

June 7, 2023

BY EMAIL

Speaker Adrienne Adams
165-02 Baisley Blvd., 2nd Floor, Suite 1
Jamaica, NY 11434

CC:

Members of the Budget Negotiating Team

RE: Advocates urge the City Council Speaker and members of the Budget Negotiating Team to disband the NYPD's Strategic Response Group

Dear Speaker Adams and members of the Budget Negotiating Team,

We, the undersigned organizations - a coalition of policing reform, civil rights, and racial justice advocates – are writing to urge the New York City Council Committee on Public Safety to Disband the NYPD's Strategic Response Group (SRG), a notoriously violent rapid response unit responsible for inflicting violence on New Yorkers.

The NYPD has a checkered history of protest policing. In 2015, the NYPD's aggressive policing of protest took on its newest form: the SRG. [Time and time again](#), when SRG arrives on the scene, officers escalate situations and injure New Yorkers who are exercising their First Amendment rights.

While the unit's abuse of protesters came into public view during the 2020 protests, its pattern of violence and bias emerged from the very moment it [was created](#) in 2015. The SRG was formed in the wake of the Ferguson uprising. At the time, Commissioner Bratton said: "It is designed for dealing with events like our recent protests, or incidents like Mumbai or what just happened in Paris." Since its inception, the unit's mission conflated terrorism with protest.

After pushback from advocates, who cited concerns around the criminalization of protest and the militarization of police, the NYPD [amended](#) the SRG's mission. The NYPD's Chief of Department announced that the unit would "not be involved in handling protests and demonstrations."

The NYPD broke that promise just months later when the SRG [made arrests](#) at protests for Freddie Gray. By 2016, the unit's budget had ballooned from \$13 million to \$90 million. The number of officers in the unit doubled to an estimated 700. The current estimated budget of the SRG is [\\$133 Million](#). The NYPD offers very little transparency on the funding, staffing, and deployment of SRG in our communities.

During the 2020 protests, the SRG's brutalization of demonstrators came into full view. On June 4, 2020, the SRG descended on demonstrators in Mott Haven before the 8pm curfew. With demonstrators unable to escape, SRG officers brutally beat, zip-tied, and arrested 263 protesters, medics, and legal observers. Sixty-one people were injured. Human Rights Watch called this conduct ["intentional, planned, and unjustified."](#) The SRG's suppression of protests neither began nor ended in the summer of 2020; they continue to use force against New Yorkers exercising their First Amendment rights to this day.

As recently as March of 2023, the SRG has been deployed to aggressively [crack down](#) on protests in the wake of the killing of Jordan Neely. From attacking demonstrators at non-violent vigils, to [arresting](#) trans activists at a march on the eve of Pride month, the SRG continues to operate as a rogue entity.

The NYPD is facing numerous lawsuits related to the department's brutalization of protesters and it is no surprise that the SRG is at the heart of many of these lawsuits. In a lawsuit filed by the Attorney General's office, the SRG is [described](#) as "inadequately trained, poorly supervised and disciplined group of NYPD members."

The SRG's pattern of violence is not a coincidence; it is baked into its structure. The SRG [is trained](#) to suppress protesters, especially those demanding racial justice. The SRG's bike squad manual identifies two types of protestor crowds: "peaceful" and "violent." Examples of violent crowds include the "BLM movement, Occupy Wall Street, and Anti-Trump Demonstrators." These trainings include guidelines for the deployment of sound cannons and tactical formations to trap and mass arrest protesters. There is no focus on First Amendment protections or de-escalation strategies, and a clear bias against those calling for racial justice.

SRG officers are [disproportionately named](#) in NYPD misconduct complaints. The NYCLU's database of CCRB complaints shows that SRG officers receive an abnormally high number of misconduct complaints compared to non-SRG officers. There have been 455 complaints filed against SRG officers between 2015 and 2021. Of officers who were named in at least one complaint while in SRG, the median number of complaints since 2000 is six. The median number of complaints received since 2000 for all officers in the database is three.

The SRG also has a pattern of targeting people of color. Of those complaints that included a victim's race, the impacted individual was a person of color 91 percent of the time. Sixty-six percent of victims were Black, 21 percent were Latinx, and nine percent were white.

New Yorkers have witnessed and been impacted by police protest suppression for far too long. During the FY 2024 budget hearings, more than 300 New Yorkers testified about the harm and trauma that this unit has inflicted on our communities.

The SRG's brutality, bias, and lack of transparency makes the SRG a threat to the safety and First Amendment rights of New Yorkers. On March 1, 2023, the City Council Committee on Public Safety held a long-awaited oversight hearing on the SRG. The NYPD [refused to appear](#). Since then, the Department has consistently refused to answer questions about the unit at subsequent budget hearings. This is especially alarming on the heels of the Department's [announcement](#) that this unit would be deployed to 20 "high crime" precincts to support with patrol duties – predominantly in communities of color.

The SRG is the most recent and most extreme manifestation of the NYPD's aggressive approach, but the shortcomings of our current system of protest policing run much deeper. The SRG is emblematic of the NYPD's tendency to use its bloated budget to inflict violence with impunity. To ensure that the unit and its tactics are not recreated under another name, the SRG's funds should be removed from the hands of the NYPD. Police forces who look and act like an invading army do not belong in our communities or in our streets. Instead of investing tens of millions in the SRG, we should plunge resources into community programs and care services that keep New Yorkers safe.

Signed,

Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - Local 2325
Alliance of Families for Justice
Arab American Association of New York
Anti Violence Project
Black Women's March
Brooklyn Movement Center
Brooklyn Defender Services
Center for Community Alternatives
Center for Constitutional Rights
Citizen Action of New York
Color of Change
Communities United for Police Reform
Community Voices Heard
Crown Heights Care Collective (C.A.R.E)
CUNY Law School Defenders
Clinic Drug Policy Alliance
DRUM: Desis Rising Up and Moving
Empire State Indivisible
EndQiNY
Envision Freedom Fund
Equality for Flatbush
GAPIMNY: Gay Asian & Pacific Islander Men of New York
Girls for Gender Equity
Immigrant Defense Project
Indivisible Brooklyn
Justice Committee
Justice for Families
Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
Latino Justice PRLDEF
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Society
Long Island Progressive Coalition
Make the Road NY
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
National Action Network
New York Appleseed
NYC-DSA
New York City for Abortion Rights
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York County Defender Services
NYC- DSA Tech Action Working Group
New York Immigration Coalition

New York Renews
New York State Youth Leadership Council
New York Working Families Party
No North Brooklyn Pipeline Alliance
People's Climate Movement - NY
Police Reform Organizing Project
Policing and Social Justice Project at CUNY
Public Science Project
Queer Liberation March
Red Hook Initiative
Sane Energy Project
Sixth Street Community Center
S.T.O.P: The Surveillance Technology Oversight Project
Sunrise Movement NYC
Theatre of the Oppressed NYC
The Center for Constitutional Rights
The Gathering for Justice
United Against Racism and Fascism
VOCAL – NY
Washington Square Park Mutual Aid
Youth Over Guns
Youth Represent