

City Council Hearing | Removing Responsibilities from the NYPD

Good morning to all of the City Council members and people in the community who are in attendance today. My name is Kathy Garcia and I am a member of the Make the Road New York Trans Immigrant Project and I am here to share my experiences with the police and the importance of dismantling vice units.

I am originally from Mexico, but I immigrated to the United States for the first time in 2001. Initially, I started working in a restaurant, which unfortunately closed after 9/11. Since then, as a trans woman, I was not been able to find another job, and I no longer had any money to pay rent or food, so I started working doing shows in bars and doing sex work again.

It didn't matter if I was working or not, the police were constantly harassing me, insulting me, kicking me out of cafeterias if I was sitting there for more than 5 minutes, putting the lights from their cars on me, and telling me to leave. The police used very intimidating tactics against me. Different policemen asked me for my phone number and told me to "cooperate" for them to not arrest me, and then they showed up at my house to force me to have sex with them. These same policemen would put the gun on the table and tell me to "cooperate."

And then, the times that I didn't follow up on her requests for "sexual favors", I was arrested. There were a total of three arrests for sex work between 2003 and 2006. In the last arrest, a man - who I later discovered was an undercover cop - offered to drive me home and offered me money. I said to him "I don't do that, what are you doing?" but in a matter of seconds, there were 3 police cars surrounding us. This resulted in 4 months in jail and deportation. Due to this arrest, I was in solitary confinement for several months, without access to hormones, and almost dying from pneumonia that was not treated until I arrived in Mexico.

I have no doubt that the cars that surrounded me were police officers from the vice unit. Vice does not protect the communities that are being trafficked, and much less any of who have been sex workers. What vice does is to commit acts of violence and unjustified raids against many of us who are just trying to survive.

I demand that the city council considers my testimony so that the VICE units are removed and more trans women and members of my community don't have to face the violence and abuse from the police. Nowadays, I am afraid of seeing the police, and I do not want more trans sisters to go through this experience. Dismantle the vice units now!

Thank you