

June 15th, 2023

Mayor Eric Adams
City Hall
New York, NY, 10007

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

NYC Council Members
250 Broadway New York, NY 10007

Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams
1 Centre St # 15N New York, NY 10007

Comptroller Brad Lander
1 Centre St #530 New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Eric Adams,

The 45 undersigned organizations condemn your response to the killing of Jordan Neely and the environment that your administration created that led to his death. Since taking office, you have stoked fear of the subway and with your words and policies have endorsed the dehumanization of New Yorkers who are poor, who are Black, who are unhoused, who have mental health complexities. We hold your administration accountable for the killing of Mr. Neely, and we demand accountability from the city.

Since you came into office, you have heightened the ongoing marginalization and criminalization of Black homeless New Yorkers by shrinking critical social services and increasing policing and criminalization of people in crisis. Over the past two years, you slashed housing and mental health care budgets and chose to instead invest in the NYPD and the criminalization and control of New Yorkers. While you stripped funding for services and supports for communities facing multiple public health crises, you used your bully pulpit to make people afraid - both of the subway and of each other, routinely and incorrectly linking homelessness and mental health with crime and danger. Just as you did with the killing of Mr. Neely.

It is unconscionable to respond to Mr. Neely's killing by placing blame on his mental health complexities and failing to address the interpersonal and institutional anti-Black violence that created the conditions for his killing and continue to fail to bring him justice in death. As a Black person and as part of the LGBTQ+ community, Mr. Neely was more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness, hunger, and distress. As mayor, you must acknowledge that your cuts to crucial services, which directly aid these marginalized communities, will only continue to perpetuate similar situations and more harm. And though you acknowledged in your response to Mr. Neely's killing that people who are homeless are more likely to be targets of violence than perpetrators of it, you have refused to recognize that your own directives to involuntarily remove

people who are homeless from public spaces contributes to the violence that homeless New Yorkers, like Mr. Neely, experience.

New Yorkers are grieving, they are outraged, and they should be allowed to gather peacefully to mourn Jordan's death and speak their truths without fear of themselves becoming the target of NYPD violence and retaliation. Instead, over the last week we have seen the police escalate and arrest New Yorkers who are gathering at vigils and protests. This is yet another example of the City responding to legitimate outrage through force and intimidation, and it is wholly unacceptable.

We Demand

1. **Homeless New Yorkers and New Yorkers experiencing mental health complexities should not be met with enforcement, they should be met with care.** Since you came into office, you have recklessly framed people who are homeless and living with mental health complexities as risks to public safety. You have increased failed policing and enforcement-based approaches, such as increased ticketing and sweeps of homeless New Yorkers, forced hospitalization and involuntary removals. Your Subway Safety Plan and your Mental Health Involuntary Removals Directive have deployed thousands of police officers to further criminalize New Yorkers in crisis. You have done this without meaningfully increasing the housing and mental health care services that are needed to address these public health issues. We demand an end to enforcement and policing-based approaches that make the city less safe for homeless New Yorkers and New Yorkers living with mental health complexities. This includes:
 - Removing NYPD from mental health response, including the ineffective NYPD Mental Health Co-response Teams and BHEARD
 - Ending the Mental Health Involuntary Removals Directive
 - Dismantling the DHS homeless police force
 - Ending aggressive policing of homeless New Yorkers through increased sweeps, ticketing, and forced removals of homeless New Yorkers from public spaces.

2. **The FY24 Budget must take meaningful action on homelessness, mental health care and other essential services that keep New Yorkers safe.** Every day in New York City and across the state, people experiencing homelessness are dehumanized and neglected while the causes of homelessness - unaffordable housing costs, unjust evictions, lack of supportive housing, unacceptable wait times for housing placements, insufficient access to low-barrier, voluntary, non-stigmatizing health care, and criminalization - are ignored in our city's budget priorities. We can house New Yorkers who are homeless and living on the streets. We can increase services that work for people living with serious mental illness. We can meet students' mental health crises with social workers not school cops. We can make sure that New Yorkers have access to the essential services that they need. But we cannot do this if you continue to shrink these services in the city budget and protect the NYPD budget.
 - Making accessible, affordable, comprehensive, culturally competent behavioral health and drug use services available to all New Yorkers including expanding Crisis Respite

Centers, Mobile Treatment Teams (IMT, FACT, ACT), Overdose Prevention Centers, and community based recovery programs designed for and by Black, Latinx and other communities of color.

- A clear pathway to ending the homelessness crisis in New York City including increasing safe havens, rental assistance, and single occupant supportive housing and protecting tenants through funding the right to counsel.
- Divest the funding for 600 vacant school cop positions in your FY24 budget and use that to fund support staff and services for students.
- Increase the funding and headcount of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (which is seeing a 16% reduction in your FY24 Executive Budget*), The Department of Homeless Services, the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development and NYCHA in order to ensure that New Yorkers are receiving the essential services that they need.

3. New Yorkers should be able to mourn Jordan's killing and make their voices heard without fear of NYPD violence. Over the past several weeks, New Yorkers have gathered peacefully to express their grief and rage over Jordan's tragic killing. Instead of being given the space to make their voices heard, the NYPD has descended on these vigils with violence and escalation, brutalizing demonstrators and making arrests. One of the primary units responsible for this has been the NYPD's Strategic Response Group. We demand that this historically abusive unit be disbanded and that these funds be redirected to critical social services for highly policed communities. The NYPD's Charges against demonstrators should be dropped and the police must stop targeting demonstrators.

Jordan Neely's story is tragic yet not unique. The Undersigned Organizations urge you, Mayor Adams, to listen to the collective voice of grieving and outraged New Yorkers. We demand comprehensive accountability for the killing of Jordan Neely and an end to the perpetuation of violence against communities in need. It is time to prioritize care over enforcement, to invest in essential services, and to address the root causes of homelessness and mental health complexities. The FY24 budget must reflect a genuine commitment to providing safe housing, accessible mental health care, and comprehensive support services. New Yorkers deserve a city that protects and uplifts its most vulnerable residents. It is long past time to redirect resources away from a bloated and unaccountable police force and towards initiatives that will truly make a positive impact on the lives of New Yorkers. We have the right to a city where peaceful assembly and free expression are cherished values, where cries for justice are heard and acted upon, and where every individual, regardless of their circumstances, can find dignity, safety, and opportunity.

We urge you to seize this moment, to be a leader who listens to the people, and to take decisive actions that will shape a more equitable and compassionate New York City for all.

Sincerely,

Communities United for Police Reform

Alliance for Quality Education
Arab American Association of New York
Audre Lorde Project
Brooklyn Movement Center
Center for Popular Democracy
Churches United for Fair Housing
Citizen Action of NY
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, at The City University of New York
Desis Rising Up and Moving - DRUM
Drug Policy Alliance
El Puente de Williamsburg
Faith in NY
Families for Freedom
Freedom Agenda
Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Church
Housing Works
Jews For Racial Economic Justice
Jim Owels Liberal Democratic Club
Justice Committee
Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice
Make The Road NY
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
New Kings Democrats
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services
New York Communities for Change
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Nodutdol for Korean Community Development
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.
Nurses for Social Justice
NYC Democratic Socialists of America - Racial Justice Working Group
NYCLU
Public Science Project
Safety Net Project - Urban Justice Center.
SURG
Take Root Justice
Teachers Unite
The Allan Feliz Foundation
The Anthony Baez Foundation
The Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice
The Peoples Plan
The Policing and Social Justice Project
Transgender Law Center
TREEage
VOCAL NY
Working Families Party
Youth Represent