



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
Senate Standing Committee on Civil Service and Pensions
Examining police safety and public protection in New York City
February 4, 2015**

Good afternoon, Chair Golden, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the important issue of police safety and public protection. My name is Eric L. Adams, and I am the Brooklyn Borough President, representing the 2.6 million residents that call Brooklyn home.

Keeping the public safe and ensuring the safety of police officers is of paramount importance in New York City. The nature of policing has been transformed over the past two decades. From 1994 to 2014, murders in New York City have dropped by 605 percent, rapes have dropped by almost 244 percent and robberies have dropped by 524 percent.

While more must be done to drive crime down even further, New York City is the safest big city in the United States, in large part due to the best trained police force in the world.

The role of the police officer in today's New York City is less about chasing bad guys and more about ensuring that the civilian population is safe, that members of the NYPD are safe, and that the person the police officer is trying to "correct" is done as safely as possible.

In order to do this, however, we need to think even further out of the box to address the new safety challenges facing "New York's Finest" and the public at large. That's why we need to rethink the technology that police officers use, the transparency that is needed to ensure that all police-community interactions are conducted in a fair manner for both parties, and the training that officers receive to improve safety for all.

To start, the NYPD must rethink the type of technology that equips their officers. Our legislative leaders should look far and wide to identify the best practices in police equipment that best protects our officers. Whether that technology is bulletproof glass, stronger bulletproof vests, or expanding ShotSpotter technology, we must equip those that protect and serve us with the most up-to-date safety-enhancing tools.

This includes using technology to improve transparency as well. Today, my office released a report calling for a pilot program in the NYPD to implement camera technology on police officers' weapons. These micro-cameras have shown the ability to capture interactions between officers and members of the community in the unwanted event of a police shooting. This technology, like body cameras on police officers and dashboard cameras, can help protect members of the general public as well as officers. In fact, a 2002 study by the United States Department of Justice found that dashboard cameras exonerated

police officers in up to 93 percent of misconduct investigations. In addition, the footage from these cameras can help improve our police training practices by giving cadets real-world footage of police-community interactions.

My report also called for the NYPD to pilot a “smart-gun” program that serves to take our gun safety measures into the future. A pilot program will prove that these types of guns work, and that they improve safety of the broader public by making it harder for guns to be used by their rightful owner.

In addition, in instances when a person is seriously injured or killed during an interaction with a police officer, we must appoint a special prosecutor. Local prosecutors often are too connected to police to offer impartial efforts.

We must also reform our grand jury system to become more transparent. Grand juries were established in England in the 12th and 13th centuries, a vestige of a time when people needed to be protected from unfair prosecution from the king and others. There was a necessary element of secrecy — one that need not apply in cases involving police misconduct.

Additionally, the handling of serious injuries and killings of individuals by police officers should be wholly separated from local grand juries. These bodies are not equipped to handle cases involving local police officers on whom they rely every day.

Special grand juries should also be convened for police-related incidents, and independent agencies must gather evidence even before they convene. For example, a statewide unit housed within the New York State Police Department should gather the evidence that will shape whether there is an indictment, as well as whether there will be a fair trial based on the facts.

But all the technology and reforms in the world pale in comparison to police officers’ greatest tools: his or her cognitive and interpersonal skills. Today, too many beat officers are being underutilized in neighborhoods, standing on street corners waiting for something to happen.

Instead, we must rethink the training of our beat officers to operate more like Community Affairs Officers. We must empower our officers to engage with community members before an arrest, a traffic ticket or a citation.

We need more proactive policing. For example, training officers to engage local businesses or community members before a crisis will help foster a better response during a crisis. Incorporating community outreach efforts to encourage people to sign-up for UPK or IDNYC can help build relationships that protect community members and police alike. In addition, we can also pair local police officers with community leaders, like clergy members, to ensure a better understanding between cops and residents.

I urge the NYPD to create a pilot program that trains an entire precinct in Brooklyn with the skill-sets that Community Affairs Officers receive as well. Doing so can help change how the community and police interact with one another and will generate even greater public safety dividends for both the NYPD and public.

This trifecta of new policing – technology, transparency and training – will help make the finest police force in the world even better.