



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

June 4, 2020

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Reducing and Redirecting the NYPD Budget

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I am writing to express once again my deep concern over your Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Executive Budget proposal to trim the New York City Police Department (NYPD) by a mere 0.31 percent, a move that all but signals your intent to maintain the status quo at the NYPD and protect at all costs its \$5.9 billion budget, despite the enormous financial and moral challenges currently facing the city. As New Yorkers and people across the country are crying out for justice, your proposal utterly fails to meet the moment, much less bring any imagination to how we might be able to shift both responsibilities and dollars away from the NYPD toward vulnerable communities most impacted by police violence and structural racism. Your refusal to consider more meaningful efficiencies within the NYPD is all the more striking in light of your decision to propose much deeper cuts to vital social services, like the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which for decades has served as a lifeline for low-income families. At a time when the global COVID-19 pandemic is already ravaging communities of color, families need these and other resources now more than ever to live in safety and put food on the table.

A Plan to Reduce NYPD Spending by \$1 Billion

As you know, more than two months ago I first called for at least a 4 percent cut to the FY 2021 budget for all City agencies, including the NYPD. In the absence of any concrete movement, I am writing to provide a detailed and actionable path to a significant reduction in the NYPD's budget, totaling more than \$1 billion over four years. By doing so, the City could free up hundreds of millions of dollars per year to support critical, frontline services and begin to rebuild communities ravaged not just by COVID-19, but by decades of systemic community disinvestment. At the same time, I believe the City should be pursuing every opportunity to shift responsibilities away from the Police Department — and its armed officers — and toward social workers, counselors, community-based violence interrupters, and other trained professionals better equipped to handle calls related to individuals in mental health crisis, homelessness, and

other non-criminal activities, as many other cities across the nation already do.

My office proposes achieving this more than \$1 billion budget reduction in the following ways:

- **Reduce uniformed headcount through attrition:** The City should suspend hiring of new police classes in FY 2021. Assuming a 3 percent attrition rate, that would bring expected uniformed headcount down to approximately **35,000** by end of FY 2021, or roughly the *same average headcount that prevailed between 2011 and 2016, when crime continued its steady decline to historically low levels*. Savings would also accrue from associated fringe benefits savings.
- **Cut uniformed overtime by 5 percent:** Overtime spending for FY 2021 is budgeted at \$519.6 million. A 5 percent reduction in budgeted overtime for uniformed officers would yield a \$26 million annual savings.
- **Trim Other than Personnel Services by 4 percent:** The City-funded OTPS budget for FY 2021 is \$429 million. A 4 percent reduction in OTPS savings would yield \$17 million in savings. This could be achieved through reductions in the NYPD's spending on computer services and other service contracts, as well as a lengthening of the replacement cycle for NYPD vehicles, among other possible actions.

These cuts would save roughly \$265 million annually, representing a PEG of 5.0 percent in FY 2021. Over four years, the plan would net the city nearly \$1.1 billion in accrued savings that could be redirected to other priorities, including helping the city to stave off cuts to other essential services.

	Annual Savings	4-Year Savings
Uniformed Attrition @ 3%	\$112 M	\$446 M
Fringe Savings	\$111 M	\$445 M
5% Unif. Overtime Reduction	\$26 M	\$104 M
4% OTPS PEG	\$17 M	\$68 M
TOTAL	\$265 M	\$1.06 B

I would also urge you to consider additional avenues for savings, including strategies for reducing legal claims filed against the NYPD. An analysis by my office reveals that in FY 2018, the City paid out as much as \$237.4 million in settlements related to allegations made against the NYPD for use of excessive force, civil rights violations, and personal injury and property damage. Since FY 2014, the total cost incurred to address the consequences of alleged police misconduct has amounted to some \$1.3 billion dollars. Addressing the enormous costs associated with NYPD claims must be a top priority for your administration. Acting aggressively to identify and hold officers accountable for police misconduct will not only save dollars in future lawsuits, it will spare many New Yorkers the needless pain and suffering stemming from the unnecessary use of force or other violations of civil rights. My office's ClaimStat initiative has helped drive down claims activity at agencies across the City, including at the NYPD, and at this moment of enormous fiscal pressure, your administration should redouble its efforts to reduce claims and associated payouts.

A Brief Budgetary History of the NYPD

The feasibility of this kind of cut is evident from an examination of budgetary trends within the NYPD in recent years. Between FY 2014 and FY 2019—the most recent years for which complete data are available—the department grew significantly, both in terms of the total budget, and in terms of the uniformed and civilian headcount. In fact, spending for the agency rose by 22 percent over those five years, to \$5.977 billion, a sum that accounted for over 6 percent of the City’s total budget. The increase was largely driven by a rise in total headcount of 2,921 full-time positions, from 50,565 in FY 2014 to 53,486 in FY 2019, an increase of 5.8 percent. Of those 2,921 new hires, more than two-thirds (2,021) were uniformed officers.

Personnel costs now account for about 89 percent of the agency’s budget, while other than personnel services (OTPS) make up about 11 percent of agency spending. Within that 11 percent are a range of costs, including police vehicles (\$86.9 million), computer equipment and services (\$120.6 million).

The current uniformed headcount of 36,461 is higher than at any time since FY 2002 with the exception of FY 2018, when headcount topped out at 36,643. As mentioned, my proposal would reduce headcount to 35,000, or roughly the same average level that prevailed between 2011 and 2016, when crime continued its steady decline. The data suggest, therefore, that there is an opportunity to scale back spending and headcount at the NYPD without impacting recent gains in reducing the City’s overall crime rate.

Alternative Approaches to Policing, and Investing in Our Communities

The prospect of reducing the scale of the force becomes even more viable if the reduction is done in concert with fundamental reforms aimed at limiting NYPD responsibilities for certain kinds of interventions that would be better handled by others who are trained in serving certain populations, among them individuals experiencing a mental health crisis and those experiencing homelessness, as well as certain low level calls for which a uniformed police officer is not needed or necessary.

Over the long-term, divesting from policing and limiting NYPD’s outsized role in the provision of social services, including the City’s approaches to mental health and homelessness, must be the goal. Doing so would not only free up hundreds of millions of dollars that could be re-invested in our hardest hit communities, many of them reeling anew from the impacts of COVID-19, it would also dramatically reduce police interactions and opportunities for unnecessary criminal legal system involvement.

Furthermore, redirecting funds toward trained social workers, counselors, and outreach staff to help them respond to challenges like homelessness and mental health disorders—which are circumstances rooted in poverty, trauma, and structural racism, *not* crimes in progress—would produce far more positive outcomes. There is strong evidence that alternatives to policing work well when properly funded, not only in mitigating harm but in building public safety and trust. New York should be looking to other cities across the nation that have dared to take new

approaches to policing, and to existing models and approaches that have proven successful, including:

- **In Eugene and Springfield, Oregon**, many 911 mental health calls are responded to by a team that consists of a mental health crisis worker and an emergency medical technician. These teams are often deployed *instead of the police* and can provide a number of services, including crisis counseling, conflict resolution, suicide prevention, and transportation to hospitals, pharmacies, and other services. In 2018 alone, as THE CITY has reported and Public Advocate Jumaane Williams has documented, the NYPD received 179,569 emergency calls involving individuals in mental health crisis, yet the City has only in the last year committed to begin deploying mental health clinicians to these 911 calls *alongside* police.¹
- **In Tucson, Arizona**, the police department has pioneered initiatives to expand its menu of alternative responses for handling 911 calls. This has scaled back the deployment of sworn officers, saved time and money and, in many instances, paired calls with other agencies and non-sworn officers more appropriate and better trained to handle certain low-risk and non-emergency calls, among them lost electronic devices, shoplifting, and other low-level “quality of life” issues.²
- **In Camden, New Jersey**, city leaders in 2013 reconstituted its police department, reducing the number of officers and adopting a new approach to policing and community engagement. The department works closely with local churches and community centers and partners with the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and other local nonprofits to better serve residents who have made repeat visits to hospital emergency rooms and jails. This high-need population is now being actively diverted *away* from the criminal justice system.³

These are trying times for all New Yorkers, but especially for communities of color. Across the boroughs, as across the nation, protesters have gathered to mourn and demand justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and the hundreds of black men and women who have been killed at the hands of police in the U.S. The need for change – and a fundamental realignment of priorities – is clear, and I urge you to seize this moment to bring a measure of justice and fairness to how we spend our city dollars and protect New Yorkers.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

¹ <https://www.thecity.nyc/health/2019/10/21/21210751/no-more-edps-nypd-s-emergency-plan-to-deal-with-mentally-ill-new-yorkers>; <https://www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov/static/assets/OPA%20EDP%20REPORT%202019.pdf>

² <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/911-call-processing-system-review-of-policing-literature.pdf>

³ <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/gatekeepers-police-and-mass-incarceration.pdf>