

#NYCBudgetJustice Testimony
New York City Council Finance Hearing
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My name is Gwen Carr and I am the mother of Eric Garner, who as you all know, was killed by the NYPD in 2014 when Daniel Pantaleo put him in a chokehold, multiple other officers pounced on him, and still others stood by watching and did nothing to intervene.

I'm here today because I know first-hand that New York City doesn't have a fair budget and that more money goes to policing Black communities like mine than goes to making sure there are employment opportunities, affordable housing, youth programs, or quality public health.

No one knows better than me that when you prioritize, fund and shield the NYPD instead of investing in our communities, the impact is devastating for Black and Latinx communities. In the most extreme cases, the impact is deadly. For me and my family, it means that Eric is gone forever. This is not ok and with the coronavirus pandemic, it's even more unacceptable.

The 2021 NYC budget that Mayor de Blasio has proposed is unacceptable. It must be reworked to prioritize recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, strengthen social services, and support communities most impacted by the pandemic. We do not need additional officers to be hired. Black and Latinx communities are already over-policed. Instead, New York needs an equitable budget that meets our needs and the needs our loved ones and community members.

It is past time that we have a City budget that begins to counteract the harm and abuse our communities have been subjected to so that in the future, families do not suffer like mine and other families who have lost loved ones to the police have. Losing Eric is a reality that cannot be shifted, but what can be changed is the allotment of funds that are currently slated to be awarded to the NYPD in FY 2021 and what is being prioritized by how the City uses its resources.

It makes no sense to plan for new NYPD hires and to continue to pay the salaries of officers who kill and brutalize, and turn around and cut services and programs our communities need. Why would we bring in more police if we can't hire school guidance counselors, nurses and social workers for our youth? This is an especially horrible and violent idea, when you look at the way NYPD officers have been brutalizing our youth and other community members and calling it "social distancing enforcement."

As taxpayers, we are forced to pay for abusive policing in many different ways. I protested tirelessly for more than five years to ensure that Mayor de Blasio and the NYPD actually fired Daniel Pantaleo. It took half a decade of fighting, even though the

whole world saw Eric killed on video, and I'm still fighting for other officers who engaged in misconduct that day – including lying in their official reports – to be fired.

Every year, the City spends millions of dollars to continue to pay the salaries of officers who commit brutality and murder. The City paid over half a million dollars to keep Pantaleo on the payroll for five years while I fought for him to be fired. He made a 6-figure salary for most of that time, with a lot of overtime.

Pantaleo also had lawsuits against him before he killed my son. From the little public information available, we know that at least tens of thousands of dollars were paid out in lawsuits against Pantaleo – and none of that came out of the NYPD's budget or Pantaleo's pocket – it came out of your and my pockets as taxpayers.

That's a lot of money to spend on just one officer who should have been fired immediately, but we know that there are many more brutal police who are kept on the job, costing us taxpayers more money every year.

For Council Members who have marched with me or said Eric's name – including Speaker Corey Johnson – I need you to fight for a budget that prioritizes our communities, not the police. I need you to help honor Eric's memory by fighting to cut the NYPD's huge almost \$6 billion budget.

I am calling on all Council Members to make it clear that they will vote against any budget that doesn't freeze hiring on the NYPD and make other big cuts so that we can save our social safety net and help our communities recover from the coronavirus pandemic. These cuts should reflect a commitment to police accountability and the removal of police from social service roles, like mental health response, their "youth initiative" and homeless services.

We're in a pandemic – we need to focus on health services and making sure Black, Latinx and other communities of color can survive. This period will impact us all for years to come and the time to start the shift away from policing and criminalization and towards the wellbeing of our communities is now. We should not wait to make these cuts to the NYPD's budget when we are able to do so at this moment.