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Contact:

Jared Chausow, Brooklyn Defender Services (JChausow@bds.org)

Ryan Karerat, The Bronx Defenders (RKarerat@bronxdefenders.org)

Redmond Haskins, The Legal Aid Society (RHaskins@legal-aid.org)

Sam McCann, The Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (SMccann@ndsny.org)

Hettie Powell, Queens Defenders (hpowell@queensdefenders.org)

Lupe Todd-Medina, New York County Defender Services (LToddmedina@nycds.org)

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Joint NYC Defender Statement On NYPD Brutality

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, The Legal Aid Society, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Queens Defenders, and New York County Defender Services issued the following statement on New York City Police Department (NYPD) brutality:

“White supremacy, structural racism, and state violence are deeply embedded into the fabric of this nation. The protests in NYC and across the country were not triggered by a few isolated incidents of police brutality; but rather are rooted in the deep-seated racism and perpetuation of inequity that this country has continuously shown to Black, brown, and Indigenous people.

We mourn with the families of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery. Their lives were snuffed out because of this country’s refusal to face our history and disrupt our legacy of anti-Black racism. New York City bears responsibility as well. Although we hold ourselves up as a progressive bastion, our city is home to some of the largest and most under-resourced communities of color in the country. New Yorkers who consider themselves “liberal” wrap themselves in white immunity while perpetuating entrenched stereotypes and harm. Amy Cooper instinctively weaponized her privilege against Christian Cooper because she knew that if she combined and repeated the words “African-American man” and “threat,” the police would not only come but they would immediately accept her word over any evidence to the contrary.

As New York City’s public defenders, we work for and represent those who are the targets and victims of police intimidation, threat, and violence. Thousands of people each year, the vast majority of whom are Black and Latinx, are funneled into the criminal legal system because of the deep-seated structural racism that we are collectively witnessing here in NYC. The disturbing videos and reports of the violent attacks by NYPD on protestors and the media, while traumatizing to watch, are all too familiar to us. They mirror the stories we hear every day of police acting with impunity, targeting,

attacking, beating, lying, abusing, and disrespecting Black and brown people in the communities we serve in all five boroughs.

The people we represent live under a constant threat of surveillance, harassment, violence, and incarceration simply because of the color of their skin. They live their lives knowing they will never be given the benefit of the doubt. They will never be presumed innocent.

Despite campaigning on a message about racial justice, Mayor de Blasio has done nothing to address the many layers of systemic racism in our city. Instead, he has reduced the budgets for much-needed health, mental health, housing and educational resources in the communities that need them the most, while growing the NYPD's bloated budget, adding more officers every year, and adding a level of militarization that has empowered the worst and most frightening version of police force.

And now, despite daily acts of violence and excessive use of force against non-violent protesters, de Blasio commends the NYPD's actions, further emboldening officers already acculturated to see Black people as the cause of every "problem" and dehumanizing the very individuals they are sworn to serve.

We demand accountability and radical change. We demand that the City Council and Mayor de Blasio significantly reduce the size and budget of the NYPD. We demand that candidates for elected office decline contributions from law enforcement PACs and unions, and return the thousands of dollars they have accepted over the years. We demand that our government at every level acknowledge the first amendment rights of the protesters and denounce the NYPD's violent response to such constitutionally-protected political protest. We demand police transparency and a repeal of 50a, the law that keeps police records a secret and allows officers to violate the civil rights of individuals over and over again with impunity. We demand investment in the communities most impacted by over-policing and police violence. And we demand that those harmed by centuries of oppression be allowed to decide for themselves how to deploy those resources to heal, provide, and thrive.

As the police continue to harass and attack peaceful protesters exercising their constitutional rights, we stand ready to zealously defend them. We stand in solidarity with the protestors taking to the streets, the bail funds working to get people released from jail, and everyone else who has responded to this moment by letting their leaders know that enough is enough."

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