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RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Over 3,300 New Yorkers from all five boroughs participated in this research project and shared with us what it means for them to feel safe in their city. **We learned that many participants want a fundamental transformation of how safety is produced in their neighborhoods.** They are asking policymakers to reconsider what constitutes safety, how it can be produced and who can help produce it.

How do New Yorkers want to make their city safer?

For many New Yorkers who live in highly policed neighborhoods, it is clear that their vision for safety moves away from law enforcement and other carceral forms of intervention to address systemic social issues. The reliance on punishment, surveillance, use of force, violence, and coercion in efforts to achieve safety has often heightened feelings of fear and fragmentation.¹ This is evident in participants' descriptions of individual and community-level experiences of harassment, violence, and harm. Rather than producing safety, policing tends to escalate conflict and disrupt communities.

Instead, those who live with heavy police presence commonly understand safety as something rooted in their relationships with and within the community that allows for themselves and the community as a whole to live and grow in healthy, supportive and accountable ways. It is rooted deeply in the daily interactions among neighbors, friends and family that promote trust, familiarity and shared aid and that de-escalate conflict and center healing justice. Community safety is a verb — it is something realized, something each of us does, makes and remakes through mutual support and collective actions. In this sense, it is rooted in collective care, in relying on neighbors and having them rely upon us in return.

While safety is fundamentally rooted in the collective everyday actions of communities and their members, its sustainability heavily relies on investments in public resources that enable communities to thrive. Neighborhood-level bonds of trust and relationships are strengthened through support for local

community organizations and centers, harm prevention and intervention initiatives, youth programs and resources, mental health and health services, and public spaces and facilities that promote trusting and constructive connections with others. Community safety is centered on resourcing ways to build people's ability to develop and sustain a vibrant community life, where the unfamiliar can become familiar, camaraderie turns to solidarity and neighbors are accountable to each other. This resourcing especially means ensuring that people's basic needs are met to provide the stability necessary to lead thriving lives with dignity. This includes accessible services such as education, jobs and income generation, child care and family support, mental health services, health care, stable housing, and food and nutrition. These kinds of investments have significant short- and long-term impact on people's lives, how safe they feel in their community, and how much safety and support they can offer their community.²

It is also clear that community safety means freedom from harm and violence, not only from other community members but also from the police. The NYPD too frequently exacerbates or, in fact, is the source of harm and violence, yet the police remain the starting point for any "serious" public safety proposal.³ It is true that many New Yorkers, as this report describes, also still have deep associations with the centrality of policing; however, when offered alternatives, they often prefer nonpolice or noncarceral options, citing them as or more effective than police interventions but involving less risk of harm and violence.

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5.1 How do we create a safer New York?

Safety is a public investment in well-resourced communities where people can thrive with dignity. To have any success enacting a transformative vision of public safety, the city must shift from criminalizing communities to supporting communities. The NYPD cannot remedy the deeply rooted structural conditions that produce widespread injustice and are often at the root of community violence and harm.⁴ The city needs to hold police accountable for harm and violence, while reallocating resources from law-enforcement into a range of community-based approaches rooted in life-affirming health, social and human services. The following are Communities United for Police Reform's (CPR) broad recommendations, directly supported by the evidence collected in the Community Safety Project, on how to create a safer New York.

1. Expand oversight, transparency & accountability of the NYPD

- Hold the NYPD accountable for failing to fire abusive officers
- End NYPD misinformation and propaganda
- Demand that the NYPD comply with city and state oversight laws
- Demand transparency on costs of NYPD settlements

2. Reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD

- Disarm and demilitarize police surveillance
- Disband historically abusive NYPD units
- Remove the NYPD from social service roles
- Reduce the growing number of police officers in non-police agencies
- Reduce the size of the NYPD
- Reduce the NYPD's budget

3. Invest in the fundamental needs of New Yorkers

- Housing
- Education
- Health care
- Mental health care
- Employment
- Youth programs and services
- Quality city infrastructure
- Community based organizations
- Food security
- Community-led safety strategies

4. Invest in violence prevention and crisis intervention programs

- Crisis Management Systems (CMS)
- Hate violence and bystander intervention programs
- Restorative justice programs in schools
- Non-police crisis response systems

1. Expand oversight, transparency & accountability of the NYPD

The city must do more to keep communities safe by increasing transparency and local oversight of the NYPD while also holding officers/departments accountable for the violence, harm and abuse they cause.

- **Hold the NYPD accountable for failing to fire abusive officers.** The failure to hold officers accountable for abuse and even the death of New Yorkers leads to ongoing, unchecked police violence in communities. The refusal to discipline these officers decreases community members' real and perceived sense of safety because they know that there is little consequence for police behavior. Policymakers need to strengthen the city's ability to hold NYPD officers accountable for harm and address patterns of misconduct that put New Yorkers at risk.⁵
- **End NYPD misinformation and propaganda.** The NYPD's 86-person public relations spin-team helps police avoid accountability for its actions. They repeatedly justify the harm police cause in communities and misconstrue how community members experience the harm. They distort the role of police in the everyday lives of New Yorkers while also misinforming the public about policies aimed at holding the NYPD accountable, such as the How Many Stops Act or bail reform policies. The city must end the propaganda and fear mongering produced by the NYPD public relations team because it makes us all less safe. The first step is to cut their budget in half.⁶
- **Demand that the NYPD comply with city and state oversight laws.** Attempts to hold the NYPD accountable through oversight laws must be complied with by

the NYPD. In 2020 organizers and advocates won the repeal of 50a, making police misconduct reports available to the public. However, it was recently reported that the NYPD's public database on officer misconduct is deeply flawed, with cases of officer misconduct disappearing for weeks on the database, making it virtually impossible to accurately assess the level and scope of officer misconduct. In addition, the NYPD is also out of compliance with statewide legislation requiring the agency to report on how many civilians it kills per year.⁷

- **Demand transparency on costs of NYPD settlements.** It was recently reported that over 1 billion dollars in police violence settlements were not reported by the Law Department over the last ten years. This obscures the true scope and scale of police violence. The city should ensure that going forward, the full-cost of NYPD settlements is accurately reported and available to the public.⁸

2. Reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD

The city must do much more to keep communities safe from police violence, harm and abuse by shrinking the NYPD's presence and power in neighborhoods.

- **Disarm and demilitarize police surveillance.** It is essential that we end the use of military-grade weapons and technologies, such as long-range acoustic devices (LRADs) and drones, and aggressive tactics and practices, such as no-knock warrants, aggressive protest policing and repression of constitutionally protected activity. Rather than advance community members' sense of safety and belonging, the use of military-grade weapons and technology such as

biometric surveillance technologies, predictive policing algorithms and so-called gang databases have further entrenched racist and bias-based policing, increased rights violations, and failed to make people and communities safer.⁹

- **Disband historically abusive NYPD units.** It is essential that we protect communities from police violence by disbanding notoriously abusive NYPD units that have a track record of consistently harming New Yorkers. Such units include the Strategic Response Group who was responsible for the death of Saheed Vassell and has a history of violence towards protestors exercising their first amendment rights, the VICE Enforcement Unit that has a history of being abusive towards trans women of color, the Neighborhood Safety Teams that are the re-created “Anti-Crime” teams who terrorized Black, Latinx and other communities of color in NYC, and the Youth Coordination Officers who have also notoriously targeted Black, Latinx, and other young people of color.¹⁰
- **Remove the NYPD from social service roles.** Police are increasingly being asked to play social service roles across the city in homelessness, in schools, in mental health response, and in hospitals. Police are wholly unsuited to help New Yorkers who are struggling on the streets, in our schools, and in their own homes, often escalating situations, abusing, and criminalizing people who need help and support. This is not the role of law-enforcement, and policymakers should remove police from these roles, including removing police from mental health response, from schools, and from homeless outreach.¹¹
- **Reduce the growing number of police officers in non-police agencies.** There are seventeen agencies outside of the

NYPD that have their own police forces or enforcement arms. The number of police officers in non-law-enforcement agencies such as the Department of Homelessness and Parks and Recreation has increased in the last several years. This is unnecessary and counterproductive to creating safer communities and should be stopped.¹²

- **Reduce the size of the NYPD.** The current size of the NYPD is larger than the Chicago and Los Angeles police forces combined with one out of every five municipal employees working for the police department. NYPD omnipresence in the lives of New Yorkers produces violence and fear. The threat of increased police contact puts individuals and whole communities at greater risk of harm, including trauma and even death. The city must reduce NYPD staffing to make communities safer.¹³
- **Reduce the NYPD’s budget.** The police are fundamentally unable to create safety in communities. They do very little to prevent crime or reduce violence and cannot remedy the deeply rooted structural conditions that produce widespread injustice and harm. Most of the tasks that police perform are better addressed using more effective and suitable alternatives. The unfortunate reality is that the NYPD’s outsized budget continues to substantially grow at the expense of other non policing investments that do in fact, offer sustainable public safety solutions. The city must reduce the NYPD’s budget and reinvest in other institutions, programs and services that meet the needs of New York’s’ most underserved communities including, Black, Latinx and other communities of color, LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, homeless New Yorkers, young New Yorkers, and New Yorkers with disabilities.¹⁴

3. Invest in the fundamental needs of New Yorkers

Ensuring that New Yorkers have their fundamental needs met will increase stability and safety for all. Our survey respondents were clear that ensuring these basic ten needs below should be the top priorities of lawmakers for making thriving, safe and healthy communities.

- **Housing.** Long-term, well-maintained, affordable housing for all New Yorkers is a cornerstone of a safe city. We cannot continue to use police-based approaches to address the homelessness crisis while failing to make the needed investments to ensure all New Yorkers have a home. It is paramount that the city increase low-income housing, invest in NYCHA, increase supportive housing, and protect tenants through rental assistance and legal services.¹⁵
- **Education.** Ensuring all New York children, youth and adults have access to high-quality education in fully-funded schools will dramatically increase safety in our city. Quality schools are bedrocks of communities, they can strengthen the social fabric of neighborhoods, increase economic security and contribute to the overall well-being of the families they serve. The city needs to invest in our public education system from early childhood education through graduate school as a primary path towards making communities safer.¹⁶
- **Health care.** New Yorkers deserve health care services that are culturally competent, comprehensive, affordable and easily available. This includes access to rehabilitation, disability and preventative health programs as well as well-funded public health organizations and hospitals. This is one of the most important elements in producing safe, healthy and thriving neighborhoods. Too many New Yorkers are still without quality affordable care.¹⁷
- **Mental health care.** Making locally accessible, affordable, comprehensive, culturally competent mental health care, including for behavioral health and drug use, available to all New Yorkers is crucial to creating a safe environment for all. We cannot continue to police and incarcerate New Yorkers using drugs or living with mental illness, while failing to close the serious gaps in services that leave so many New Yorkers without support. We need to increase overdose prevention centers and other harm-reduction based programs that keep people who use drugs safe. We specifically need an increase in mental health programs for under-served Black, Latinx, other communities of color as well as LGBTQ+ communities.¹⁸
- **Employment.** Investment in anti-poverty programs as well as increased access to secure and well-paying jobs for New Yorkers living in poor neighborhoods of color is essential to sustainable public safety. Unemployed or underemployed New Yorkers are some of the most highly policed, and the city is not doing nearly enough to create widely available opportunities for financial security.¹⁹
- **Youth programs and services.** The city needs to invest in young people as a public safety strategy instead of criminalizing them. Young New Yorkers deserve services that will help manage the multiple stressors of adolescence and help them transition into adulthood. This includes recreational programs for young people, programs that support young people to enter higher education as well as programs that secure

employment and housing. Programs for young people play a crucial role in public safety and have far reaching impacts on the lives of young people.²⁰

- **Quality city infrastructure.** A safe city also depends on city infrastructure that is robust, well-maintained and accessible to all its residents. This includes investments in parks and green spaces, playgrounds, pools and recreational facilities, quality and accessible public transportation, including protected bike lanes and safe pedestrian crossings. The city must prioritize these projects over continued funding for policing and criminalization infrastructure. Quality city infrastructure creates safe public spaces that can be claimed and enjoyed by all.²¹
- **Community based organizations.** Well funded and well staffed multi-issue community based organizations are critical to public safety. Community based organizations provide trusted and tailored local support across New York neighborhoods in deeply grounded and accountable ways, especially for Black, Latinx and other communities of color that are often under-served. Community organizations also support democracy by increasing the power of local communities and ensuring that city government is accountable to the needs of communities.²²
- **Food security.** The city needs to ensure that all New Yorkers have reliable access to nutritious and affordable food. This includes nearby, affordable, healthy grocery stores and farmers markets, food pantries, SNAP, meals on wheels, urban farming, and programs that end hunger in the city. Safety comes from stability, and when New Yorkers feel like they are unsure where their next meal is coming from, it has far-ranging impacts on individual and community safety.²³

- **Community-led safety strategies.** Violence and harm are best understood through a focused lens at the level of a small number of people within a few neighborhood blocks and social networks. Community-led safety strategies offer more individualized, trusted, and effective responses to neighborhood crises. These strategies include, for example, violence interrupter and gun violence-prevention programs like “Cure Violence”, peer mentor programs such as “Credible Messengers”, restorative and transformative justice programs through school coordinators and community healing circles, local crisis response teams for mental health crises and domestic violence and other non-police first responders as alternatives to calling police. See number 4 below.²⁴

4. Invest in violence prevention and crisis intervention programs

Police-led efforts to prevent or reduce conflicts and crises have proven limited and frequently escalate situations. Instead, alternative measures that rely upon non police, independent outreach workers and peers have demonstrated substantial success in defusing and mediating conflicts as well as preventing long-term violence in the streets, in schools and in community organizations and centers. The impact of these initiatives is most strengthened when integrated with individualized, wraparound services — such as health care, housing, employment and education — that can help stabilize conditions and improve New Yorker’s quality of life long term.

- **Crisis Management Systems (CMS).** CMS should be dramatically expanded across

the city, especially programs that take a holistic approach to addressing violence and harm and are led by members of the communities that they serve. Crisis Management Systems have a proven track record of intervening to prevent and significantly reduce gun violence. CMS deploy teams of trained violence interrupters and credible messengers who mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence.²⁵

- **Hate violence and bystander intervention programs.** These programs are rooted in communities and strengthen public safety. They use a comprehensive community-driven approach to prevent bias incidents and hate crimes. They also have strong track records of addressing hate violence and helping bystanders intervene in violence when appropriate.²⁶
- **Restorative justice programs in schools.** Our students need culturally responsive and healing-centered programs that help address harms occurring at school by supporting students in generating solutions to conflict. Restorative justice programs in schools have a proven record of keeping students safe and out of the criminal legal system.²⁷
- **Non-police crisis response systems.** New Yorkers experiencing mental health or substance use-related crises should receive a public health-based response from peers and professionals who are best equipped to address the issues and coordinate with long-term (post-crisis), low-threshold wraparound services. This means policymakers must create an alternative crisis response system that is truly based on public health principles, with oversight from the city's public health agencies, not the NYPD.

Policymakers must also ensure that adequate investments are made in preventative and long-term mental health and substance-use care that helps people heal and thrive, especially Black, Latinx, and other communities of color that have been historically under-served in New York.²⁸

5.2 Specific priority demands for fiscal year 2025

The following are priority demands for Fiscal Year 2025 proposed by Communities United for Police Reform and supported by evidence gathered from the Community Safety Project. These demands specifically help expand oversight, transparency, and accountability of the NYPD as well as reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD.

Priority 1

Cut the NYPD's press/communications budget by at least 50%, including Deputy Commissioner of Public Information and other NYPD press/communications infrastructure and programs. Public resources should not be used to spread misinformation, and the millions of dollars being spent by the NYPD public relations spin team should be cut and re-invested to close critical gaps in services. When accounting for the full cost of staffing of DCPI, social media management and other contracts, we estimate that the full cost of NYPD press and communications is well over \$10 million dollars.²⁹

Priority 2

Remove NYPD from mental health response. New Yorkers need mental health care, not increased criminalization. NYPD Co-Response Teams should be eliminated, and this money should be moved into crisis response teams that do not include police officers and community-based mental health services and programs that can provide mental health crisis prevention, response and post-crisis services. We estimate that the NYPD Uniform costs of NYPD Mental Health Co-Response teams is approximately \$5.6 million dollars.³⁰

Priority 3

Freeze hiring of school police and cut funding for remaining vacant school positions. Mayor Eric Adams is proposing hiring 574 school police officers in FY25 to fill vacant positions³¹ as well as an additional 400 school police positions³² that are being introduced in the FY25 Adopted budget, meaning close to 1000 new school police officers in schools next year. The city should be taking the opposite approach, cutting school cop vacancies, freezing hiring, and moving at least \$98 million dollars³³ to close needed gaps in services and support for students. Students need restorative justice, mental health, other non-police schools' staff and practices that help students learn and thrive, not cops.

Priority 4

Disband the Strategic Response Group (SRG). Adams is proposing an increase in funding next year for this notoriously abusive unit.³⁴ The SRG should be disbanded, and their hyper-aggressive escalating tactics should be eliminated. Militarized forces that target protesters for exercising their first amendment rights do not belong in our communities or in our streets, we must disband the SRG and reinvest \$145 million³⁵ to serve, not harm New Yorkers.

Priority 5

Block attempts to add 1,200 additional officers in FY25,³⁶ and instead invest those monies to keep jobs in schools, mental health programs, libraries, composting, and non-police anti-violence programs. The NYPD should not be allowed to add an additional 1,200 new recruits in FY25 while staffing from other critical agencies and programs are being cut. These officers would add \$62 million dollars to the NYPD expense budget and at least an additional \$62 million in fringe and pension costs for FY25, for a total of \$124 million dollars that can be reinvested.³⁷

Priority 6

Stop the Creation of Cop City NYC! Reject Mayor Eric Adams plan to spend \$225 million on a mega-police training facility in Queens. This capital project will consolidate training for the NYPD and 17 other city agencies that have enforcement arms. Adams' Cop City project will increase the influence and power of the NYPD and mold the enforcement arms of other city agencies to more closely follow NYPD protocols and practices. This is a dangerous expansion of policing and enforcement and will result in increased criminalization of New Yorkers.³⁸

5.3 Conclusion

The actions, calls for change and growing movement that emerged across the country in 2020 were especially felt in New York City and throughout the state. What we saw was an undeniable, popular democratic expression for change that was simultaneously multiracial and broad-based. It was also led by people directly affected by police abuse and violence, especially Black communities and other communities of color.³⁹ In other words, the very communities holding the weight of policing in America made it clear that this cannot go on any longer. Policymakers, elected officials and even some police leadership were initially open to engage with these historic calls for transformative change. However, we quickly entered a period of reactionary backlash where police unions and political parties (among others) maneuvered to counteract the demands of the movement.⁴⁰

The popular media in New York has frequently described the election of Mayor Adams, a former NYPD officer, as a referendum on and rejection of the 2020 demands.⁴¹ Such portrayals commonly emphasize a desire for public safety through policing while downplaying the demands to end overly pervasive, abusive and discriminatory policing. In popular coverage and political talking points, this has been presented as a binary to the extreme — that the choice is either “defund” or “safety” where safety can only be delivered by the police through repressive enforcement practices. Predictably, aggressive police enforcement and greater investments in policing are presented as the leading solutions.

The reactionary turn in New York discounts a substantial amount of learning in the past

decade gained through public outrage, successful litigation, an ongoing federal monitorship of the NYPD and passed legislation (including two veto overrides, one by then-Mayor Mike Bloomberg with the Community Safety Act and another in 2024 by Mayor Adams, with the How Many Stops Act).⁴² This learning also involved convincing empirical evidence that aggressive, quality of life and order-maintenance policing practices — such as stop and frisk — and strategies such as broken windows policing increase harm to Black, Latinx and other New Yorkers of color and have questionable (if any) causal benefit to safety.⁴³ Yet, the NYPD continues to be deployed in response to violence even though it does little to prevent violence from occurring and fails to address the vast number of fundamental harms that marginalized communities experience.⁴⁴ In other words, despite all we learned about policing in the past decade, the NYPD continues to be the New York’s main safety strategy.

It is folly to respond to the historic demands for change that emerged over the 2020 summer with the same narrow set of tools and actors that caused ongoing pain and harm in the past. It is folly when a discussion on safety reform, or change of any kind, starts with the police. This is broken, self-reinforcing logic. If the problem which needs addressing is the police’s failure to keep all people safe — and indeed, that the police actually accentuate and enact harm against Black, Latinx and other communities of color — the solution cannot be the very problem. A fundamental reimagining must take place if we are to break free from the entrenched patterns and practices of abuse, violations of rights, fear and even death.

The desire for safety is universal. That is not in doubt. We have been tricked, however, to

think that there is only one way or one kind of actor who can help promote safety. We have been told that the only way to obtain safety is through punishment, repression, violence and authoritarian use of force. To build effective policy and budgetary agendas that promote dignity, safety and justice, we must move beyond political talking points or positions based solely on the priorities and analysis of the NYPD. Indeed, any public policy to address safety and policing must first directly hear what New Yorkers want, especially those who bear the brunt of the reality of policing in the city — namely Black, Latinx, New Yorkers of color, young New Yorkers, homeless New Yorkers, LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers, New Yorkers with disabilities and immigrant New Yorkers (among others). Such an effort should do so in a way that centers and acknowledges their lived experiences. It must also avoid presenting a set of false dichotomies and trade-offs that presume policing as a necessary part of the safety equation.

The Community Safety Project spoke to 3,303 New Yorkers living in highly policed neighborhoods across all five boroughs and heard how they understand safety, what their experiences with the NYPD have been, and what they desire from the city to meet the current moment and the challenges ahead. This project centered their thinking, vision, policy desires and the common issue that lay at the heart of the matter: community safety. After all, this is what the police are supposed to be doing: providing community safety. What we learned, from what amounts to many decades of lived experience and wisdom, is that the NYPD cannot consistently and adequately produce safety in neighborhoods.

We also learned that New Yorkers want investments that empower vibrant

community life, where those who are unfamiliar can become familiar, where camaraderie turns to solidarity and where neighbors become accountable to each other. It is not a radical notion that communities are a significant source of neighborhood safety. However, community support and care do not occur independent from significant state investments that prioritize support for local community organizations and centers; locally owned businesses; enough food, housing and employment for everyone; and public-oriented infrastructures like parks, playgrounds, performances and other spaces that facilitate trusting connections with others.

Meanwhile, Adams has proven to be a mayor who is continually cutting nearly every city agency while increasing the NYPD budget.⁴⁵ Adams has stated his promise to reform the NYPD but has instead consistently refused to hold NYPD officers accountable and has promoted people within the department with documented cases of misconduct.⁴⁶ Adams has reinvested in aggressive quality of life or order maintenance policing that doubles down on the premise that safety is carved through the kinds of carceral enforcement that have repeatedly resulted in discrimination and abuse.⁴⁷ Adams has failed to meet this moment with necessary and bold transformational policies. In the meantime, through our study, we have documented another vision — one rooted in and emanating from New York communities who have experienced heavy policing. Those communities told us we need a system that offers healing, not abuse. It is past time that we listen.

Chapter 5: Endnotes

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Chapter 5: Endnotes

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“How is it that we want to fix our harm? Repair the world. You don’t fix it by causing more harm. The idea that you get justice by causing more harm is terrible ... people can fuck up and be healed.”

- Town hall attendee

