Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams  
New York City Council Committee on Public Safety  
March 12, 2018

Good afternoon Chair Richards and members of the City Council Committee on Public Safety. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee on New York City’s Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) Budget.

As a 22-year veteran of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and now as Brooklyn borough president, I am intimately aware of the security risks that our women and men in blue, as well as the 2.6 million residents of Brooklyn, face every day. We currently live in the safest city in America and that is the result of tireless work from community activists and reform-minded police leadership to recognize that everyone is responsible for the public’s safety. Without collaboration and partnership in communities and among police officers, we would not have seen the safety gains we’ve made to date and we would not have a hope that we can make even further gains in the future.

That said, we still have many challenges facing public safety in New York City. In the wake of terrorists attacks on venues across the country and world, we must do more to protect soft sites such as arenas, businesses, and schools; in an era of limited resources, we must make efficient use of taxpayer dollars to deliver the most public safety gains for the buck; and in a time at which we are seeing children killed on New York City’s roadways, we must double down in our efforts to curb reckless driving.

In this year’s proposed budget, I see an opportunity to fill gaps in needed public safety resources by becoming even more innovative with how we use and leverage taxpayer dollars.

In July 2016, I launched Operation Safe Shopper, a public-private partnership that allocated Brooklyn Borough Hall discretionary expense funding to five Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and/or 501(c)(3) civic groups for the purchase of security cameras. Since that time, I have expanded this program to an additional three 501(c)(3) civic groups and will be further expanding to additional commercial corridors across the borough this coming year.

While this may not seem on its face to be an innovative use of taxpayers’ dollars, a closer inspection will reveal it to be just that. Instead of buying new, expensive camera systems, these dollars were used to purchase cameras to be placed in private businesses or residences with
existing camera systems. The purchase came with two important caveats. First, the cameras purchased must be positioned to face the street and/or sidewalk, and second, the businesses would need to inform the local New York City Police Department (NYPD) precinct of the existence of the cameras. In addition, camera location was identified by the local groups coordinating with precincts that know the community best, and the organizations purchased the type of camera that best suited their particular neighborhood.

The total investment in Operation Safe Shopper to date was $20,000 — $2,500 per participating organization — for what could total at least 25 cameras. Compare this to the $100,000 of capital funding I awarded for security cameras in Bensonhurst in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17), which, when coupled with another $100,000 from the local council member, will purchase only eight security cameras.

Through this pursuit, we are innovating camera deployment in a fiscally responsible manner to quickly improve public safety.

Most importantly, the program has already proven to be an early success. In our first year in 2016, it took less than a month for Operation Safe Shopper cameras to lead to an arrest following a series of robberies at knife-point along Albany Avenue in Crown Heights. Similarly, within months of deploying cameras at Newkirk Plaza in Ditmas Park, an arrest was made in a bicycle robbery outside the hardware store where one of the cameras was deployed.

My office is eager to expand these successes, but my discretionary budget alone is insufficient to do so by the order of magnitude necessary. That is why I am requesting that the City Council allocate $1 million to grow this program. Doing so could help improve public safety in underserved business and commercial corridors across New York City.

Another innovative public-private partnership that currently exists within the NYPD is the NYPD SHIELD program, a highly popular and successful counterterrorism public-private partnership that connects trainings from NYPD experts to private security at businesses and venues across New York City. Understanding that the NYPD cannot be at every location in the City at every moment, this program provides best practices for private-security at those locales in dealing with an active shooter or attack. Unfortunately, the program has become a victim of its own popularity, and has seen extensive delays in scheduling the trainings. In fact, in the wake of the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, I convened an emergency meeting for businesses and entertainment venues at Brooklyn Borough Hall to learn more about the program. As a result, there were three-month delays in scheduling trainings due to outsized demand. Additional resources are needed in order to ensure that we are doing our utmost to prepare for another potential terrorist attack or active shooter situation.

New York City has also been a leader in partnering with community-based violence interrupters to stem the tide of violence and retaliatory violence in particular. This partnership has become a nationwide model and has led to significant safety gains in communities that have had historically high rates of crime and violence. We must double-down on providing resources to these life-saving organizations. In addition, to build off Chair Richards’ good idea to provide bulletproof vests for school safety agents, I believe it is time we begin to explore the possibility
of providing violence interrupters with similar equipment. These violence interrupters are often engaging highly dangerous individuals without weapons, and it is imperative that their lives be as protected as possible in order to conduct this important work.

Finally, while not under the purview of the City Council, we must, once again, urge Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature to act on ensuring that New York City’s streets are made even safer for those who traverse them every day. While Vision Zero has made significant strides, we must continue to do more, and Albany must arm New York City with tools to expand its proven and successful speed camera enforcement program. Speed cameras serve as a force multiplier for the NYPD while also serving to change motorist behavior. In the wake of three child fatalities in Brooklyn in the past six weeks alone, the time is now for Albany to act on providing at least one speed camera for every school in New York City. We cannot continue to defer action on this important enforcement tool.

Thank you in advance for your work to ensure that all New Yorkers can safely raise healthy children and families.