

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Justice in Every Borough.

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

Legal Aid: City Council Should Reject Mayor de Blasio's Policing Plan as the Bad Product of a Bad Process

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** urged the City Council not to endorse Mayor Bill de Blasio's policing plan ahead of a scheduled New York City Council vote on a resolution that will lay the foundation for future efforts to address longstanding patterns of NYPD violence and harassment disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx New Yorkers.

Background

On June 12, 2020, as New Yorkers joined people across the country in mass protests against police violence and harassment of Black and Latinx people, New York's Governor issued Executive Order 203, directing the executives of local governments to convene the head of the local police agency and various stakeholders to develop a plan to improve policing "for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and [to] promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color."

The order specifically requires that those stakeholders include members of the community with an emphasis on areas with high numbers of police interactions, non-profit and faith-based groups, public defenders, and elected officials and to ensure their involvement in the development of a policing plan.

An operations plan was meant to have been issued by September 2020, stakeholders were to have been convened in the early autumn, collaborative drafting was to have taken place in November and December, and a public comment period was supposed to have launched in January of this year. In New York City, none of this happened.

You can read more about the City's failure to include community input here: <https://tinyurl.com/f9frejkb>

Legal Aid's [comments](#) urge the City Council help move New York City beyond the Mayor's failed response to the Governor's executive order on policing. In particular, Legal Aid called on the Council to:

- Acknowledge that Mayor de Blasio and the NYPD's police reform process disrespected New Yorkers directly impacted by police violence and abuse. The Mayor's Police Reform Plan is the product of a process that did affirmative harm. The Council has an opportunity to begin to repair that damage by

acknowledging it and avoiding any impression that a resolution relating to this Plan ignores – or, worse, endorses – that damage.

- Acknowledge that Mayor de Blasio’s plan largely extends status quo policing strategies and fails to meet New Yorkers’ demands for transformative change. Mayor de Blasio’s failure of leadership produced a police reform plan whose flaws cannot be ignored and can only be fixed with more time than the Council now has available. To take us beyond this moment, the Council’s resolution must acknowledge that Mayor de Blasio’s plan offers little in the way of concrete solutions to the problems of the NYPD and is at best a starting point, with much more work to be done.
- Make meaningful community engagement a prerequisite for any further reform processes. At the heart of the present disaster is Mayor de Blasio and the NYPD’s failure to meaningfully engage advocates and impacted communities. Council has an opportunity to ensure that these mistakes are not repeated.
- Mandate transparency in all police reform proposals. Mayor de Blasio and the NYPD have a well-established pattern of failing to commit to full transparency around NYPD policies and practices. This is particularly troubling given how much of the Mayor’s Plan centers on new assessments and reviews to further examine problematic NYPD practices. The Council should make explicit demands to ensure that transparency is a component of all reform initiatives.
- Withhold endorsement of parts of the plan that simply extend the NYPD’s status quo policing strategy. Far from “reinventing” or “reimagining” policing, large portions of the Mayor’s Plan double down on the NYPD’s strategy of “Neighborhood Policing” or “Enhanced Neighborhood Policing.” As the Plan itself acknowledges, this policing strategy dates back to 2015, and it has failed to prevent, and in some cases contributed to, the injustices underlying the current crisis in policing.

“The New York City Council should not further alienate New Yorkers by endorsing a police reform plan that glosses over and distracts from, rather than addresses, the deeply rooted problems within the NYPD,” said **Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “We need to move beyond this failed process, listen to the demands of impacted communities for investment in non-police strategies for improving public safety, and acknowledge that true change cannot be built on the creaky foundation the Mayor has put before the City Council. Otherwise, New Yorkers will be left with a reform plan in name only and will be destined to repeat the cycle of failed promises that led to this summer’s protests.”

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For 145 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. www.legalaidnyc.org