

Committee on Public Safety Testimony

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Thank you, Chair Adams, Speaker Johnson and to the entire Committee for the opportunity to share my support for the proposals before you today. Your efforts provide a meaningful framework towards ensuring the City experiences a recovery deeply rooted not only in fairness, but safety and integrity. We need to rebuild our City not as it was, but how it should be.

Ultimately, further transparency and accountability will lead to greater trust between neighborhoods and the NYPD. This will help make New Yorkers safer at a time of increasing violent crimes and shootings, particularly in communities of color. If this spike in crime was happening on, say, the Upper East Side, we'd be pouring far more resources into getting control of the situation.

In fact, the murder clearance rate in 2020 dropped by about 16% from 2019. As Mara Gay of the New York Times recently noted, "Several studies have found that the effectiveness of the police at solving crimes plays a major role in determining whether individuals or communities trust them and report crimes."¹

Likewise, the recent rise in hate crimes are also deeply concerning. According to the NYPD's own Hate Crimes Dashboard,² there were 265 Confirmed Hate Crime Incidents in 2020 and 97 Hate Crime Arrests:

- 43% were against Jewish people;
- 15% were against Black people; and
- 11% were against the LGBTQ community, with some truly horrific reports of anti-trans violence.

Moreover, there has been a 900% increase anti-Asian hate crimes in New York City in the past year. 900%.³

We should be looking for ways to redirect NYPD resources towards reducing these violent and hate crimes in every precinct. We need more officers and detectives focused on protecting neighborhoods – and subways – from the most detrimental crimes. This is what the NYPD can do well and where our City should focus its law enforcement budget. I am also encouraged that the Council is advocating to bolster mental health responders and violence interrupter programs to better direct the NYPD to problems they are best equipped to solve.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/29/opinion/nypd-crime-murder.html>

² <https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrljoiYjg1NWl3YjgtYzgzOS00Nzc0LTkwMDAtNTgzM2I2M2JmYWWE1liwidCI6IjJiOWY1N2VlTc4ZDEtNDZmYi1iZTgzLWEyYWZkZDdjNjA0MyJ9>

³ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2021/2/11/22279407/anti-asian-hate-crime-surge-fuels-demands-for-systemic-and-sensitive-responses>

But with such great responsibility, we must also heighten the standards of the NYPD. Past decisions our City has made have created a shaky foundation on which to rebuild. By taking bold steps to reimagine public safety and policing in our City, we can live up to the City's highest ideals. Indeed, when City taxpayers must pay hundreds of millions for police misconduct settlements annually, you know something is wrong.

First and foremost, I was happy to see that T2020-6808 was added to today's hearing. We should absolutely expect our officers to live in the City. If we want police to engage in neighborhood policing, they should live in our neighborhoods. If we want them to build trust with our communities, they should be a part of them. Policing, and more importantly, public safety, only work when we see each other's humanity. Right now, a majority of officers live outside the City. Not even civilian NYPD employees are granted that privilege. I hope our partners in Albany pass S2984/A1951. Officers should know the communities they are serving as well as possible.

Second, I support Int. 1671-2019, which would require law enforcement to issue a quarterly report on traffic encounters. Our goal should be to regulate bad drivers, not discriminate against Black and Brown drivers. Similarly, I support Int. 2224-2020, which would move crash investigations to the Department of Transportation. Transportation experts design our streets and they should play a leading role in analyzing crashes, particularly after our City moved in the wrong direction in terms of traffic fatalities last year.⁴

Third, we need to strengthen and streamline the CCRB for the NYPD to be held accountable. I would recommend that those who sit on the Civilian Complaint Review Board should be full-time employees. Unfortunately, the CCRB's caseloads are high, and it is impossible for part-time workers to appropriately scrutinize dense, complex cases on nights and weekends. While I support the current appointments system, not only should these members be wholly committed to a legal process that is among the most fraught and consequential in the City, but our government must be willing and eager to invest in paying people to ensure better results.

Indeed, even where and how to file a complaint can be confusing. As THE CITY pointed out during the George Floyd protests, there are multiple agencies – four are referenced in the article with one being the State Attorney General's Office – to potentially raise concerns about the police. This is not an example of a responsive and rational bureaucracy.⁵ And we should not require individuals to have to physically go to the CCRB offices in Lower Manhattan for in-person interviews. We should instead have CCRB employees meet individuals in locations throughout the five boroughs that are more convenient. As it is, only about one-half of civilian complaints are fully investigated.⁶

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/01/nyregion/nyc-traffic-deaths.html>

⁵ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2020/5/31/21276494/how-to-report-police-misconduct-and-what-to-expect-if-you-do>

⁶ <https://www.wsjs.org/en/articles/2020/08/24/nypd-a24.html>

Clearly, we have our work cut out for us. But for our City to have a real recovery, we must be able to protect New Yorkers - both from crime and from police misconduct.