

**Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
New York City Council
Committee on the Justice System
Committee on Finance
May 20, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chair Lancman, Chair Dromm and members of the Justice System Committee and Finance Committee. My name is Elizabeth Glazer, and I am Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Several of my MOCJ colleagues are participating and available as well to respond to questions. They are Ozzie Cruz, Eric Cumberbatch, Debbie Grumet and Dana Kaplan.

The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice advises the Mayor on criminal justice policy and is the Mayor's representative to the courts, district attorneys, defenders and state criminal justice agencies, among others. MOCJ designs, deploys and evaluates citywide strategies to increase safety, reduce unnecessary arrests and incarceration, improve fairness and build the strong neighborhoods that ensure enduring public safety.

As we are all painfully aware, COVID-19 has taken a terrible toll on New York City, most significantly in illness and tragic deaths, but also financially. There is much we don't know about the disease or when its grip on New York City will end. What we do know is that we must expect deep cuts to the city's budget—though how deep remains to be seen. Our challenge and responsibility must be to learn from the hard lessons this crisis teaches and to guide the city forward, perhaps to a better place, even as we face a constricted financial present and future.

We don't write on an empty slate. We already learned during this administration that doing *less*—lightening the touch of the criminal justice system—best secures public safety and our values as a city. The past years have seen declining arrest rates, declining crime rates and a plummeting jail population, making New York the safest big city in the nation with the fewest people incarcerated.

The COVID emergency urgently accelerated these trends and distilled the stakes of the decisions before us. Arrests and overall crime rates have declined even further. Through the concerted efforts of many criminal justice partners to address the heightened risks COVID poses in congregate settings, the jail population has

dropped by an additional nearly 30%, to levels not seen since 1946. COVID-19 forced the criminal justice apparatus to do less—to arrest less, to strip court proceedings to only the most essential matters conducted remotely and to hold fewer in our jails.

The tremendous shifts over past years and recent weeks grew from efforts of many criminal justice partners and professionals. But we must recognize the truly transformative role played by New Yorkers themselves. In this administration, we have increasingly recognized that New Yorkers themselves own safety, as much as the formal structures of the justice system. We have worked hard to support thriving networks in the communities that have suffered most from cycles of poverty, crime and incarceration. We know that neighbors, mentors and credible messengers have a profound impact in turning the tide on violence and crime in communities and that affording the respect and dignity due to the city's civilians is the best path to peace.

Before the COVID emergency, our Crisis Management System (CMS) and Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP) made our city more vibrant and safe. During this crisis, the strong mutual aid networks forged in MAP communities to identify and solve problems from the neighborhood turned up on a dime. Neighbors are helping neighbors, identifying those most in need and providing critical supply networks, ensuring the arterial structures in the neighborhoods are effective delivery mechanisms for city resources. CMS has continued its important work defusing violent incidents, even as they have moved to the virtual world to do so, and they also have participated in providing supplies and information to the neighborhoods where they work.

Out of the crucible of COVID, with less in the city's budget to work with, our task is to sustain a smaller, less enforcement-based and more civilian-driven model of justice and safety in this city. We must prioritize and devote resources to the people and communities most affected by cycles of poverty, crime and disease, and who can have the most impact in leading to a better place.

I wish that COVID-19 had never come to New York City. But it did. Now we must find and seize the opportunities for progress this crisis can offer. I am grateful to the City Council and our other partners who have worked with us through these dark days and with whom we will build the city's new future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I would be happy to answer any questions.