

**Statement of
Joseph A. Puma
before the Committee on Rules, Privileges and Elections
Committee Room, City Hall
April 18, 2016**

Good morning, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Lander, and Members of the Committee on Rules, Privileges and Elections.

My name is Joseph Puma, and since December 2013 I have had the distinct privilege of serving on the Civilian Complaint Review Board as the City Council's designee from Manhattan.

During the past two or so years of service on the CCRB, I have had the unique opportunity to exercise fair-minded, hands-on, principled, and collaborative leadership during a time when vast swaths of the public and numerous leaders in government and law enforcement have looked to repair and improve police-community relations. Even when these actors have disagreed, they have made efforts to view police-civilian encounters more holistically in the social context, in particular for their impacts on diverse, more vulnerable, and/or marginalized communities. Public discourse and debate has focused on questions and collective values such as how best to promote and maintain public safety, impacts on the day-to-day practice of law enforcement, creating better and more equitable outcomes for individuals and groups, upholding constitutional and civil rights, and understanding and initiating positive reforms to law enforcement and the criminal justice system as a whole. In New York, the NYPD's widespread use of "stop, question, and frisk" was deemed unconstitutional and new City leadership and advocates sought to usher in a remedial approach. Despite local reforms and proposals, high-profile, often tragic, incidents and collective action by civilian groups and police groups, both locally and nationally, further revealed the ongoing, necessary work.

It is within this context that I have viewed my service on the CCRB during a historic and eventful time both locally and nationally. Since joining the Board, I have born witness to, supported, led, and advised on many sweeping reforms that not only resulted in historic gains for the agency in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness, but have also incrementally improved the perception of an agency which for much of its existence has not lived up to its full potential as an important and uniquely situated player in the City's police oversight landscape with potential to foster improved police-community relations in New York City.

This unrealized potential has been notwithstanding the various, earnest efforts of scores of the agency's forbearers, staff and Board included, and also exacerbated by real setbacks and challenges over the years. There is still much work to be done.

Since I began serving on the Board, I estimate I have reviewed over 1,400 cases. I bring an engaged, fair-minded, hands-on, and collegial approach to working with fellow board members and staff. I bring an open mind, sensitivity, and compassion to my review of cases which bear real-world consequences for police officers and civilians alike. At the CCRB, I have been an active member of the Outreach subcommittee and the Mediation Committee, and served as the co-Chair of the former Training subcommittee. My perspective and life experience as a community advocate, lifelong public housing resident of Manhattan, and as an openly gay, bicultural, Latino-identified, cisgendered man, has aided the agency in its outreach efforts, for example, to NYCHA communities, Manhattan communities, LGBTQ-serving organizations, and other community-based organizations. My previous experience as a civil rights paralegal, budget and policy analyst, and intergovernmental liaison, has enriched internal conversations about topics such as the budget and legislative process and has helped the CCRB forge new contacts with partners in government. I am in the process of completing, full-time, a Master of Arts degree from Union Theological Seminary.

As frontline public servants in their communities, Council Members have been vital partners in spreading the message of the CCRB, inviting the agency to events in their districts and distributing our informational literature in multiple languages. I am pleased that, thanks to the leadership of Speaker Mark-Viverito and several other Council Members, the Council is helping the CCRB significantly scale up the CCRB in the Communities initiative. This expanded initiative allows the CCRB to hold special evening office hours in six participating Council Members' district offices throughout the city, allowing community members to file complaints, give sworn statements, and obtain information about the CCRB, without needing to travel to the CCRB's lower Manhattan office during normal business hours. I am grateful to the participating Council Members in this expanded initiative: Speaker Mark-Viverito, CM Gibson, CM Richards, CM Rose, CM Menchaca, and CM Cornegy. My gratitude also go out to several other Council Members not listed here who participated in earlier phases of this initiative, and those who would like to explore future participation.

I was deeply honored to receive news in June 2015 of the Manhattan Delegation of the City Council's wish to reappoint me as their designee on the CCRB. My official appointment in December 2013 left me with approximately 1.5 years in my term, which expired on July 4, 2015. Per the City Charter, CCRB Board Members serve terms of 3 years. The timing of my first appointment meant I joined the Board with about half a term remaining. Although the Public Officers Law permits certain appointed officials to serve in their official roles beyond their stated terms until a replacement is named, seeking reappointment has afforded me the opportunity to review and validate my unique contribution to and commitment to helping the CCRB fulfill its Charter mandate. I was humbled to receive the renewed support of the Manhattan Delegation as their potential designee, and would be most grateful for the support of this Committee and the full Council in recommending me to the Mayor for reappointment.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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Name: Joseph Puma

Address: 643 E. 13th St. Apt. 8F, NY, NY 10009

I represent: CCRB

Address: 100 Church St., NY, NY 10007

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