



**Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee on Public Safety
Oversight - Reducing the Responsibilities of the NYPD
Delivered by: Quadira Coles
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Good afternoon, Chair Adams and members and staff of the Committee on Public Safety. My name is Quadira Coles and I am the Policy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE).

GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, New York committed to the all-around development of Black girls, young women and transgender and gender expansive youth of color. GGE challenges systemic forces that constrict the full freedom and expression of young people. We do this work through direct service, policy advocacy, organizing, and culture change. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around ending gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and sexual abuse, for close to two decades. With this lens we work to advance the citywide and international movement for police-free schools.

We are offering testimony today to reiterate that police officers do not keep young people safe. Instead, they exacerbate or escalate issues that lead to harmful and long-term collateral consequences for youth. It is with this understanding that we demand police be permanently removed from schools and any city responsibility of safety and mentorship for young people be put in the hands of care workers who are dedicated to transformative justice and working with youth in holistic ways.

This school year, New York City still has the opportunity to shape a new experience for students coming out of remote learning brought on by the pandemic. City decision makers had plenty of information and stories from students, parents and teachers at their disposal, yet we are coming into this new school year like business as usual. There were countless opportunities for the City Council to act on the police-free schools demands of many students, educators, families, and advocates. There is still time to block the growth of the NYPD's school policing division and reject the recruitment of 250 new school cops. There is still time to curtail the NYPD's budget and block the creation of a new policing division inside of the Department of Education, a misguided project that still maintains the premise of punishment and surveillance.

There were two budget cycles that passed during the pandemic where the city council did not act in favor of the young people in New York City who have said that policing is causing them harm now and will negatively impact their futures. The prevention of harm and the goal of safety

has rarely been successful with the use of police. It is in the police's job description, training, purpose, and paycheck to enforce unjust laws and protect the interest of those in power. None of these things cater to the needs of students. The City Council should be thinking about ways to prevent further harm by supporting transformative and holistic methods that have been proven to get to the underlying causes of conflict and violence in lieu of retributive punishment or intimidating day-to-day surveillance.

GGE and advocates who work closely with young people have shown up to many of these hearings and put forward solutions that will eliminate this perceived need for our schools, public spaces and youth-filled spaces to be saturated with police officers. We have proposed \$1 billion in budget cuts that will allow for more money to be spent on sustaining citywide Restorative Practices, hiring emotional support staff and building school infrastructure that prioritizes the social and emotional development of students. We, and many young people, have asked for a universal Summer Youth Employment Program to allow students to provide supplementary income for their families and build on their professional development in preparation for their futures. Instead, this past summer the NYPD hosted more SYEP worksites – in precincts, 1 Police Plaza, transit districts, patrol service areas, and so on – than ever before.

In response to the youth demanding the total dismantling of the NYPD's School Policing Division and protesting in the streets with calls to action to defund the police, we are seeing new NYPD-run youth programs like "NYPD Kids First," in addition to an expanded partnership with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to bolster youth surveillance and recruitment simultaneously – a warped kind of logic. The NYPD's budget continues to go unscathed which allows for new hires, positions and expansion. Furthermore, there is a continuing underinvestment in programs that uphold restorative practices. We have had enough of the total control given to the NYPD through bloated budgets and dangerously thought-out delegation of city responsibilities.

We demand that the City Council work to end all youth surveillance expansion efforts by the NYPD and remove School Safety Agents from schools, permanently. There are community programs and care workers that deserve the responsibility and funding to serve the young people of New York City. There should be an investment in career readiness programs that do not involve working for the NYPD. There should be programs that allow young people to explore their skills and talent instead of youth-policing initiatives that reinforce obedience. Young people deserve space to channel their energy towards activities that bring them whole wellness, instead of forced affiliation with the same systems that perpetuate harm. There are members of our communities who do not work in a law enforcement capacity who are eager and deserve the opportunity to work with our youth with the right support.

Thank you.