



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Testimony Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams  
Wednesday, June 17, 2020  
Attorney General Hearing on Community-Police Relations**

Good afternoon. My name is Eric Adams and I am the Brooklyn Borough President. I want to thank the New York State Attorney General Letitia James, former United States Attorney General Loretta Lynch, and Professor Barry Friedman, for the opportunity to testify on this important topic: Community-Police Relations.

In addition to being the first Black borough president of Brooklyn, a borough that would be the third largest city in America were it an independent city, I am also a former New York City Police Officer, retiring as a captain after 22-years on the force.

My background as a member of the New York City Police Department (NYPD), as well as police reform advocate, provides unique perspective on the challenges of policing but also the need for proper policing in our communities of color, who bear the brunt of over-policing and police brutality.

Watching what has unfolded in New York City, and across the country and world, over the past few weeks in the wake of the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor is not new to me or to any of us involved in these hearings today. This has been our life's work. Before Floyd and Taylor, we had to navigate the police killings of Eric Garner, Amadou Diallo, Eleanor Bumpers, and countless other unarmed men and women of color killed by police in this city and country.

What seems different this time is that a new generation of activists have harnessed this outrage and are turning their pain into true purpose. Seeing the young people that have led this most recent movement has left me hopeful for sustained change in the NYPD as well as police departments across the country.

This hearing is intended to address recent interactions between police officers and protestors. While looking at the specific interactions is an important step, in order to fully address the issues of police brutality that sparked these most recent protests we must take a comprehensive approach to analyzing this issue, from police funding to community oversight. I am here today to share a few ideas that I believe can go a long way towards addressing these longstanding challenges.

### **Allocation of Resources:**

This begins with a series of reforms starting first with the proper allocation of resources in our City. Recently, many have rallied behind the call to “Defund the Police.” While I agree with the sentiment, I think it is imperative to ensure that any resource allocation that is taken from the NYPD does not go to simply trimming the budget, but rather shifted to investments that proactively reduce crime.

For example, for just \$50 million of the NYPD’s current budget, we can fully fund the Fair Futures campaign, which provides foster youth access to long-term coaching, robust academics, career development, and independent living. Supporting the Fair Futures campaign is a proven strategy for increasing graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment, preventing system involvement, and helping our youth get on a pathway to becoming successful adults.

We should also be reallocating funding from the NYPD to dyslexia screening at the point of entry into the criminal justice system as well as early on in childhood. Illiteracy is a risk factor for criminal behavior and given that dyslexia can often lead to illiteracy, with some estimates showing that nearly 50 percent of prisons are filled with inmates struggling with dyslexia, prioritizing screening at City and State jails should be at the forefront of our interventions. The recently passed First Step Act requires Federal prisons to screen for dyslexia at intake and to provide support if people are diagnosed. We should do the same in our City and State prison systems. This will reduce recidivism and prepare inmates for economic opportunities after their time served.

### **Proper Staffing and Training:**

One of the most common misunderstandings is that all policing jobs are created equal. Much like not every doctor should be an emergency room doctor or surgeon, not every police officer has the psychological make-up to perform every job on the force. We should not be asking a narcotics officer who routinely kicks in doors while making arrests, to police protests and potentially receive insults or be spit at while on the line. Their muscle memory is to view everyone as a “bad guy.” We must choose our officers for the right jobs and that includes a deeper psychological assessment to determine the best fit within the force. In addition, we must assess the numbers of officers we are deploying to communities, and in large scale events such as protests. In short, the quantity of officers may not be more effective to properly police than the quality of officers who have the mental fortitude to police in a stressful environment.

We must also ensure that NYPD officers receive de-escalation training not only for interactions with the public but also in scenarios when they must de-escalate their fellow officers. This should be incorporated during in-service trainings and done via role playing or virtual reality technology.

In addition, we should also create strict requirements on the ability of officers to move from being uniformed officers to plain-clothes officers. We must ensure that those who are becoming plain-clothes officers have the proper policing fundamentals in place before they move to this more aggressive role in policing.

We must also continue to pursue the diversification of the police force. This should include not simply increasing the diversity of rank-and-file officers, but those in leadership and policy-making

positions. The NYPD must continue to build an extensive recruitment to attract candidates of color to both the rank-and-file as well as the leadership. Some ways that they can do this include:

- Implementing the “Experience Equals Education Plan.” New York City’s peace officer forces such as School Safety Agents, Traffic Enforcement Agents, and H+H Officers are more diverse than the NYPD as a whole, yet they are not allowed to take the NYPD exam unless they have two years of college. We should allow these and other peace officers to take the NYPD exam if they have served honorably for more than two years in their current positions.
- Increased civilianization of the NYPD will also increase the diversity in the department. People of color are more likely to work as civilians in the department and their presence increases the likelihood that they may someday apply to become officers.

### **Community Oversight and Police Participation in Communities:**

One of the easiest ways to provide additional community oversight of policing is to allow the community a greater role in the selection of local precinct commanders. I have recently called on Mayor de Blasio to immediately issue an Executive Order creating community review panels to approve NYPD precinct commander candidates. This call was coupled with an ability to veto by supermajority any of these candidates within their respective areas. The community review panels should be composed of community board leaders, precinct council members, and local elected officials. The NYPD must earn the trust and respect of communities to serve them best and including voices at the local level is the first step in earning that trust.

We all recognize that policing is a high-stress job and more must be done to support officers to mentally navigate this profession. The high rate of NYPD suicides over the past year highlight this challenge. Since officers experience high stress on the job, in addition to the general stresses of work and family, we should be providing them sabbaticals, similar to those offered to teachers, at 66 percent pay if an officer chooses to use their sabbatical to work in a community-based organization providing services to residents. This will not only provide tangible mental health benefits, but also serve to foster additional connections to the communities they serve.

This concept could also be applied to candidates before entering the police department. For example, prior to admission to the Police Academy, applicants must participate in the equivalent of six months of volunteer service in community organizations in New York City communities. This will build up the trust between new recruits and the communities that they will eventually serve and find the best possible candidates that will live by the NYPD’s credo of “To Serve and Protect.”

Thank you.