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NYC Public Defenders Demand At Least \$1 Billion Cut to NYPD Budget

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, New York County Defender Services, Queens Defenders, and Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem sent a letter today to Mayor Bill de Blasio and the New York City Council reiterating their demand that lawmakers cut at least \$1 billion from the NYPD budget and redirect those funds low-income communities of color across the city.

The letter states:

“Our clients are disproportionately stopped, ticketed, arrested, and punished because of the color of their skin and the communities in which they live. As public defenders, we see firsthand how the NYPD undermines public safety, perpetuating and exacerbating the conditions that trap people in a cycle of poverty and criminal legal system involvement through Broken Windows policing. We witness how targeted policing of communities of color reinforces state violence that too often costs Black and Latinx New Yorkers their lives. And now the general public has witnessed these atrocities, too. In recent weeks, viral videos of police officers violently abusing their power have increased the public’s awareness of what Black and Latinx New Yorkers have long known: It is long past time for transformative change.

New Yorkers recognize that bold action is necessary. Transformative change must start with divesting at least \$1 billion directly from the NYPD’s almost \$6 billion FY21 expense budget, but it cannot end there. We must dramatically shrink the footprint of law enforcement and reverse our decades-long defunding of social services and public infrastructure. It’s time to reject the impulse to arrest, punish, and incarcerate our way out of complex social problems. It hasn’t worked. Instead, as recommended by Communities United for Police Reform, New York City must invest in ‘strong, accessible, and culturally competent systems and infrastructure that center the needs of low-income Black, Latinx, and other communities of color.’”

“New Yorkers have taken to the streets over the past several weeks in response to the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breona Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and so many other Black people at the hands of police with a simple message: enough is enough,” said **Justine Olderman, Executive Director of The Bronx Defenders**. “As public defenders, we witness every day how police surveillance, harassment, and violence creates intergenerational trauma and funnels hundreds of thousands of people into the criminal legal system. Elected officials have a unique opportunity to

chart a new path for the city. One that dramatically shrinks the policing footprint and invests in community self-determination, health, and stability.”

"New York City's budget is woefully disconnected from New Yorkers' values, values that our neighbors have taken to the streets to reassert. The bloated NYPD budget threatens our Black and brown neighbors' lives and starves communities like ours in upper Manhattan of vital resources," said **Alice Fontier, Managing Director of Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem**. "Mayor de Blasio and the City Council must respond to the demands of their city. It is time to cut at least \$1 billion from the NYPD budget and to invest those resources in programs that reflect our city's values and meaningfully serve New Yorkers."

“The NYPD has nearly unfettered power to surveil, arrest, and incarcerate tens of thousands of Black and brown New Yorkers every year," said **Stan Germán, Executive Director of the New York County Defenders Services**. "Recent reforms have shrunk the size of the criminal legal system, but the racial disparities at every stage of the process remain chillingly the same. We must find a new path. Good research has shown that decreasing the number of police can make our communities safer. Instead of wasting billions of dollars every year on the NYPD, we must now invest in the kinds of programs that make us all stronger: our schools, mental health care resources, and housing. We stand with the protesters to call for these long overdue reforms.”

“Brooklyn Defender Services joins people rising up in the wake of police killings of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, George Floyd and so many others in demanding an end to racist police violence and defunding of police, said **Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services**. “Every day, our attorneys and social workers serve Black people and other New Yorkers of Color who desperately need housing and healthcare, including mental healthcare, and yet instead face arrest, prosecution, incarceration, or worse. Defunding police means reinvesting funds to meet people’s needs and provide for true community safety.”

"As New York City reckons with structural racism and economic inequality that continues to plague Black and brown communities, those in government must respond with bold action not just cheap talk,” said **Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “It is due time to cut the NYPD’s bloated budget by at least \$1 billion dollars and use those funds to support education, housing and employment in the very same communities that have shouldered over-policing for decades. The New York City Council has committed, and now City Hall must join for what is right. New Yorkers are watching and are demanding real action."

“At Queens Defenders we witness firsthand the impact of what intergenerational poverty can have on our city’s most vulnerable residents and communities – the same residents and communities that the NYPD has historically targeted leading to unprecedented levels of our black and brown neighbors being behind bars,” said **Lori Zeno, Founder & Executive Director of Queens Defenders**. “The City agencies focused on lifting up vulnerable New Yorkers have for too long dealt with shoe-string budgets while the NYPD swelled their ranks. The time has come to redirect funding to where it can have the most impact on ensuring all New Yorkers can reach for and realize their full potential.”

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