

Testimony

**New York City Council Committee on Public Safety
January 11, 2021**

Hawa Bah
Mother of Mohamed Bah
Justice Committee Member

My name is Hawa Bah. I am the mother of Mohamed Bah, a son who gave me great pride. I lost my son at the hands of the NYPD on Sept. 25, 2012. Since then, I have not stopped fighting for justice for my son and all those killed by the NYPD. I have not stopped fighting to create the change we need so that no more Black and brown New Yorkers are murdered by the police.

Thank you, Chair Adams, for having the families speak first today. I remember you because you voted with us against the bill that Ritchie Torres watered down in the Right to Know Act. And you voted with us for Reynoso's bill. You spoke of the families that day.

I am here today because I am very concerned that – in response to Governor Cuomo's executive order – the City is doing a "police reform" process that is basically being led by the NYPD and has, up until now, not created any real way for New Yorkers who are directly impacted by the NYPD to give input.

Unless reforms come from the communities who are abused by the NYPD every day, especially us families who have lost our loved ones, we are not going to get any real change and we will continue to be abused and killed.

It's important that you are creating space to hear from some of the families today, but just listening is not enough. You have to take action. You have to do what we say.

I want to share a little bit about what happened to my son: When Mohamed was 16, he traveled alone from our home in Guinea to America, to go to school. He said to me "America will be proud to have me as a student and Africa will be proud to have me as a child."

Mohamed was a hard worker. He was a Muslim man, an honors student and a taxi driver. Mohamed was someone who always helped people and was loved by his neighbors in Harlem. That's who he was.

At one point, before Mohamed was killed by the NYPD, he was attacked in the street, maybe for money. He was beaten. After this happened, I left Africa, my company, my factory, to come to America because I noticed something was going on with my son. He wasn't as happy and he was having a hard time.

I called 911 to get an ambulance to take him to the hospital, but the police came first. Instead of helping him, they treated him like a criminal.

When NYPD got there, I told them, "I didn't call the police, I called for an ambulance," and told them to leave. They told me this is how the system works, which is why we need to change the whole system.

I begged the police to let me talk to my son, but they refused.

Edwin Mateo, Andrew Kress and Michael Green shot Mohamed eight times. Lt. Michael Licitra was supervising them and allowed this to happen. Officer Edwin Mateo fired the last shot, at close range to my son's head while he was on the ground.

The officers lied about killing Mohamed. They claimed Mohamed stabbed them, but it was later proven that one of the officers shot another one was his Taser. I still can't believe Mohamed was killed like this.

Even though some of the truth came out during the civil trial, none of these officers were ever held accountable.

There is so much you can learn from my son's story about what need to be changed about the NYPD and about our society.

First: We need accountability.

The officers who murdered Mohamed are still working in our community. They are still collecting pay checks and getting raises. It's like they are being rewarded for killing my son.

This always happens. It has happened to all of us families who are speaking today. The NYPD unjustly takes our loved ones lives without any consequences.

Officer Mateo, Lt. Licitra and all of the other officers involved must be fired from the NYPD. The plan to reform the NYPD must make accountability a top priority. Without this the violence will only continue. I need you to commit to pushing for these officers and the officers who killed others like Delrawn Small, Antonio Williams and Kawaski Trawick to be fired.

Second: The City must remove the NYPD from any response to those who are in emotion distress like my son. We need a better system to take care of New Yorkers' health.

The NYPD cannot be involved in responding to people who are experiencing emotional or mental health crises. They have to be completely removed. It doesn't make any sense for officers with guns to come unless the purpose is to criminalize and kill the person who is suffering.

Instead, when someone is in crisis, they need people who are trained in mental health response, who can give them support, and listen. We need the people who come to involve families, friends, and neighbors who know the person, and who the person in crisis can trust.

More training for the NYPD will not work. After Mohamed was killed, the City said they would re-train their officers. They always talk about more training, but now, years after Mohamed's death, nothing is any better. None of the training has stopped them from killing others, like Kawaski Trawick or Saheed Vassell.

We also need better healthcare for our communities. Rather than giving the NYPD money for training and keeping them involved when people are in emotional distress, that money should go to better mental health services for our communities.

This leads me to my last point: The Mayor and City Council should defund the NYPD so that we have more money for the services our communities really need.

The NYPD has too much money, power, and they keep killing and hurting families like mine. Every year they use millions of dollars to respond to people in emotional distress. They also pay millions of dollars to keep giving paychecks to officers like Edwin Mateo and the other officers who murdered Mohamed. The City pays out hundreds of millions more because of police brutality civil suits.

Why does the City continue to spend so much money on brutalizing and killing Black and brown people? The only way to help stop police violence and make our communities safe is to defund the NYPD and put that money into mental health care, jobs, housing, education, and other services we need.

Thank you for listening. It's important that you are creating space to hear from some of the families today, but just listening is not enough. You have to take action. You have to do what we say.