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Legal Aid, Advocates and Elected Officials Call on NYPD Inspector General to Release Audit of the NYPD’s Gang Database

G.A.N.G.S Coalition Also Urges the City Council to Immediately Pass Legislation That Would Finally Abolish This Overtly Racially Biased Policing Tool

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, G.A.N.G.S Coalition, elected officials, impacted New Yorkers and others, rallied outside of the Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD (OIG-NYPD) to demand the release of a long-awaited report on the New York City Police Department’s (NYPD) controversial gang database, and called on the New York City Council to pass Int 0360, pending legislation that would abolish the database and precludes the NYPD from creating a replacement.

The New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), which oversees OIG-NYPD, stated that the report would be released by the end of 2022. The report will reveal the findings of an audit that launched in 2018 into the problematic database, which is currently estimated to hold records on 17,500 to 42,000 New Yorkers, some as young as 13-years-old. 99 percent of those in the database are Black and Latinx.

Advocates have long decried the NYPD gang database as discriminatory, over-inclusive, and full of erroneous data that results in surveillance and the questionable prosecution of Black and
Latinx people. Inclusion in a gang database, which requires no proof of criminal activity, can impact an individual’s access to housing, education, employment, naturalization, and more.

“Simply put, the gang database is a racist and unconstitutional tool that ensnares young Black and Latinx New Yorkers in the criminal legal system, and we’re confident that the OIG-NYPD report will reflect exactly that,” said Anthony Posada, supervising attorney in the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society. “We call for the immediate release of this report, and on the City Council to advance much needed legislation that will abolish this rogue and hyper-inclusive database once and for all.”

In 2019, Chicago’s Office of Inspector General audited the Chicago Police Department’s Gang Database which resulted in findings of widespread abuse and discrimination. The report cited a lack of sufficient controls for generating, maintaining, and sharing gang-related data; a lack of procedural fairness protections; significant data quality concerns; and a lack of transparency regarding its gang designations strain on police-community relations.

Cities across the country, including Chicago, Boston, and Washington D.C., have successfully challenged their local law enforcement’s gang databases in court. The justices in the U.S. First Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston cited “flaws in that database, including its reliance on an erratic point system built on unsubstantiated inferences.”

In 2017, the Portland Police Bureau ended its gang database, yet a city audit less than a year later discovered that the Bureau still kept an informal list of active gang members despite purging the formal directory of “designated” gang members. This underscores the need for legislation, such as Int 0360, to not only abolish databases, but also prohibit local law enforcement from creating replacements.

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