



Thursday, May 18, 2023

**STATEMENT OF POLICE COMMISSIONER KEECHANT L. SEWELL
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON FINANCE AND
PUBLIC SAFETY**

**ON THE MAYOR'S EXECUTIVE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL**

MAY 18, 2023

Good afternoon, Speaker Adams, Chair Brannan, Chair Hanks and members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Mayor's Executive Budget for the 2024 Fiscal Year. It is a privilege to testify before the Committees on Finance and Public Safety about the hard work and professionalism of the dedicated members of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). I am joined here today by members of my executive staff.

Each and every day, members of the NYPD, uniformed and civilian, whether the executives you see before you or the officers on the street, start their tour with a clear vision: keeping New York City the safest big city in America. Having emerged from the pandemic, New York is vibrant again. It is pulsating with life, with opportunity and prosperity. Our sidewalks and subways have become crowded and the restaurant scene is flourishing. Tourists are flocking to our landmarks and cultural events. Each of these developments are incremental votes of confidence in an improving public safety picture in New York City.

So, it is incumbent upon the NYPD to continue to foster an environment that allows every community in this city to flourish. It is about people feeling safe to walk on our streets no matter the time of day, entrepreneurs having confidence in renting commercial space, and working together to create an atmosphere where our children can learn and thrive. It is about New Yorkers knowing that the environment outside of their homes is a safe one and that they can freely enjoy everything this city has to offer.

Like many of our partners in city government, we have been doing more with less. Our uniformed headcount is nearly 34,000, and our civilian headcount is 16,758. We have experienced a reduction of over 2,500 police officers and about 1,700 full time civilians since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We have not however experienced fewer requests for service. The NYPD responded to over 700,000 more 911 calls in 2022, when compared to 2019, and nearly 530,000 more 311 complaints. At the end of April, 911 calls were up by 6% and requests for NYPD services from 311 are up over 5%.

New Yorkers are reaching out and calling for NYPD services in larger numbers. Yet, daily efforts by the women and men of the NYPD remain steadfast despite their significantly reduced headcount. This year, overall arrests are up over 20%. Felony arrests are up 16%. We have made over 1,450 gun arrests this year, on top of achieving a 27-year high in this category last year. And 2,269 additional illegal guns have been taken off our streets in addition to the

over 7,100 seized last year. As officers address quality of life conditions, the issuance of criminal court and OATH summonses are each up by nearly triple digits.

We remain focused on delivering our quality of life promise to all New Yorkers. We are partnering with communities to clean and paint over graffiti staining our neighborhoods; joining forces with other city agencies to assist those living on our streets to find shelter and services; working with our retailers to secure their businesses; and delivering a visible police presence at corridors used by children walking to school and employees commuting to work.

Last year, we issued 258,000 summonses to vehicles with covered or obstructed plates, arrested nearly 4,200 drivers for forged or altered plates, and seized 7,520 cars that had fraudulent paper plates or were parked illegally while displaying a temporary paper plate. So far this year, we have already issued over 103,000 summonses to vehicles with covered or obstructed plates, arrested over 1,400 drivers for forged or altered plates, and seized approximately 2,300 cars bearing a fraudulent paper plate or were parked illegally while displaying a temporary paper plate. We are also conducting educational outreach to all the auto parts stores throughout the city to ensure compliance with legislation that you recently passed that prohibits the sale of plate covers. Addressing these issues is a daily focus for the NYPD, which includes joint operations between our Highway Patrol Unit, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, the MTA, the State Police, and the Sheriff.

New challenges have also arisen. The proliferation of unlicensed cannabis shops has affected nearly every neighborhood and precinct in the city. While recent changes in these laws, as part of the State Budget, appear to be encouraging, the cannabis sold at these establishments is not inspected or certified in the way that legal cannabis is, and has often been contaminated with impurities, heavy metals, salmonella, E. coli, and pesticides. In partnership with the Sheriff's Office, we have conducted more than 1,200 inspections of these establishments, have taken enforcement action where appropriate and will continue to explore opportunities to attempt to curb illegal cannabis sales.

Over the last year, we have redoubled our efforts on efficiency. As part of a comprehensive staffing analysis that was launched in 2022, the Department audited positions in each of its Bureaus and identified those for civilianization and redeployment. To date, we have redeployed almost 1,000 officers – the equivalent of two Police Academy classes – from administrative positions back to patrol duties. Just as other city agencies and other law enforcement agencies have experienced attrition and recruitment challenges, we have pivoted existing resources back into our core crime-fighting mission.

Additionally, significant attention has been paid to improving the Department's organizational and operational structure. Where we have been able to act on opportunities quickly, we have done so, and we have also engaged in the longer-term work of consolidating bureaus, divisions, and units to ensure agency efficiency.

Even in the face of some of the challenges that I have mentioned, the efforts of the women and men of the NYPD are yielding real benefits for New Yorkers. Year to date, five of the seven categories of major crime are down. We have witnessed declines in homicides, rape, robberies,

burglaries, and grand larcenies. In addition to the double-digit reductions from last year, shootings incidents have decreased by 25% year—to-date and shooting victims are down by 24%. And significant declines are occurring when it comes to hate crimes and shoplifting complaints.

These positive trends have also touched the transit system and our housing developments. In our NYCHA developments, shootings are down over 28%. In the subway system, major crime is down, driven by decreases in robberies and felony assaults, resulting in an over 8% reduction in major crimes. This is all occurring as the ridership level in the system reaches pre-pandemic levels. At the end of April, subway ridership surpassed four million riders – a first since the pandemic. This reflects increased rider confidence in the safety of the subway system, resiliency in the city's continued economic recovery, and proof-positive in the investment of deployed police personnel.

While I have discussed how the agency has become more efficient, the hard work exhibited by our personnel also requires the use of overtime. I welcome inquiries and scrutiny into our use of this necessary tool to ensure efficiency. That is why I personally scrutinize the use of these funds, and continuously push for reductions where it is feasible. The Department continues to focus on managing its overtime utilization to ensure it is used efficiently while at the same time ensuring there is no negative impact on public safety and the provision of core public services. When compared to fiscal year 2019, excluding protests and enhanced Transit coverage, we are projecting a decrease in city funded overtime hours of 4%. This is being driven by successfully reducing events overtime hours by 11%, and operational overtime by 15%. Overtime continues to be an essential and critical tool in maintaining public safety as it allows for additional deployments when and where they are most needed, including to reduce crime and enhance investigative capacity.

Specifically, use of overtime includes:

- Detectives working overnight to interview a victim or witness, to follow up on critical leads, and to make sure justice is delivered for crime victims.
- Officers working extra tours to increase our presence on our subways.
- Personnel coming in on a Sunday to make sure that the thousands of annual events and millions of spectators are safe.

This is time that our dedicated members are spending away from their families and friends, and instead working to keep the people of New York City safe beyond the confines of a typical work schedule.

I mention this consortium of progress, efficiency, and challenges to highlight a major point. While the current public safety picture is improving and encouraging, I am forced to ask how much better could we all be doing when it comes to public safety? What more can be done to drive down violence and crime in every neighborhood? If we were at our true, full headcount, how much safer could New York City be? We want to again attain the historic crime decreases that this city achieved nearly five years ago, and reach a higher level of excellence. This ideal, however, is dependent on a fully resourced and well-trained police department. If we cannot achieve this, then our collective public safety goals will suffer.

There can be no substitute for adequately funded public safety and a healthy and properly compensated force of officers. That is why I want to praise the Police Benevolent Association, and the city, in participating in good-faith and forward-looking negotiations to hammer home our officers' ground-breaking new contract. Our police officers will receive a long overdue pay raise, which will help us with both recruitment of new officers and retention of existing officers. Closing the pay gaps between the NYPD and other police departments will make it an easier decision for our officers to stay with the NYPD.

I am also encouraged by the focus on our officers' health and wellness. It is my hope that the 10 and 12 hour tours we have begun to pilot in four commands will make great strides forward in this respect. We anticipate this new tour structure to result in significantly more days off for our officers to spend with their families without cutting into overall patrol coverage while also remaining cost-neutral. The goal is also to give the Department a surge in personnel during peak crime hours in patrol, transit and housing commands such as school dismissals, rush hours and Friday and Saturday evenings. This restructuring will also help us to compete with more flexible or alternative work schedules seen in the private sector, enabling us to recruit the best potential candidates.

We also enhance public safety in this great city by being at the forefront of technological innovation in law enforcement. The NYPD leads when it comes to being at the cutting edge and beyond, and Mayor Adams has vocalized the commitment to continue to go further. We must not shy away from committing resources to this end. Like other technologies that we use, we must carefully balance the use of technology with the rights of individuals. However, we cannot allow fearmongering about the potential for misuse to be a barrier to embracing innovation.

For example, in order to combat car thefts, we are working with the Association for a Better New York to leverage the use of Apple Air Tags to identify and notify the police about stolen vehicles. The Association has donated the distribution of over 500 air tags to the public. The public can place these devices in their vehicles, enabling the owner to track their vehicle. This can be a useful tool when investigating the theft of an automobile. As part of this initiative, the Department has convened meetings with auto dealers to aid in the distribution of these devices.

As I am sure you all saw, we have revived the robot dog program, or digidog as some call it, and will be acquiring two such remote-controlled robotic K-9s. These devices will play a vital role during high-risk situations such as hostage or barricade scenarios by allowing us to assess the situation and attempt to de-escalate before an officer even needs to approach, or during large scale events which create hazardous conditions, such as natural disasters, terrorist attacks or a building collapse. We have seen the advantages that remote controlled drones and other robotic devices have given us in many of these high-risk scenarios, so there is simply no reason not to enhance our existing capabilities. At the same time, we are also piloting technologies to provide mobile camera coverage in the subway system and track fleeing vehicles with the goal of reducing vehicle pursuits by our officers.

Our greatest multiplier, however, has always been and remains our willingness to partner. We stand committed to forging as many relationships as we can to gain the faith and trust of everyone in our city. We leverage partnerships in many ways to combat crime, such as our deepening

coordination with the ATF, the FBI and the State Police through the Gun Intelligence Task Force, which streamlines the sharing of critical information and strategies to investigate and prosecute shootings.

We have partnered with the Departments of Homeless Services and Sanitation in the City Street Encampment Removal Task Force to keep our sidewalks clean and, most importantly, to connect people with the services they so desperately need.

A more recent and critical, but perhaps less well-known, partnership we have deepened is with the Department of the Aging. In order to combat crimes against the elderly and tailor appropriate services, the NYPD has been sharing crime data involving victims who are sixty or older with the Department of the Aging so that their Older Adult Centers can better focus their attention and resources. Next month, each precinct will be designating one of their Community Affairs Officers to serve as a direct liaison with the Department of Aging on matters involving local elderly victims of crime and our respective agencies will be partnering on training initiatives.

The most important and satisfying partnerships are the connections we make with everyday New Yorkers. We could not do our jobs without the input and assistance of the communities we serve. We hold monthly Build the Block meetings and regular meetings with restaurant and bar owners in each precinct, among many other community meetings. I also understand the importance for our highest levels of leadership to connect at the local level, which is why I began holding executive meetings in precincts and community spaces throughout the city. After the meeting, we have our senior leadership interact with members of the community.

We have launched our groundbreaking CompStat meetings to the public, as well. So far, we have held two Community CompStat sessions at Police Headquarters, which had over 300 public participants. This will become a regular feature of the NYPD's ongoing commitment to transparency and engagement.

Turning to the Mayor's Executive Budget and its impact on the NYPD in the coming fiscal year - in totality, the NYPD's Fiscal Year 2024 All Funds Expense Budget is \$5.3 billion, the vast majority of which - 91 percent - is allocated for personnel costs. The remaining 9 percent is dedicated to non-personnel costs, including technology that provides officers with immediate access to critical safety equipment, tools, and applications.

As part of this executive budget, the NYPD reached the 4% PEG target. For the NYPD this equated to finding city funds savings of more than \$200 million each year. In order to achieve this, funding reductions were taken in several areas, including, existing vacancies, salary accruals, additional revenues, and other than personal services. As a result, the NYPD's City-funds budget for fiscal year 2024 has been reduced to \$5.05 billion, compared to \$5.32B in fiscal year 2019 and \$5.28B in fiscal year 2020.

For the current fiscal year, 2023, the NYPD received partial funding for the Domain Awareness System and Mobility Initiative (\$27.6 million - one year only) and an overtime adjustment of \$44 million - also one year only. Funding was also added for leases and collective bargaining for

DC37. Due to timing, this financial plan does not yet account for the recent PBA collective bargaining, which was added to the City's budget centrally.

The Department's Ten-Year Capital Budget is \$1.6 billion for fiscal years 2024 to 2033. This funding is critical for facility construction projects such as the 40th Precinct Stationhouse, the new 116th Precinct facility, and a renovated firearms training facility.

This Department will continue to work tirelessly to drive down crime, improve the quality of life, and earn the trust and confidence of all New Yorkers. When it comes to advancements in crime-fighting, community connectivity, embracing technology, and enhancing training, no police department in this nation has been more successful than the NYPD. I know that this success will continue because of the incredible women and men who patrol our great city every day – and we are grateful to be moving ahead with the critical support of the Mayor and this Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and we look forward to answering any questions you may have.