city services is being cut, the NYPD Uniform Headcount has increased for this fiscal year. Increasing NYPD headcount is especially egregious given that the NYPD refuses to fire abusive cops who kill and brutalize New Yorkers - like those who killed Allan Feliz, Kawaski Trawick, Delrawn Small, Antonio Williams and others - keeping them on payroll for years and making New Yorkers pay their salaries discipline is stalled. . . The NYPD is already the largest police force in the country, and the over 50,000 person agency makes up almost 1/6th of city employees. The latest research shows that public safety increases when people have the public goods and services that they need, not when there are more police on the streets..⁸ Rather than continue to fund expanding the NYPD, those monies should be invested in real safety infrastructure like housing, schools, libraries, and non-police anti-violence programs.

New Yorkers need the City Council's support to create a safer and more just city that promotes life-affirming care. We need the City Council to reduce the NYPD's bloated budget and instead invest those dollars in programs and services that work for

⁶ Audit of the Department of Homeless Services' Role in the "Cleanups" of Homeless Encampments. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/audit-of-the-department-of-homeless-services-role-in-the-cleanups-of-homeless-encampments/>. June 28, 2023.

⁷ FY 2025 Department Estimates. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/de1-24.pdf>.

⁸ Eck, Lee, & Corsaro. (2017). Adding More Police Is Unlikely to Reduce Crime: A Meta-Analysis of Police Agency Size and Crime Research. *Translational Criminology*. Spring 2017. 14-16. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315794349_Adding_More_Police_Is_Unlikely_to_Reduce_Crime_A_Meta-Analysis_of_Police_Agency_Size_and_Crime_Research.

New Yorkers. Please reach out to us at CPR to discuss the actions that the City Council can take to create a safer New York City. Our member groups would like to partner with Council members to fight for a budget that our communities deserve. To continue this conversation, please contact CPR's program director, Ileana Mendez-Peñate, at ileana@changethenypd.org.