



March 7, 2022

New York City Council
Committee on Public Safety
Kamillah Hanks, Chair
City Hall Park, NY 10007

Dear Chairperson Hanks,

The [Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law](#) strongly encourages the New York City Council to exercise its oversight authority over the New York City Police Department (NYPD) by denying funding for the Department's proposed reinstatement and revamping of former anti-crime units, which became notorious during the 1980s and 1990s for routinely violating the civil rights of New Yorkers, particularly in Black and brown communities.

While the increase in the incidents of gun violence in New York City must be addressed, heavy-handed law enforcement tactics are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Former police commissioner, Dermont F. Shea, learned this lesson well. In 2020, he disbanded the outdated plainclothes, anti-crime units because he understood that such brutal tactics erode community trust in law enforcement. Without that trust, the Department has only made its job more difficult and has utterly failed in its overarching mission to protect and serve.

Facts don't lie. [Studies](#) analyzing NYPD's prior efforts to remove guns from the streets through the excessive use of stop-and-frisk practices demonstrate low gun retrieval and arrest rates. These studies also demonstrate that New Yorkers of color, particularly young, Black and Latino men, bear the brunt of excessive use of force and unconstitutional searches and seizures carried out by the police. These same practices have led to the unjust deaths of many New Yorkers at the hands of the NYPD. Unfortunately, the names Amadou Diallo, Eric Garner, Sean Bell, Shaeed Vassell, and many others, reflect these failed policies of the past. In fact, a 2018 analysis by [The Intercept](#) using data from the [Fatal Encounters](#) project found that while the NYPD's plainclothes anti-crime units constitute a small percentage (approximately 6%) of the overall force of sworn officers, they were responsible for a disproportionately large number of fatal shootings (approximately 31%) from 2000 – 2018.

The Mayor's explanation that newly revamped law enforcement teams will be specially trained and recruited, thereby allaying any concerns about an uptick in unconstitutional practices, is overly optimistic. Short-term police trainings are soon forgotten. When officers have extreme pressure to recover illegal guns and make arrests - cultural sensitivity, unconscious bias, and procedural justice training tactics can be quickly forgotten. We agree that recruiting officers who care about the community and have the right psychological state of mind to build community trust should be a priority for the NYPD. However, that recruitment alone is not enough to prevent repeating the failures of the NYPD's notorious anti-crime units.

We support the Mayor's commitment to invest more resources into building community trust and strengthening the social safety net. But that effort does not require a return to heavy-handed policing. Addressing and curbing high rates of gun violence requires years of substantial investments in relationship building, community infrastructure development, and the provision of necessary support systems. We encourage the City Council to support these investments while resisting the Mayor's plans to rely on failed tactics from a bygone era in policing.

Over the past decade, in collaboration with advocates across New York, the City Council has fought long and hard to protect the civil rights of New Yorkers. We urge you to continue to do so by resisting pressure to institute policies that have a great likelihood of repeating the NYPD's past mistakes.

Sincerely,

Jason D. Williamson (Mar 4, 2022 17:00 EST)

Terrance Pitts (Mar 4, 2022 15:31 EST)

Jason Williamson, Executive Director

Terrance Pitts, Senior Research and Advocacy Fellow