February 12, 2019

Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
28 Wells Avenue, Building #3
Yonkers, NY 10701

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie
1446 East Gun Hill Road
Bronx, NY 10469

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie and members of the New York State Legislature:

Historically, low-income communities of color have been subject to rampant criminalization and mistreatment by police and law enforcement. We continue to see this disturbing trend play out across our state. From Buffalo to New York City, racial disparities in policing are still widely seen and felt.

The 88 organizations signing this letter represent tens of thousands of New Yorkers, including many families of New Yorkers who have been killed by police and communities that have been criminalized, abused and whose rights have been violated by discriminatory and abusive policing. With a new Democratic governing majority in Albany, you have an opportunity to create a safer New York for everyone, and help end abusive and discriminatory policing.

To achieve those goals, we urge you to pass the Safer New York Act—a comprehensive package of legislation that will increase police transparency and accountability throughout New York state, and help build safer communities for all New Yorkers. The Safer New York Act includes passing the PoliceSTAT Act (A-Lentol/S1830A-Hoylman), repealing 50-a (A2513-O’Donnell), strengthening and codifying the Special Prosecutor Executive Order (A1601-Perry/S2574-Bailey), reducing Unnecessary Arrests (A4053-Aubry/S2571-Bailey) and passing the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (A1617-Peoples-Stokes/S1527-Krueger).

Many of our organizations are in Albany today to lobby for the Safer New York Act— a much-needed legislative package that has broad and growing support among New Yorkers, including those we represent.

Below is an overview of what each of the bills in the Safer New York Act will do:

Police Statistics & Transparency (STAT) Act (A-Lentol/S1830A-Hoylman) would require police departments across the state to record and report comprehensive demographic and geographic data on deaths and killings occurring during law enforcement activity as well as enforcement of low-level offenses (including violations and misdemeanors.) to improve transparency and help address aggressive and selective police enforcement.¹

¹ Endorsed in concept by President Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.
Repeal of NYS CRL, Section 50-a (A2513-O’Donnell). 50-a is a state statute that is used to keep police misconduct and discipline secret. NYS is arguably the least transparent in the nation when it comes to information about police misconduct. 50-a prevents public disclosure of “personnel records” and is used statewide to shield abusive officers and hide the failure of police departments to hold officers accountable for egregious actions, including police brutality, sexual misconduct, lying in official capacities, and other abuse. A repeal of 50-a is necessary to provide much needed transparency on police misconduct and discipline in New York State, and a meaningful check on police abuse, whether by individual officers or entire departments.

Enact Special Prosecutor Legislation (A1601-Perry/S2574-Bailey) to codify and strengthen Executive Order 147. This legislation provides the Attorney General’s office with jurisdiction in all cases of police killings and deaths in police custody, memorializing and strengthening EO147. It would help to ensure fair and thorough investigations and, when warranted, effective prosecutions in tragic incidents that the criminal justice system has historically failed to address. It would help to aid New York families in securing justice for the unjust deaths of their loved ones at the hands of police or in police custody, and advance police accountability and equal justice.

Reduce Unnecessary Arrests for non-criminal, minor offenses (A4053-Aubry/S2571-Bailey). This legislation would help end harmful and needless arrests for low-level, ticketable offenses. These arrests can carry significant social and public costs to taxpayers, and can jeopardize employment opportunities, immigration status, and access to health, housing, and other programs for those subjected to these unnecessary arrests. By making the law enforcement action commensurate with the offense, this legislation can help reduce financial resources spent on minor infractions, and increase resources available for meaningful safety measures for all New Yorkers.

End Marijuana Prohibition by passing the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (A1617-Peoples-Stokes/S1527-Krueger) which will remove marijuana from consideration under the Controlled Substances Act, and will authorize the personal use and cultivation of marijuana. Marijuana prohibition has failed in its stated goal of stopping or curbing marijuana use across New York State. Instead, the enforcement of marijuana statutes has been used to target and criminalize communities of color. The Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) will help address the discriminatory enforcement of marijuana prohibition statutes.

Passage of the Safer New York Act should be one of your top priorities for this legislative session.

Now is the time for real progressive leadership in Albany that will ensure police departments across our state become more transparent and accountable to all New Yorkers.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Communities United for Police Reform
1199 SEIU-UHWE
Ali Forney Center
Alliance for Education Justice
Alliance for Quality Education
Arc of Justice
Bronx Defenders
Bronx Freedom Fund
Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Movement Center
Brotherhood/SisterSol
Center for Constitutional Rights
Citizen Action of New York
Clergy Campaign for Social & Economic Justice
Coalition for Educational Justice
Color of Change
Community Change
Damayan Migrant Workers Association
Defending Rights & Dissent
Drug Policy Alliance
DRUM- Desis Rising Up & Moving
Enough is Enough Rochester
Equality for Flatbush
Faith In New York
FIERCE
Girls for Gender Equity
Global Action Project
Harm Reduction Coalition
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Immigrant Defense Project
Jewish Voice for Peace - New York City
Jews for Racial & Economic Justice
Justice Committee
JustLeadershipUSA
Kairos Center for Rights, Religions, and Human Rights at Union Theological Seminary
Katal Center for Health, Equity & Justice
LatinoJustice
Law@theMargins
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Society
LGBT Faith Leaders of African Descent
Make the Road New York
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
Metropolitan Community Church of New York
Million Hoodies
MinKwon Center for Community Action
MomsRising
MPower Action
NAACP NEW YORK STATE CONFERENCE
National Domestic Workers Alliance
Communities United for Police Reform

New Kings Democrats
New York City Anti-Violence Project
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Communities for Change
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Metro Area Postal Union, APWU
North Star Fund
Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights
NY Working Families
NYC-Democratic Socialists of America
Picture The Homeless
Public Science Project
Rise Up Kingston
Rockaway Youth Task Force
Showing Up for Racial Justice - NYC
South Asian Fund For Education, Scholarship And Training (SAFEST)
St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
Street Vendor Project, Urban Justice Center
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Take On Hate
Tarab NYC
The Arab American Association of New York
The Black Institute
The Center for Popular Democracy
The Gathering for Justice/Justice League NYC
The National Panhellenic Council of NYC, Inc
The Policing and Social Justice Project at Brooklyn College
Transgender Law Center
Transportation Alternatives
Trinity Lutheran Church
UAW Local 2325 - Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (AFL-CIO)
Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL-NY)
War Resisters League
We Dream in Black
WESPAC Foundation
Westchester Coalition for Police Reform
Youth Represent

cc:
Governor Andrew Cuomo
Assemblymember Tremaine Wright, Chair of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus
Assemblymember Latrice Walker and Senator Luis Sepulveda, Chairs of the Criminal Justice Subcommittee for BPHA Caucus