

RAISE the AGE | NY

June 16, 2020

City Council Speaker Corey Johnson

City Council Member Donovan Richards, Chair of the Public Safety Committee

City Council Member Keith Powers, Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee

City Council Member Deborah Rose, Chair of the Committee on Youth Services

City Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the Committee on General Welfare

Re: Priorities for Divesting from NYPD and Investing in Youth

Dear Speaker and Council Members:

In response to protests led by young people and their allies across New York City, as well as years of work by advocates in police reform and youth justice, the Mayor has stated his intention to reduce funding for NYPD, and make investments in youth and social services. **We write on behalf of the Raise the Age campaign urging you to pursue a budget that boldly answers the call of our communities by decriminalizing youth and investing in the resources that vulnerable young people, including those who are court-involved, need to thrive now and during the summer ahead.**

Decriminalization of Youth

As we move toward larger divestment from NYPD and new investments in true community safety, there is an immediate need to remove public health enforcement from police. Like removing street vendors from the purview of NYPD enforcement, public health should not be a primary police function. While the City has shifted some public health outreach efforts to Cure Violence organizations in some communities, as long as the City's police force remains responsible for social distancing enforcement, we will exacerbate existing disproportionate court involvement for youth of color during the COVID19 crisis and our beginning recovery. The City must expand on this effort to develop a corps of individuals outside of law enforcement, with preference given to organizations that already have a presence in the most heavily policed neighborhoods.

We also reiterate our call to stop custodial arrests of youth for all but the most serious charges, prioritize warnings whenever possible, and, when necessary, utilize the least disruptive tools, such as summonses. When the NYPD must interact with youth, de-escalation should be

employed at every level and referrals to community-based services should be used in lieu of arrests and summonses.

Restore Summer Youth Employment Program and Permit Flexible Youth Programming and Direct Financial Support

The City must commit to youth well-being with significant investments in services and supports to vulnerable adolescents and young adults, including those who are justice-involved. In the short term, this must include summer programming and financial support. This means reinstating the Summer Youth Employment Program immediately. Organizations need both flexible funds and guidance now to create programs that can be effectively administered for youth this summer.

Moreover, as our young people are subject to confinement in their homes for longer and longer periods of time, they have fewer contacts with supportive adults in their community, who are a cornerstone of positive youth development. Many SYEP provider organizations and City partners have expertise in youth development, family engagement, counseling and mental health. The City must fund remote engagement with young people, including check-ins, mentorship, and, where necessary, referrals to other community-based services and supports.

Mental Health Management and Crisis Intervention

The City must organize and plan for the mental health needs of youth and families escalating with the lengthening period of home confinement, the impacts of unemployment, the loss of life that has resulted from COVID19, and the community trauma of police brutality and racism that the protests of recent weeks have laid bare. Resources available through City agencies and community-based partners should be coordinated and deployed to serve youth and families in their homes through remote supports during the summer and as we begin the process of re-opening and COVID19 recovery.

As the City budget process proceeds, vulnerable adolescents and young adults, and those who have contact with the court system, must be priorities in NYPD divestment and community reinvestment. Your leadership is essential to fulfilling the potential of this moment for youth and families in New York.

Sincerely,

BronxConnect/Release the Grip
Center for Community Alternatives
Children's Rights
Children's Defense Fund-NY
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Families Together in New York State
Good Shepherd Services

Justice for Families
League of Women Voters, Criminal Justice Committee
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York County Defender Services
SparkAction, The Forum for Youth Investment
Youth Represent
YVote/Next Gen Politics

cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio, Public Advocate Jumaane Williams