

April 23, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dermot Shea
Commissioner, New York City Police Department
1 Police Plaza
New York, NY 10038

Re: Public Health Concerns on NYPD Spread of the COVID-19 Virus

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Shea,

We are 200 medical workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, including doctors, nurses, physician’s assistants, and other medical workers, and organizations representing medical workers. We write to share our concerns with the way the New York City Police Department (NYPD) is policing during the current public health crisis. Specifically, we are alarmed at the high rate of infection among NYPD officers and fear that unnecessary interactions between the NYPD and the public will further exacerbate the public health crisis unfolding in New York City and rapidly spreading across the country.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to emphasize the importance of social distancing to reduce transmissions.¹ Further, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a leading police research and policy organization, recommends “identifying core department functions” and appropriately curtailing non-essential police activities such as “crime prevention programs, parking enforcement, and enforcement of certain misdemeanor laws” during pandemic situations.² **We urge the NYPD to heed the CDC and PERF’s advice to socially distance and curtail all non-essential contacts between NYPD officers and the public at this time.**

We are especially concerned to hear that the NYPD is taking a business-as-usual approach to policing low-level offenses at this time.³ For each interaction the NYPD has with the public,

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Community-Related Exposures* (March 30, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html>.

² Andrea M. Luna, et al., *Police Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Studies and Recommendations from the Field*, Critical Issues in Policing Series, Police Executive Research Forum 10 (Oct. 2007), https://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Public_Health/police%20planning%20for%20an%20influenza%20pandemic%20-%20case%20studies%20and%20recommendations%20from%20the%20field%202007.pdf.

³ Thomas Tracy, *NYPD commissioner says ‘no intention’ of reducing arrests amid coronavirus crisis*, N.Y. Daily News (March 21, 2020), <https://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-nypd-wont-reduce-arrests-coronavirus-crisis-20200321-ae6ltasujjelbdpkgefkbkfpuuu-story.html>; See also Josmar Trujillo, *Policing in a pandemic: Why can’t the NYPD manage to dial back broken windows enforcement even now?*, N.Y. Daily News (March 26, 2020), <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-policing-in-a-pandemic-20200326-uy2m5jbiwbucxmvkewqlipjsli>.

there is a risk of virus transmission, and we urge the NYPD to take this public health risk seriously. **There is no question for us as medical providers that the risk of virus transmission is a far greater threat to the public health and safety of New Yorkers than non-violent offenses at this time.**

Unnecessary contact between the NYPD and the public at this time is even more concerning when taking the alarming rate of infection of the NYPD into account. Currently, **the NYPD infection rate is 121 infections per 1,000 NYPD officers, more than seven times that of New York City as a whole.**⁴ Because of the high infection rate, it is likely that many more NYPD officers have been exposed to the virus without their knowledge. Each interaction between NYPD officers and members of the public puts both groups at risk of transmitting the virus and further spreading in the community, in NYPD precincts across the city, and in the homes of NYPD officers and the people with whom they are in contact.

We urge you to reassess and readjust policing to meet the needs of the current moment, ensuring that you put the health and safety of New Yorkers first during this crisis:

- (1) **Halt the enforcement of low-level and ‘quality of life’ offenses to reduce unnecessary interactions between the NYPD and the public.** Social distancing is necessary in all sectors of society to reduce the risk of transmission and to “flatten the curve.” Just as medical facilities are switching to telemedicine and canceled elective procedures, we call on other sectors of society to reevaluate what level of in-person interaction is necessary, keeping in mind that every in-person interaction increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission. We believe that low-level, quality of life policing is simply not worth the risk to public health at this time.

- (2) **Cease unnecessary arrests by issuing summonses or appearance tickets for all other qualifying offenses, and stop the flow of people onto Rikers Island.**⁵ Every arrest creates dozens of points of contact and opportunities for virus transmission. These contacts include the contact between the person arrested and the arresting officers, contact between the person arrested and additional officers at the precinct and Central Booking, arrested people in close contact in cramped holding cells at precincts and Central Booking, court officers assisting with arraignments, and, in the case that bail is set on the individual, contact with Department of Corrections staff and others detained in NYC Jails. Each of these people go on to be in contact with others in their workplaces,

[story.html](#) (“After some officials called for a moratorium on quality-of-life enforcement, the mayor [rebuffed](#) the notion of scaling back on even low-level policing. But would cops be willing to engage in interactions over offenses like fare evasion or loud music? Early [reports](#) and [tweets](#) suggest cops are still arresting people for [shoplifting](#). In my own neighborhood, police were [writing tickets](#) for cycling infractions as recently as last week.”).

⁴ See @NYPDnews, Twitter (April 19, 2020), <https://twitter.com/NYPDnews/status/1251992638846390275> (Infection rate based on the 4,371 NYPD employees diagnosed with COVID-19 out of a police force of 36,000 employees).

⁵ See The Legal Aid Society, *COVID-19 Infection Tracking in NYC Jails*, <https://legalaidnyc.org/covid-19-infection-tracking-in-nyc-jails/> (last visited March 31, 2020), for more information on the alarming rates of infection in NYC jails, where the current infection rate is more than 7.5 times that of New York City; see also Meagan Flynn, *Top doctor at Rikers Island calls the jail a ‘public health disaster unfolding before our eyes’*, Wash. Post (March 31, 2020 7:00 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/03/31/rikers-island-coronavirus-spread/>.

families, and, in the case of those detained, in NYC jails. Each arrest risks virus transmission, and we implore you to take this risk seriously and require officers to issue summonses for all qualifying offenses.

(3) Encourage social distancing through public service announcements, not enforcement that leads to unnecessary contacts and risks further transmission of the coronavirus. By sending NYPD officers—who currently have a much higher rate of coronavirus infection than NYC as a whole—into communities to enforce social distancing, the NYPD is likely exacerbating, not helping, the problem of rapid viral transmission. Close contact, as required when issuing a citation, should be avoided whenever possible.

As medical workers on the frontlines of the crisis, we urge you to prioritize the health and safety of New Yorkers and to take seriously the need for social distancing and avoiding unnecessary contacts between all people, including interactions between the NYPD and the public.

Sincerely,

Advancing Health Equity

Physicians for a National Health Program-NY Metro

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York

Nurses for Social Justice

Progressive Doctors

NYC Coalition to Dismantle Racism in the Health System

Treatment Action Group (TAG)

Individual Medical Signers

Abigail Hunter, FNP-BC

Allison Galgano, LMSW

Alaní Estrella
PhD Student of Biomedical Science at NYU Langone

Alyce Erdekian, MPH

Alyssa Marcinak, LMSW

Alec Betterley, LCAT
NYC Health and Hospitals

Alyssa Smith, MPH, CPH

Amanda Hayden, CD, LMSW, CBC

Alexandria M. Cooper, RN

Amanda Ingle, LMSW

Alison Liss, MD

Amanda Ramsdell, MD

Amanda Wang
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians & Surgeons*

Amit R. Patel, MD, MPH

Andrea Brandon, M.D.
*Faculty, New York University School of
Medicine*

Andrea Jakubowski, MD
*General Internist, Montefiore Medical
Center*

Andrea Lumm, RN, NP

Andrea Yeguez
Medical Student

Andrew Goldstein, MD, MPH

Angelique Saavedra, MSN, RN, WHNP-BC

Anjali Sharma, MD, MS
*Associate Professor of Medicine, Albert
Einstein College of Medicine*

Anton Gillespie
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians & Surgeons*

Antonio Valentin, RN

Athena Brown, NP

Austin Seavolt, RN

B. Oyinkan Marquis, MD
*Assistant Professor, SUNY Downstate
Medical Center*

Barbara Zeller, MD
Senior Medical Advisor, Brightpoint Health

Becky Czarnik, RN

Ben Sher, LMSW

Betty Kolod, MD

Binita Shah, MD

Bonnie Mohan
*Executive Director, The Health & Housing
Consortium*

Bridget Manzano
Health Educator, Mount Sinai

Brielle Cardieri, MD

Bruce G. Trigg, MD
*Public Health and Addiction Medicine
Consultant*

Caleb LoSchiavo, MPH
*Doctoral Student, Rutgers Biomedical and
Health Science*

Carlene Valentine, MS
PhD Candidate

Cassandra Harrison, RN

Chance Krempasky, FNP
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center

Chanelle Diaz, MD, MPH
Internal Medicine Physician, Bronx, NY

Charlotte Austin, MD

Chloe S. Chaudhury, BS
*Medical Student, NYU Grossman School of
Medicine*

Christy Duan, MD
*Zucker Hillside Hospital / Northwell Health
System*

Cindy Saenz
*Medical Student 4, Icahn School of
Medicine at Mount Sinai*

Cristian Peña
Medical Student

Daniel Lugassy, MD

David Himmelstein, MD

Deborah K. Miller, L.P., S.E.P.

Deepika Slawek, MD, MPH, MS
*Assistant Professor of Medicine, Montefiore
Medical Center/ Albert Einstein College of
Medicine*

Delaine Powerful, MPH

Diane Chang, MD

Eden Engel-Rebitzer
Medical Student

Eleni McCaffery
MD Candidate

Elisa Brunelle, Psy.D.

Elizabeth Deutsch, RN

Elizabeth Jones, RN, ANP-BC

Elizabeth Schretzman, LCSW

Ellen Isaacs, MD

Emma Pliskin, MPH
CUNY School of Public Health

Eddie DeGrand, LMSW

Erica Seppala, RN, BSN, MPH, MA

Esther Han, MD, MPH
*New York Presbyterian Hospital - Columbia
University Medical Center*

Evelyn Deliz, PA-C

Farah Allouch, MPH

Gene Liaw, PA-C

H. Reeve Bright, MD, MPH, MS

Hana Le, LMSW

Hannah Brooks, MS, MD

Hannah Schwennesen
*Medical Student 3, Perelman School of
Medicine*

Hannah Weber, PhD
*MD/PhD Candidate, NYU Grossman School
of Medicine*

Heather Paladine, MD, MEd
Family Physician

Helen Zhou
*Medical Student 2 at NYU Grossman School
of Medicine*

Janice Dabu, RN

Jaquelyn Jahn, MPH

Jasmine Shwetar
Medical Student

Jennifer Cabrera, MD
NYU Grossman School of Medicine

Jennifer Grossman, RN, BSN, LNC

Jennifer Karlin, MD, PhD

Jessica DeMulder, MPH

Jessica Ding
Medical Student

Jessica Ho
*Medical Student I, Columbia Vagelos
College of Physicians & Surgeons*

Jessica Morgan, LMSW

Jill Tatangelo, RN, MSN

Joan Gabriella Heinsheimer, MD

Johanna Valente, MSN, M.Ed, RN, FNP-BC

Johannes Mosquera Wilson, RN

John Jeffrey
Medical Student

Joie Waxler
*Health Educator, Mount Sinai Adolescent
Health Center*

Jonathan Giftos, MD, AAHIVS
*Medical Director, Addiction Medicine &
Drug User Health at Project Renewal*

Julia Agee, MD

Julianne Rieders
*Medical Student I, NYU Grossman School
of Medicine*

Kacy Yoo, LMSW

Kamini Doobay, MD, MS
NYC Emergency Medicine Resident

Kareen Matouk, M.A.
Psychology Intern, Mount Sinai

Karina Galvin, PA-C

Karoline Knable, RN

Katerina Santos, RN
Registered Nurse Supervisor

Katherine Bridges, RN

Katherine Oshman, LCSW

Katherine Schaff, DrPH, MPH

Katie Luedecke, RN, BSN

Kelly Doran, MD, MHS

Kelsey Cordle, COTA

Kristal Ruiz, LMSW

Kristen Medley
MD/MPA Candidate

Kristin Wunder, MPH
Bannon Consulting Services

Kristine Torres-Lockhart, MD

Laura Harris, MD, MPH, MS

Laura Ucik, MD
Montefiore Medical Center

Lawson Moyer, MD

Leah Haykin, MD

Leah Jo Carnine, PA-C

Liana Goehring
*MD/PhD candidate, NYU Grossman School
of Medicine*

Linda Wang, MD

Lipi Roy, MD, MPH

Lisa Joy Kirschenbaum, RN

Liz Kroboth, MPH

Mansi Shah, MD
Family Medicine Physician

Marc Shi, MD
*Internal Medicine Resident Montefiore
Medical Center*

Mariya Masyukova, MD, MS
Attending Physician

Martha L. Castro, MD
Emergency Medicine Resident

Mary Rossillo
Medical Student

Matthew Akiyama, MD, MSc
*Assistant Professor of Medicine, Montefiore
Medical Center*

Maureen Silverman, LMSW

Megan Campbell, LMSW

Megan Russell, RN

Melanie Morgan, RN

Melissa Sontag Broudo, JD, MPH
Co-Director of Soar Institute

Melissa Stein, MD

Melody Gomez
Public Health Professional

Michael Zingman, MD, MPH

Michaela Brennan, RN, MPH

Michelle Eilers, MSc
Demography and Health

Michelle Lin, MD, MPH

Michelle Mc Abee, MPH
*Columbia University Mailman School of
Public Health*

Mindy A. Schwartz, MD

Nancy Krieger, PhD
*Professor of Social Epidemiology, Harvard
T.H. Chan School of Public Health*

Natasha Anushri Anandaraja, MD, MPH
*Assistant Professor of Medical Education
and Pediatrics, Icahn School of Medicine at
Mount Sinai*

Nicholas Tamborra, LMHC

Nicole Shechter, PCA

Noah Rosenberg
Medical Student

Olivia Moscicki
Medical Student

Omar Salman, MD

Pamela Hops, MD

Payel Gupta, MD, FACAAI

Rachael Bedard, MD
*Director, Geriatrics and Complex Care
Service, Correctional Health Services*

Rachel Berkowitz, DrPH, MPH

Rachel Scott, MPH(c), MSW(c)

Randall Burson
*MD/PhD Student, Perelman School of
Medicine*

Rebecca Allen
Medical Student

Rebekah Almanzar, LMSW

Renée Reopell, LCSW

Rhea Boyd, MD, MPH

Ronald Nelson
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians and Surgeons*

Ronnie Taveras
Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center

Rory Brown
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians & Surgeons*

Roxana Chicas, BSN, RN

Ruth Oppenheim-Rothschild, RN
Community Health Nurse

Ruth Wangerin, PhD, MPH

Rye D. Blum, ANP

Sam Kokoska
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians & Surgeons*

Sandra Turner, MD

Sanna Alas
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians & Surgeons*

Sarah Duncan, MD

Sarah Pickering, MPH

Sarah Redmond, RN

Sarah Walsh, PhD, MPH

Sebastian Gualy
*Medical Student, Perelman School of
Medicine*

Shadi Nahvi, MD, MS
Associate Professor of Medicine

Sheba Sethi, MD

Sheira Schlair, MD, MS

Shoshanna Kahne
*PhD Candidate in Microbiology at NYU
Langone*

Shourie Jonna
MD Candidate

Sophia Yapalater
*Medical Student, Perelman School of
Medicine*

Spencer Dunleavy, MSc, MSc
*Medical Student, Columbia Vagelos College
of Physicians & Surgeons*

Steffie Woolhandler, MD, MPH

Stella Safo, MD, MPH
Attending Physician

Stephanie Porto
Patient Advocate, Woodhull Hospital

Stephen Rubenstein, M.D.

Stephen Sukumaran, MPH

Susan Joyner, LCSW-C

Susan M. Reverby, PhD
Historian of Medicine, Wellesley College

Tejas Venkat-Ramani, MPH
*Assistant Director of Quality Improvement,
NYC Correctional Health Services*

Tiffany E. Cook
Program Manager at an NYC Medical School

William B. Jordan, MD, MPH
Clinical Assistant Professor, Albert Einstein College of Medicine

Tristan Wristen, RN, BSN, MSN, FN-CSA, LNC

William Ford
Medical Student

Tunmise Fawole, MPH
Medical Student 2, NYU Grossman School of Medicine

Yael Bacharach, LCSW

Zoe Kratina-Hathaway
Medical Student

Vanessa K. Ferrel, MD, MPH

cc: NYC Council Speaker Johnson
City Councilmember Richards, Chair of Public Safety Committee
City Councilmember Rivera, Chair of Hospitals Committee
City Councilmember Levin, Chair of General Welfare Committee
NYPD Inspector General Phil Eure
NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams