

March 17, 2020

Mayor de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We write today as New Yorkers who are all too familiar with abusive and discriminatory policing by the NYPD. As New York City moves into another week of crisis response around COVID-19, we are deeply concerned that the City is not realigning its police response to the current circumstances. We have reason to fear that possible expansion of law enforcement authority will also expand the NYPD's abuse of power and violation of the rights of New Yorkers, particularly low-income New Yorkers of color.

This is a difficult time for many across our city. The most vulnerable among us include those without permanent housing or access to healthcare, workers who are losing income and being laid off, children and young people whose education and daily lives have been disrupted, elders and people with disabilities, those who have faced coronavirus-related discrimination and violence, and many others whose concerns are not making headlines.

We are invested in comprehensive crisis management that increases our capacity to care for each other as fellow human beings, and New Yorkers. It would be wrong for law enforcement activities to undermine or compromise the health and dignity of New Yorkers during this period.

We urge you, in your dedication to the public health of all New Yorkers, to immediately adopt the recommendations we outline below to decrease the likelihood of abusive policing; unnecessarily cycling people through jails, exposing New Yorkers to increased risks of contracting COVID-19 and related illnesses; and to maximize public health & safety in this period:

1. **Immediate moratorium on all police enforcement of low-level and "quality of life" offenses** (aka broken windows policing), which has been historically discriminatory and abusive. The moratorium should include the following:

- Immediate moratorium on all fare evasion enforcement by NYPD, MTA and other law enforcement operating in NYC transit.
- Remove police from all homeless outreach efforts, immediate moratorium on police raids and sweeps of people who are homeless in shelters and in the streets; immediate moratorium on police initiating interactions with people perceived to be homeless, and an end to the NYPD "homeless outreach and diversion" program - which criminalizes poverty and homelessness by ticketing & arresting people who are homeless, coercing them to "accept" services that are inadequate and often unsafe.
- Immediate moratorium on enforcement of discriminatory and abusive targeting of largely immigrant delivery workers for fines, summons, arrests and confiscation of their e-bikes. This is especially important as you are correctly rolling out more social distancing policies, including restricting restaurants to delivery and takeout. As delivery workers risk their

health to fill the gap for New Yorkers, they should not fear police enforcement of unfair laws that target them.

- Immediate moratorium on police enforcement activities and police crackdowns that target street vendors, canners, those perceived to be sex workers and others in informal economies whose livelihoods depend on work in public spaces.
- Immediate moratorium on low-level drug enforcement, including marijuana-related stops, summonses and arrests.

2. Immediate moratorium on all unnecessary summons and arrests for non-broken

windows offenses - To the extent that any enforcement action does occur, the NYPD should be directed to issue summonses and appearance tickets instead of conducting custodial arrests whenever possible, with hearing dates scheduled for after the health crisis is over.

3. Zero-tolerance policy for police abuse of authority and abusive policing. We are concerned that, as this public health crisis continues, expanded law enforcement authority may result in an increase of bribes, coercion, sexual assault, brutality and other violence and abuse of authority by police.

This concern is based on the city's systemic refusal over the past several years to fire and discipline NYPD officers in a meaningful and timely way for offenses against New Yorkers.

- We request that you make clear that all acts where police abuse their authority in the context of interacting with civilians will be subject to a swift and fair review process, and if substantiated and warranted, officers will be swiftly disciplined with measures including termination. Police actions where termination should be considered include, but is not limited to: sexual harassment and assault, gender-based violence, excessive force; refusal to identify themselves; obstructing constitutionally-protected cop-watching activities; conducting unlawful searches; bribes and other coercion.

The protection of abusive policing and abusive officers by your administration must end.

4. End rhetoric, policies and practices that criminalize entire communities. We are alarmed by comments you and other public officials have made that serve to criminalize entire groups of people during this pandemic, including young people of color

- We request that you refrain from public comments, policy and practices that serve to criminalize entire communities – and that you direct the NYPD to cease any actions that engage in discriminatory profiling of – and law enforcement actions against - groups simply because they are in public space (e.g. young people of color, people perceived to be homeless and others).

5. Transparent emergency-planning that prioritizes safeguarding human and civil rights, especially related to potential quarantine areas, curfews and other significant actions that the City may take that are traditionally enforced by police. We want to make sure the enforcement of public health measures does not increase the number and frequency of unconstitutional stops, frisks and other unnecessary police interactions, especially in communities of color.

- We request that you share the City’s plans related to these types of emergency actions with the public prior to implementation, including your plans to safeguard the health, human rights and dignity of people who are street homeless and in shelters, public housing residents, people who are incarcerated, children and youth, elders, people with disabilities and others.

6. Re-evaluate your proposal for NYC’s FY2021 budget. This next period will require emergency support and actions for many, including public school students and their families; workers in informal economies and those not eligible for unemployment or paid sick leave benefits; creation of emergency housing units for people who are homeless; immediate changes to homeless shelters to comply with public health guidance; public health equipment and supplies for medical facilities and others.

- We urge you to consider cuts to the NYPD’s almost \$6 billion budget by ending the expansion of the NYPD’s role in social service delivery (including NYPD response to mental health incidents, homeless outreach and the new NYPD “youth initiative”) and reallocating those monies to critical community-based infrastructure and services.

We urge you to prioritize public health needs and human rights of all New Yorkers, over any knee-jerk impulse to continue and increase hyper-aggressive and abusive policing practices. Public safety can be ensured in ways that support everyone’s personal safety and dignity while decreasing unnecessary police interactions in the context of this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Communities United for Police Reform
 Alliance for Quality Education
 Arab American Association of New York
 Audre Lorde Project
 Bronx Defenders
 Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network
 Brooklyn Defender Services
 Brooklyn Movement Center
 Brooklyn NAACP
 CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities
 Center for Community Alternatives
 Center for Constitutional Rights
 Center for Popular Democracy
 Citizen Action of New York
 Color of Change
 Community Voices Heard
 Democratic Socialists of America - NYC chapter
 Dignity in Schools Campaign
 Drug Policy Alliance
 DRUM- Desis Rising Up & Moving
 Equality for Flatbush
 FIERCE
 Girls for Gender Equity
 Immigrant Defense Project
 Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

Justice Committee
JustLeadershipUSA
Katal Center for Health, Equity & Justice
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Society
Make the Road New York
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
MomsRising
NAACP New York State Conference
National Domestic Workers Alliance
New York City Anti-Violence Project
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Communities for Change
New York Immigration Coalition
North Star Fund
Picture the Homeless
Public Science Project
Riders Alliance
Rockaway Youth Task Force
Showing Up for Racial Justice - NYC
Street Vendor Project
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Take On Hate - NY
TakeRoot Justice
Transgender Law Center
VOCAL-NY
We Dream in Black
Youth Represent

cc: NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea
NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams
NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson
City Councilmember & Public Safety Chair Donovan Richards
CCRB Chair Fred Davie and Executive Director Jonathan Darche
NYPD Inspector General Philip Eure