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

Legal Aid, NYCLU, the Office of the Attorney General, The Aboushi Law Firm, Wylie Stecklow PLLC, Davis Wright Tremaine LLP and National Press Photographers Association Welcome Hiring of Community Engagement Expert to Help Assess NYPD's Compliance with Landmark Protest Settlement

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, the New York Civil Liberties Union, the Office of the Attorney General, The Aboushi Law Firm, Wylie Stecklow PLLC, Davis Wright Tremaine LLP and the National Press Photographers Association today welcomed the hiring of a Community Engagement Expert, Obi Afriyie, who will help ensure the New York City Police Department (NYPD) is in compliance with provisions of a landmark [settlement agreement](#) reached in *Payne et al. v de Blasio et al.* which significantly reformed the NYPD's policing of protests to protect the public and members of the press from excessive use of force.

The lawsuit was brought in 2020 on behalf of 11 individuals who were brutalized by the NYPD while participating in and reporting on protests calling for racial justice and police accountability following the murder of George Floyd.

The settlement agreement, reached in 2023, requires the NYPD to utilize a tiered response system that creates a presumption against deploying police officers to protests unless certain thresholds are met, thereby minimizing police presence at protests and requiring the NYPD to use de-escalation methods before increasing its response.

Additionally, the agreement requires the NYPD to stop its use of the crowd-control tactic known as "kettling," amend its internal discipline matrix, and improve treatment of members of the press.

The Community Engagement Expert is an independent position tasked with engaging affected communities including grassroots organizations, legal organizations, press organizations and legal observers to ensure their critical input is taken into account when determining whether the NYPD has successfully implemented these reforms.

Obi Afriyie is a Community Organizer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund with experience in social justice-oriented community mobilization, policy development, and program creation.

"As a lifelong New Yorker and community organizer, I am thrilled to step into the role of Community Engagement Expert," said **Obi Afriyie**. "In my new position, I will work tirelessly with the community to hold the NYPD to its oath to protect New Yorkers' right to protest, regardless of their message, race, or neighborhood. Our First Amendment protections are not just legal principles—they are the lifeblood of effective advocacy and the cornerstone of true restorative equality. I am eager to amplify the voices of those too often unheard and ensure their rights are protected and empowered."

“I congratulate Obi Afriyie on becoming the Community Engagement Expert, a role that was created as part of my office’s settlement with the Legal Aid Society, NYCLU, and the NYPD to protect peaceful demonstrations,” said **New York Attorney General Letitia James**. “This position is crucial to helping us ensure that New Yorkers can exercise their First Amendment rights freely and safely. I look forward to working with all our partners to safeguard New Yorkers’ constitutional rights and our public safety.”

“We welcome the hiring of Obi Afriyie as the Community Engagement Expert, a position that will be paramount in analyzing whether the NYPD has succeeded in its requirement to scale back its excessive use of force against New Yorkers exercising their First Amendment rights,” said **Rigodis Appling, Staff Attorney in the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “The Department cannot be allowed to revert back to the brutal tactics seen during the 2020 demonstrations for Black lives, which resulted in dozens of New Yorkers being severely and unjustly harmed at the hands of officers. We look forward to working with Mr. Afriyie and the oversight committee as we continue to closely monitor the NYPD’s level of compliance with these critical reforms.”

“As the Community Engagement Expert, Obi Afriyie will play a critical role in ensuring that the voices of impacted New Yorkers are front and center as the settlement takes hold,” said **Daniel Lambright, senior staff attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union**. “As thousands of protesters have taken to the streets to make their voices heard over the past years, the NYPD too often responded with force and violence. This only underscores the need for the City to fully operationalize the requirements of the settlement. Working with Mr. Afriyie and the oversight committee, the NYCLU is prepared to hold the NYPD accountable for any violations and fulfill the promise of this historic settlement.”

“A cornerstone of this landmark settlement agreement was giving communities and grassroots organizations affected by police brutality a direct seat at the table,” said **Tahanie Aboushi, partner at The Aboushi Law Firm, PLLC**. “With Obie Afriye as the Community Engagement Expert, we can ensure that the community is heard and is part of ensuring the NYPD is compliant with the settlement. An oversight mechanism of this structure will provide a means to protect first amendment activity and hold the NYPD accountable for any continued abuse of power and violence.”

“All New Yorkers need to have a voice in this conversation,” said **Wylie Stecklow of Wylie Stecklow PLLC**. “Police - community relations cannot improve without community engagement.”

“The National Press Photographers Association welcomes Obi Afriyie, in his role as Community Engagement Expert,” said **Mickey H. Osterreicher, general counsel for the National Press Photographers Association**. “Mr. Afriyie’s participation is crucial to the successful implementation and enforcement of the settlement agreement in bringing about meaningful change for policing in New York, especially as it relates to the First Amendment rights of the public and the press.”

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