

Testimony

**New York City Council Public Safety Hearing
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My name is Victoria Davis. I am the sister of Delrawn Small who was murdered on July 4, 2016 by NYPD Officer Wayne Isaacs. I am also the mother of two Black boys and a member of the Justice Committee, a grassroots organization that supports and organizes with families who've lost loved ones to the police.

I am here today to tell you that the NYPD should not be responsible for social distancing enforcement. No one knows better than I do how deadly this can become.

As a mother, I was horrified to watch the video that emerged last week of a young mother being tackled and arrested in front of her child for not wearing her mask properly.

As the sister who has lost her brother to police violence, it is triggering and re-traumatizing to watch every single one of the clips of the NYPD's abusive social distancing enforcement against Black and brown New Yorkers.

As a member of the Justice Committee, I have been dismayed to learn of reports to our organization about the NYPD obstructing those who try to witness and film violent social distancing enforcement, for example, in one case, pepper-spraying a young woman with no warning.

The violence is unacceptable. On top of this, in these interactions multiple police, often who are not wearing PPE themselves, come into close contact with and put their hands all over New Yorkers, raising the risk of virus transmission for everyone.

As I know first-hand, discriminatory, abusive policing is nothing new for the NYPD, but the moment Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo engaged the NYPD in social distancing enforcement, they set us up for more abuse. Historically, the NYPD's abusive stop-and-frisk practices and other Broken Windows enforcement have severely disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx communities, at times with fatal consequences. What did they think was going to happen when they threw the NYPD at a public health crisis? The social distancing enforcement statistics now show that history has and will continue to repeat itself unless this city radically changes its understanding of what keeps us safe.

Wayne Isaacs murdered my brother in cold blood almost four years ago. In spite of the fact that he called 911 for himself, lied about what happened and failed to mention he had shot someone, Mayor de Blasio and the NYPD have still not held him accountable. This is part of de Blasio and the NYPD's pattern of shielding and protecting abusive officers, which creates a culture in which cops feel they can act above the law with impunity. What we are seeing now, in these viral videos and statistics, is the result of the culture created by that total, systemic lack of accountability.

I want to be clear: It's not enough for de Blasio to make vague statements about the NYPD no longer enforcing mask-wearing when there is "no serious danger".

First of all, even if they NYPD may reduce the number of tickets or arrests it's making for people not wearing masks, it doesn't mean harassment and abuse will not happen. For example, in the incident I mentioned earlier, a young woman was pepper-spray and a young man was choked and no one was arrested or given a ticket, but severe damage was certainly done.

Secondly, families who have lost loved ones to the police know all too well that the NYPD perceives "serious danger" wherever and whenever it suits their purpose, especially when it comes to brutality against Black and brown New Yorkers. Isaacs upholstered his gun just because he saw Delrawn walking across the street. He defends his actions by saying he "feared for his life". Whenever someone is unjustly killed, the officer involved says, "I feared for my life" or "I thought he or she had a gun."

We need the NYPD out of social distancing enforcement all together. If we continue on this path, more people will be brutalized, more people will be put at risk for contracting the virus, and I fear, eventually, another family will lose a loved one.

New York City needs to reverse its trend of throwing police and public health and social issues. Community organizations and public health workers who are accountability to our communities should be the ones conducting education around the coronavirus pandemic. On top of this, we have to understand that when people's needs for shelter, income, food and supplies are not met, they cannot stay inside. Meeting people's needs and addressing systemic inequities has to be part of our strategy for ending the pandemic.