

COMMUNITIES UNITED FOR POLICE REFORM

Monday, March 7, 2022

Mayor Eric Adams
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Speaker Adrienne E. Adams
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

NYC Council Members
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Eric Adams, New York City Council Speaker Adrienne E. Adams & NYC Council Members:

In the recent blueprint to End Gun Violence, Mayor Eric Adams identifies gun violence as a public health concern. We couldn't agree more, gun violence is a serious cause for concern and New Yorkers deserve a city that is a safe and thriving home for all.

Unfortunately, **Mayor Adams' primary strategy for curbing gun violence through a dramatic increase in policing and enforcement is outdated and ineffective** — a return to the Guiliani-era tactics that divided our city, led to the murders of Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Ramarley Graham, Shantel Davis, Eric Garner, Carlos Lopez Jr., Saheed Vassell, Antonio Williams, Kimani Gray and more by hyper aggressive plainclothes units that put thousands of New Yorkers like Kalief Browder in Rikers Island, is not a solution. Mayor Adams' regressive plan will put Black, Latinx, and other communities of color at serious risk of increased police violence and unnecessary contact with the criminal legal system. To expand policing and criminalization two years into a global health pandemic will harm communities that Adams is allegedly trying to help.

For decades communities have been demanding a vision for public health and safety that reduces gun violence, and all violence, by promoting jobs, affordable places to live, wraparound services for people with mental illness and substance use disorders, high-quality education for all students and access to high-quality health care. These calls for public health solutions to community violence couldn't be more pressing as Black, Latinx, other New Yorkers of color continue to struggle more than their white counterparts with the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pieces of Mayor Adams' plan indicate support of non-police safety solutions that we have been demanding for years – and we know will work – like expanding the Summer Youth Employment Program and providing resources for programs and organizations in communities working to interrupt violence. Unfortunately, these aspects of Adams' plan are secondary to his primary strategy of increasing the power and reach of the NYPD.

Mayor Adams' plan will expand and rebrand the notoriously violent Anti-Crime and other plainclothes units that are known for harassment, violence, and brutalization of Black, Latinx, and other communities of color.

Mayor Adams plan also includes an increase of NYPD officers in communities of color, putting more officers on the streets to carry out failed broken windows policing strategies. We already know what over-policing of our communities will result in – rising levels of police abuse, an increase in the NYPD's already outsized power and communities being further harmed by unnecessary involvement in the criminal legal system. In other words, this will have detrimental long-term effect on public health outcomes.

Mayor Adams' plan also increases the use of surveillance technologies, with little oversight to protect the rights of New Yorkers, especially young people who are often targeted by the NYPD with these technologies.

Mayor Adams' plan to increase the size and scope of NYPD will offset any benefits from investments he is claiming to make in community resources and the result will be further criminalization of New Yorkers and harm to our communities. The pathway to reducing violence is clear, the city must invest in communities to bring economic stability to neighborhoods through job programs, investments in affordable housing and mental health care, and increased youth and community programs that do not involve police. These are not just long-term solutions, these investments will have immediate positive impacts now.

Communities United for Police Reform and the 77 organizations that have signed on to this letter are calling for Mayor Adams to do the following:

Immediately halt plans to further resource plainclothes officers and roll out Mayor Adams' so-called "Neighborhood Safety Teams." The NYPD's plainclothes specialty units - including the former iteration of the Neighborhood Safety Teams, the Anti-Crime Unit, also known as the "Street Crime Unit" before that – are characterized by an overly aggressive mandate that proactively and aggressively targets Black and Latinx communities. They are notorious for racial profiling, violence, unconstitutional stops, and the suppression of New Yorkers' rights. In the early 2000s, groups led by the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights—known today as the Justice Committee—alongside Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the Center for Constitutional Rights and other allies that later founded Communities United for Police Reform, successfully won the dismantling of the Street Crimes Unit. Since then, Mayors and the NYPD have attempted to rebrand and "retrain" the units, however the abuses remain. Mayor Adams claims his Neighborhood Safety Teams will be different, but re-training officers does not reduce police violence. Despite new trainings for the NYPD after Eric Garner was killed

in 2014 by plainclothes officers, NYPD Anti-Crime officers went on to kill Saheed Vassell, Antonio Williams, and too many more. Modifying officers' uniforms, re-branding and re-naming units will not change the fact that by design they are inherently violent and discriminatory. More than ninety-six percent¹ of precincts that have been identified to incorporate this stepped-up enforcement are in primarily Black or Latinx communities. The culture, mandate and the abusive practices of these units will carry over to "new" or "re-trained" units, just as they have permeated all levels of the NYPD. Mayor Adams must reduce the NYPD's scope, not expand it.

End New York City's surveillance of Black, Latinx, and other communities of color and the use of dangerous surveillance technology. Putting more officers on patrol, especially concentrated in historically Black, Latinx, or other communities of color, will increase the likelihood of police violence in those neighborhoods, not create safety. In addition, the use of dangerous biometric surveillance technology that disproportionately mis-identifies Black people and the installation of more cameras throughout the city will give the NYPD unprecedented access to faulty and biased surveillance technology that will criminalize Black, Latinx, and other New Yorkers of color.

Stop the roll back of hard-fought criminal legal system reforms that save lives. State reforms related to cash bail, Raise the Age, and discovery were championed by communities all over New York City to reduce abusive practices in our criminal legal system. They must not be rolled back now, when they are proving to save the lives of New Yorkers and reducing the damage done to Black, Latinx, and other communities that are targeted by our criminal legal system.

Focus on well-paying Jobs and Affordable Permanent Housing. Many Black, Latinx and other New Yorkers have yet to recover the jobs they lost at the start of the pandemic and far too many still owe back rent or have permanently lost their housing. Meanwhile, the investments from the city that are dedicated to improving employment outcomes or increasing affordable housing have largely failed to reach Black, Latinx and other communities of color. Adams released a preliminary budget that does very little to create new jobs for those most in need, while insisting that that the State take the lead on workforce investments. There is much more that the city can do to make sure people in neighborhoods that have been hit hardest by the pandemic have the opportunity to secure well-paying jobs and live in stable housing.

Fully Fund Jobs and Programs for Young People. We need to make sure that every young person in New York City has access to a good job, which means fully funding and resourcing Summer Youth Employment Programs, regardless of immigration status, as well as employment opportunities throughout the school year. Mayor Adams has said that every young person who wants a job will have one, but in his preliminary budget he only brought the number of youth jobs up to 100,000 a far cry from actually meeting the need of the young people in the city.

¹ <https://www.nysfocus.com/2022/02/24/eric-adams-blueprint-gun-violence-de-blasio-project-fast-track/>

We also need to increase funding for community-based youth programs that do not involve the NYPD and stop funding the NYPD's youth initiatives. There are many programs for young people that have proven track records of positive youth development outcomes, and yet the city has yet to fully fund these programs and provide them with the resources they need to run smoothly.

Make Violence Prevention Programs & Violence Intervention Programs a Central Strategy. The Mayor's plan does make some investments in violence prevention and intervention programs, but it is clear that this is a secondary strategy to increased policing. We need to expand and fully fund violence prevention programs - including Restorative Justice in schools - so that we can address the root causes of harm in our neighborhoods. These programs have a very strong track record of reducing gun violence and should be a central strategy in addressing gun violence, not one that is dwarfed by investments in the NYPD.

Increasing Access to Comprehensive Community-Based Mental Health Programs and Safe Drug Use Services. New Yorkers need services that address the rising mental health needs and overdose crisis caused by the pandemic that has disproportionately impacted Black, Latinx, other New Yorkers of color. Quality mental health care and harm reduction services can be lifesavers for individuals, families and communities, and yet most Black, Latinx, and other New Yorkers of color lack access to affordable quality mental health and drug use services. The city needs to invest in community based mental health centers as well as overdose prevention centers as well as ensuring that schools have the resources to hire mental health professionals and supports for students.

It's time for the Mayor, Speaker, and City Council to address public safety through evidence-based strategies that address how the pandemic has ravaged our communities. We must stop investing in failed policing tactics that feed the cycle of violence, incarceration and impoverishment that have decimated our communities for so long. We cannot and will not go backwards – we must move forward.

Signed,

Communities United for Police Reform
Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice
Allan Feliz Foundation
Alliance for Quality Education
Anthony Baez Memorial Fund
Arab American Association of New York
Asian American Federation
Audre Lorde Project
Bronx Defenders
Brooklyn Movement Center
CAAAY Organizing Asian Communities
Caribbean Equality Project
Center for Appellate Litigation

Center for Community Alternatives
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Family Representation
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, at The City University of New York
Center for Popular Democracy
Chinese American Planning Council
Churches United for Fair Housing
Citizen Action of New York
Color of Change
Community Voices Heard
CUNY CLEAR
Defending Rights & Dissent
Drug Police Alliance
DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving
Equality for Flatbush
Faith in New York
FIERCE
Five Boro Defenders
Freedom Agenda
Girls for Gender Equity
Housing Works
Immigrant Defense Project
Jewish Voice for Peace New York City
Jews for Racial and Economic Justice
Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club
Justice and Beyond
Justice Committee
Justice League NYC
Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Society
Literacy Assistance Center
Long Island Progressive Coalition
Long Island Social Justice Action Network
Make the Road New York
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
Neighbors Together
New Hour for Women & Children —LI
New Kings Democrats
New York City Anti-Violence Project
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Communities for Change
New York County Defender Services
New York Immigration Coalition

Nodutdol for Korean Community Development
Policing and Social Justice Project
Public Science Project
Ramarley's Call
Red Hook Initiative
Safety Net Project
Street Vendor Project
SURJ New York City
Surveillance Technology Oversight Project
TakeRoot Justice
Tarab NYC
The Brotherhood Sister Sol
The Gathering for Justice
Theatre of the Oppressed NYC
Trinity Lutheran Church in Sunset Park
Urban Youth Collaborative
VOCAL-NY
Yalla Brooklyn
Youth Represent

CC:

NYC Public Advocate, Jumaane D. Williams
NYC Comptroller, Brad Lander
NYC City Council