

**New York City Council, Committee on Public Safety
Oversight Hearing on Community Policing in NYC
March 3, 2015**

Submitted by: Djibril Toure, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement

My name is Djibril Toure and i am a Member of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement - which is on the steering committee for Communities united for Police Reform.

As a longtime resident of Bedford-Stuyvesant, who directly experienced stop-and-frisk abuses and police misconduct and was a plaintiff in the initial federal lawsuit against discriminatory NYPD practices after the 1999 murder of Amadou Diallo by NYPD officers, I am greatly saddened by the fact our city appears to be risking a repeat of history, despite a difference in rhetoric and tone.

In my community, like communities of color throughout our city, we have long struggled against hyperaggressive and abusive policing in ways that those in Park Slope, Chelsea, or Brooklyn Heights could never imagine.

In 1978, activists from Black Veterans for Social Justice marched for justice after the death of Arthur Miller, a community activist who was choked to death by NYPD officers. In the years since, we have seen too many cases in which lives are senselessly lost because of police brutality and a discriminatory, overaggressive approach to policing for even the most minor infractions. This obsessive focus characterizes “broken windows” policing. But make no mistake: This enforcement occurs primarily in certain neighborhoods and targets New Yorkers of color throughout the city.

In central Brooklyn, it is not uncommon for someone to be arrested or summonsed for riding a bike on the sidewalk. That same behavior in Brooklyn Heights is rarely addressed, let alone the subject of a police encounter.

This broken windows style of policing that was central to Bill Bratton’s first stint as police commissioner under then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and remains the focus now during his second stretch under Mayor Bill de Blasio, not only criminalizes our communities but also is incompatible with improving police-community relations. We saw this up close on video, with the tragically unjust and unnecessary death of Eric Garner at the hands of the NYPD.

Recently, we have all seen the disturbing videos from across the city - of NYPD officers using excessive force against individuals who were unarmed, nonviolent and surrounded by multiple officers. In one video, a young man in a Harlem subway station is placed in a similar chokehold while being punched in the face by an officer until bloody. Another shows a man in my neighborhood having a gun pulled on him and kicked in the head by an officer while handcuffed on the ground. The latest example shows a pregnant mother being placed in a chokehold by NYPD officers in front of her young daughter. The officers in that incident were reportedly enforcing a law against barbecuing on the sidewalk.

Bratton has promised renewed training for the entire NYPD. But his staunch commitment to broken windows policing is problematic. While training is important, it is an empty solution to this problem. We've heard it after most incidents of deadly use of excessive force by NYPD officers: Anthony Baez, Ramarley Graham, Sean Bell and others. The problem is that it hasn't stopped the next incident, because it's not the real problem. The only kind of community policing that will be effective is that which doesn't seek to over-police minor incidents, and instead works in conversation with the community to deal with serious conditions.

We need leadership from City Hall that is going to tackle the real challenges that allow these incidents to continue the failed accountability for police brutality and the systemic issues with broken windows policing that target our communities. We see that officers with multiple civil rights suits and CCRB complaints, like Daniel Pantaleo, face no real consequences and are allowed to brutalize us again and again.

To the many New Yorkers who demanded change in the policing of our communities and felt hopeful when our City Council passed the Community Safety Act last year, these recent events are discouraging. New Yorkers voted for a more just and accountable NYPD, but we appear to be getting more of the same substance with simply a softer tone.

Mayor De Blasio has a choice to make. Will he bring real accountability for systemic police abuses and brutality and depart from the broken windows theory that led to the explosion of stop-and-frisk abuses? For the health and safety of our city and communities, it is critical that he fulfill the promises he made to communities of color while pursuing office, because we need real change, not more broken policy that will inevitably lead to more brutality and tragedies.