



## MEMORANDUM

DATE: December, 21, 2021

TO: New York City Council Members

FROM: Communities United for Police Reform

CC: Public Advocate Jumanee Williams  
Comptroller Brad Lander  
Speaker Adrienne Adams

**RE: Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Modification**

### **Budget Modification Harms New Yorkers and Cuts Services Critical to Public Safety**

As the city struggles to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, New Yorkers, especially Black, Latinx, and other New Yorkers of color, are facing many serious challenges brought on by the last three years. There are [more unhoused New Yorkers in our shelter system](#), more New Yorkers who are worried about being able to stay in their homes and pay their rents, more New Yorkers are struggling through anxiety, depression, and serious mental illness without support, and more New Yorkers aren't sure how they are going to pay all their bills. In addition, there are more public schools struggling to meet increased needs of students and families, more mental health centers and programs that have months-long waiting lists, more city agencies that are so short-staffed that they cannot provide timely and accurate processing of public benefits to New Yorkers who need them most. These are crucial public safety concerns that need to be addressed and prioritized.

Instead of creating a wellspring of city resources to address these co-arising financial, public health and safety crises and restore city agencies and programs, at minimum, to pre-COVID levels, Mayor Adams has proposed a Budget Modification for FY23 that cuts essential resources and supports for New Yorkers, especially Black, Latinx, and other communities of color, including cuts to public schools, libraries, police oversight, services and supports for our elderly. In addition, the Mayor is doing little to address the slowdown in services and supports that are related to the city's high vacancy rate which is impacting the availability of supportive housing units, NYCHA operations, and New Yorkers being approved for public benefits such as SNAP. Instead, he is leveraging vacancies to make permanent cuts to the budgets and staff of city agencies. This will contribute to a growing backlog of people who are without stable housing,

food and other critical services, causing further harm to New Yorkers and further strain on our city's service providers.

While cutting critical services and destabilizing New Yorkers' health and lives, the Budget Modification protects and preserves the NYPD's bloated budget from financial and personnel cuts, effectively increasing criminalization of the people the Mayor is neglecting to serve and support. During his first year in office, the Mayor has consistently positioned the NYPD to respond to public health and safety issues that stem from underinvestment in housing, health and education, which the NYPD is not qualified to address.

### **Background**

Over the past 12 months the Mayor released his Gun Violence Prevention Plan, Housing Our Neighbors Plan, and Subway Safety Plan that make bold claims about how he plans to address the multiple crises created by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as making ["the largest financial commitment to housing that any administration has ever made"](#) or creating ["an unprecedented Summer Youth Employment and Youth Engagement Program"](#) or ["promote equity and economic opportunity at every turn"](#). These plans claim to take a holistic and thoughtful approach to addressing root causes of these multiple crises, but none of these initiatives have been accompanied by the meaningful short-term or long-term investments that such bold plans would require to truly close the gaps in homeless or mental health services, affordable housing, education, or employment that are leaving so many New Yorkers with unmet needs. Instead, in the three major budget resolutions that Mayor Adams has presided over (the FY22 February Financial Plan, the FY23 Adopted Budget, and the FY23 November Financial Plan) he has decreased funds to the very city agencies that provide crucial services for New Yorkers and in every budget both the February and November resolutions he has shrunk the city's municipal workforce, placing increased strain on agencies that were already struggling to carry their existing workload.

Where the Mayor has actually directed City dollars in his first year, is in the expanded scope, role and power of the NYPD, using policing in his plans to address community violence, street homelessness, and the mental health crisis, none of which will alleviate these issues. The Mayor has brought back notoriously violent units that have killed New Yorkers and instructed NYPD to sweep away, displace, and detain unhoused New Yorkers who the City has failed to house and support, under the guise of providing care, even directing officers to misinterpret the mental hygiene law in order to hospitalize more people against their will. For our youngest New Yorkers, the Mayor has made it clear that being policed is more important than receiving a quality education by prioritizing hiring police officers for schools while cutting thousands of pedagogical positions and school funding. In other words, even in the face of [empirical data showing otherwise](#), Mayor Adams believes we can police away the issues of homelessness and mental health, and increase policing of young people as his core approach to public health and safety.

## **What's in the Budget Modification?**

The Budget Modification reflects cuts that the mayor demanded all city agencies make in September of 2022 as well as FY23 changes that were a part of the November Financial Plan. Known as the Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEGs), these cuts are historically budget adjustments that are not supposed to impact the City's ability to provide services and run programs. However, the cuts in the mayor's Budget Modification are more than mere adjustments and will leave New Yorkers who are already vulnerable without key lifeline services and programs, especially in Black, Latinx and other communities of color.

### **Protecting and Preserving the NYPD Budget**

Even though all agencies were asked to cut 3% in FY23 as part of the PEGs, the Budget Modification reflects only a 1.2% cut to the NYPD budget, missing its mark by almost \$90 million. Meanwhile, most other agencies that provide critical services were either cut by 3% or something close to it. The mayor defended his protection of the NYPD, essentially communicating that further decreasing the funding or headcount of the NYPD is off the table. But the choice to protect the NYPD budget has real harmful consequences. If the mayor had at the very least held the NYPD to the 3% standard that all agencies were asked to make, that \$90 million could have been used to spare Housing, Preservation and Development, Public Libraries, Parks & Recreation, the Civilian Complaint Review Board, Department for The Aging, and CUNY from any cuts at all. The NYPD could have easily made its 3% cut by cutting NYPD budget bloat such as the high NYPD overtime which is costing the city \$374 million dollars, or cut positions from the 34 staff in the NYPD public relations department, or by cutting funding to NYPD involvement in homelessness, mental health and schools, or by decreasing notoriously abusive units that harm New Yorkers such as the Strategic Response Group (SRG) which is costing the city \$68 million dollars.

### **Cuts to Libraries**

The Budget Modification includes \$13.6 million dollars in cuts to the City's libraries, which will likely cause cuts to staff, hours, branches and programming. Libraries provide crucial services, especially in Black, Latinx, and other communities of color who generally have less access to the free books, Wi-Fi, and computer access that libraries provide. Libraries also provide safe public-indoor spaces for children and young people outside of school hours.

### **Cuts to New York City's Public Schools and Universities**

The Budget Modification includes a \$12.6 million dollar cut to CUNY's budget and a cut of 79 positions. This mid-year cut to CUNY is on top of the \$14.6 million dollar cut the mayor made in July of this year. Cutting funds to CUNY will have a disproportionate impact on low-income students (who are primarily Black, Latinx, and other students of color) for whom universities

provide pathways to economic security. Furthermore, cutting positions to CUNY at this time will hurt students whose education has already been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Budget Modification also cuts millions of dollars to city funds from the Department of Education, which comes on the heels of over \$469 million dollars in cuts that schools got in June. These cuts come at a time when schools are seeing an increase in enrollment from asylum seekers as well as unhoused students and are struggling to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of these students. In addition, the Mayor has made no significant investments in addressing COVID-19-related challenges, including increased health and mental healthcare needs of students and the lasting impact of diminished services for students with special needs during the pandemic.

The Budget Modification also cuts another \$1.6 million from Pre-K for 3-year-olds and eliminates the expansion of universal pre-K for three-year-olds that was set to roll out this year.

### **Cuts to Case Management Services for the Elderly**

The Budget Modification includes a \$11.5 million dollar cut in city funds to the Department for the Aging, including a \$4.3 million dollar cut to case management services for older adults, even though there are already over 2,000 older adults on the case management waitlist.

### **Cuts to Police Oversight and Accountability**

The Budget Modification cuts 22 positions from the Civilian Complaint Review Board, the agency tasked with investigating complaints made by New Yorkers against the NYPD for excessive or unnecessary force, profiling, abuse of authority, discourtesy, or the use of offensive language. These cuts demonstrate the mayor's deprioritizing of police accountability and discipline at a time when he is simultaneously expanding NYPD power. Like many city agencies, the CCRB is already struggling to address complaints filed by New Yorkers in a timely and thorough fashion due to inadequate funding and staffing shortages. Cutting another 22 positions will significantly diminish the agencies' ability to respond to complaints, investigate, make determinations, and administratively try officers in court. The CCRB's budget, prior to these cuts, was already .4% of the NYPD's expense budget. Further crippling the CCRB will exacerbate the long-standing culture within the NYPD in which officers feel that they can commit abuse and misconduct with impunity.

### **Cuts to protecting New Yorkers from Wage Theft**

The Budget Modification cuts \$1.5 million dollars in city funds from the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, this diminishes the ability of New Yorkers who have experienced wage theft to hold employers accountable.

## Leveraging Vacancies to Cut Critical Services

The mayor is making permanent cuts to staffing and budgets of some of the city's most critical agencies by leveraging vacancies to shrink government services. **The City's Department of Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD)** is tasked with expanding affordable housing, protecting tenants by ensuring landlords provide safe and well-maintained housing, and ensuring New Yorkers get housing-related subsidies and support that they need. HPD plays a critical role in COVID-19 recovery and in addressing NYC's homelessness and housing crisis. However, HPD is experiencing massive staffing shortages and has a vacancy rate of 18.2% which increased by 4.2% since Adams came into office. Because HPD is so under-staffed it has been unable to meet targets and deliverables that provide New Yorkers with important services such as increasing supportive housing units, preparing, and rehabilitating NYCHA units for new tenants, or addressing the backlog of Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher appeals.

Instead of protecting funding for these critical agencies and addressing the staffing shortages, **the Budget Modification cuts city funds to HPD by 5.1%**, one of the steepest cuts made to any city agency. The city budget cuts include a \$6 million dollar cut to supportive housing rental assistance, reducing the number of supportive housing units for this fiscal year by 25% and a \$7.4 million dollar cut to NYCHA, most of which is for a program that helps prepare and rehabilitate NYCHA units for turnover and placements from DHS shelters, emergency transfers, and NYCHA's general waiting list.

The mayor should not be leveraging high vacancy rates in order to cut the budgets of critical agencies. Addressing the housing and homelessness crisis should be a priority and the mayor should be protecting city resources allocated for these programs and allowing agencies to reallocate unused funds towards strengthening agency infrastructure and addressing staffing shortages.

Similarly, the **Department of Social Services** has a 20% vacancy rate with some specific programs having even higher vacancy rates such as Domestic Violence Services (49%) and Public Assistance and Employment Administration (32.1%). This is impacting the timely and accurate processing of public benefit programs such as SNAP, Medicaid and rental assistance vouchers.

### What do we need instead?

We need to make changes to the city budget that pave a clear pathway to both recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future economic headwinds. The mayor's approach of unilaterally shrinking critical agencies while preserving NYPD budget bloat and expanding police power will not bring about the community health and safety New Yorkers so desperately want. It will only exacerbate the current public health crisis that we are facing and exacerbate

inequity and poverty, which are root causes of the very safety concerns the mayor supposedly wants to address.

The mayor should ensure that critical city agencies can close the gaps in services and support that are leaving so many New Yorkers with unmet needs by cutting NYPD budget bloat and investing those funds where they are needed most. This includes addressing the vacancy crisis through thoughtful staffing decisions and policies, instead of bluntly cutting positions, and making strategic investments that support short-term and long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach has the best chance of preparing New Yorkers for any economic headwinds in the next year and ensuring a safe and prosperous future for Black, Latinx, and other communities of color.

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***About Communities United for Police Reform:***

Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) is an unprecedented campaign to end discriminatory and abusive policing practices in New York, and to build a lasting movement that promotes public safety and reduces reliance on policing. CPR runs coalitions of over 200 local, statewide and national organizations, bringing together a movement of community members, grassroots organizers, lawyers, researchers and activists to work for change.