

**Testimony by Keeshan Harley, Make the Road New York and Communities United for Police Reform
for June 29, 2015 NYC Council hearing, Public Safety Committee
Testimony supporting Right To Know Act bills (Int. 182 & Int. 541)**

“If you tremble with indignation at every injustice, then you are a comrade of mine.”
– Che Guevara

CPR is a New York-based campaign to end discriminatory and abusive policing practices, consisting of many of those unfairly targeted by police action and aggression.

As a young Black 20-year-old man, first stopped by police at the age of 13 and stopped-and-frisked over 100 times since, I know firsthand the issues our communities face with respect to everyday interactions with police. I have been slammed against the wall, placed in handcuffs, yelled at and questioned by police in my city, while doing nothing wrong – For example one of the most abusive instances I’ve had with a police officer was one my way home for school. As I turned the corner to walk my path home, a plain clothed police officer abruptly drove his car up to the side walk and told me to stop moving. I looked at the officer incredulously and said “What?” to which he responded by slamming me against a wall and berating me with questions like “Do you have any weapons on you?” as he starts to take my belonging - my book bag and hat- off of me. At this point in the interaction I am very afraid that this officer is TRYING to incriminate me, so I tell him “ What are you doing? You can’t search me! I have rights” to which the officer responded “Shut up, niggers don’t have rights.” And after emptying my belongings on the street and finding nothing, the officer lets me go, gets into his vehicle and drives off...with not so much as “I’m sorry.”

So with experiences like this, as I watch closely all that is happening across the country, it is hard to avoid thinking about my own interactions with the NYPD in my neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and how they could have been fatal for no justifiable reason. The sheer number of these unnecessary interactions increases the probability.

The killings of Akai Gurley, Eric Garner and Ramarley Graham and so many others at the hands of police in New York, demonstrates the tragic consequences of systemic problems with police accountability and the disregard for Black and Brown lives.

Black and Brown young people should not have to expect to be stopped by the police simply because of who we are and where we live, and our parents should not have to prepare us for it. For young people like me, the effect of being put on display by the police in our communities and to our neighbors over and over again is demoralizing, humiliating and only serves to fracture our communities. It criminalizes us to our neighbors, who may not have the appropriate context that we have done nothing wrong and assume the opposite, stigmatizing us as criminals or delinquents in our own communities.

The challenges we face within the NYPD are not those of a few individual bad apples, but are more systemic and structural in the way policing approaches, targets and treats certain communities.

The need for the Right To Know Act is INCONTRIVERTIBLE! This legislation should not be seen as shackles on the police, but as a way to begin to build trust between police and community members that is so clearly absent during interactions. The Right To Know Act means police can have to uphold the tenants of Courtesy, Professionalism, and Respect or be held accountable. Trick or forced searches does not bring NYC toward better policing, abusing the rights of people of color, LGBTQ, and mentally ill people does not help build trust and safety in our communities. WE NEED THE RIGHT TO KNOW ACT!