

**Testimony of Eric Vassell, Father of Saheed Vassell who was killed by NYPD in 2018. Mr. Vassell is also a member of the Justice Committee**

*Delivered to the New York City Council for February 6, 2023 Joint Hearing of Committee on Hospitals, the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction, the Committee on Fire and Emergency Management and the Committee on Public Safety*

My name is Danny Kim, I am an organizer with the Justice Committee. Mr. Eric Vassell had an emergency, so he asked me to read his testimony on his behalf.

My name is Eric Vassell. I am the father of Saheed Vassell, who was killed by the NYPD on April 4, 2018.

I am here to oppose Mayor Adams' directive to force hospitalization on people with mental illnesses. This is not a plan. It is giving the NYPD more power to sweep people off the street just because officers think they don't have a place to stay or have a mental illness.

This is the opposite of what our communities need. We need affordable housing and quality mental healthcare. I know this firsthand because I watched the City's healthcare system fail my son long before the NYPD killed him.

Saheed first started to struggle with mental illness after his close friend was killed by the police. We could not find any programs in our community that would help him and treat him like a human.

Without anywhere else to turn, we would call 911. The police and EMS would take him to the hospital but instead of helping, they just gave him a whole lot of pills and locked him down. For Saheed – being in the hospital was like being in prison.

NYPD Anti-Crime and SRG officers murdered my son without warning at a busy intersection in broad daylight. My son was unarmed and not a threat to anyone. None of the officers were ever disciplined.

My son's story is not unique. Mohamed Bah's, mother was not able to find services for her son, so she called 911. The NYPD showed up and killed him.

Kawaski Trawick, Deborah Danner, Iman Morales.... There are too many names.

Too many community members do not have homes. Too many struggle with mental illness. With the pandemic, it has only gotten worse. Instead of making a plan to address this, Mayor Adams is cutting budgets for housing and healthcare and throwing more police at this problem. Police officers don't have the skills to diagnose or care for people. They only have the skills to criminalize and arrest people.

I am calling on the New York City Council to stop the mayor's dangerous forced hospitalization directive and to invest in housing, community-based mental healthcare and other services for our communities.

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