

# DC 37 Progressive Caucus Petition

June 22, 2020

## I. INTRODUCTION

We are rank and file members launching a new Progressive Caucus under DC 37. We cannot express the extent of our outrage at the systematic and unbridled violence of the NYPD, now on full display for the entire world to see. Not only does the NYPD treat our city as an “occupied territory,” to echo the words of current and former staffers for Mayor De Blasio, but their recent aggression also enabled the temporary suspension of the right to a writ of habeas corpus. We stand with the demonstrators as they continue to protest our racist criminal justice system’s sustained assault on Black people in NYC and around the country.

While the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery have catalyzed these most recent demonstrations, we know that Black and brown New Yorkers live under the threat of vicious police violence every single day. Years of spending money on new training, body cameras, and attempts at police reform has failed to fix the core problem: our justice system is rooted in racial control and empowers officers to abuse (and kill) with impunity.

Our union is powered by city workers who strive to advance economic and racial justice. We work every day to make our city better. We write this petition because we believe that the circumstances call for a complete reimagining of how NYC ensures the public health and safety of its residents. These efforts are already underway in other cities, like in Minneapolis where the City Council has called to disband the police, or in San Francisco where police will no longer respond to non-criminal calls.

Put simply, cutting the NYPD’s budget is not enough. We support calls to **defund the NYPD** and completely reimagine our city’s approach to public safety. As city workers, we know that the way to ensure public wellbeing is through robust investment in housing, healthcare, and a public health approach to violence reduction. Budgets are expressions of our priorities, and it is time we used our power as a union of 150,000 members to push for a budget that actually reflects the needs and desires of our union and the City as a whole. As a first step, in the coming fiscal year, **we believe that the NYPD’s budget should be reduced by half**. It is now clear to us, and it should be clear to you, that those dollars would be better spent by other departments that ensure the safety and wellbeing of New Yorkers by administering social services.

## II. JOIN US

We hope that the rest of our 150,000 members, and DC 37 leadership will stand in solidarity with us as we make this call, and remember our union's obligation to its diverse membership, many of whom live in communities that have received underinvestment from the City for decades.

### **The signers of this petition believe DC 37 must call for:**

1. A plan for the defunding of the NYPD, divestment from prison funding, and a reallocation of those public resources toward social needs, a just form of ensuring community public safety and wellness. This would not include clerical workers, crossing guards, or other necessary civil service workers employed by the NYPD or Corrections.
2. A plan for providing the space for New Yorkers to discuss alternatives to status quo policing in their communities, including investment in transformative and restorative justice practices and well-tested models of violence interruption such as neighborhood patrols and unarmed responses to non-violent calls, to build an NYC without police or incarceration.
3. Immediate de-militarization of the NYPD. Removal of all riot gear, military equipment, and crowd control substances banned by international agreement such as tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets. Institute legal prohibition against any future such purchases.

### **And, in the short term, for the following actions:**

4. The removal of \$3 billion from the NYPD budget in Fiscal Year '21, and reallocation of the funding towards other essential services and community-based violence prevention strategies.<sup>1</sup>
5. Immediate institution of independent, legal, civilian oversight over the NYPD with full investigatory and prosecutorial powers to address all alleged instances of excessive and/or racist police violence.
6. The removal of police unions from the Central Labor Council.
7. Appointing an independent commission to investigate the response of the Mayor's Office and the NYPD to the May and June 2020 protests against police violence.

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<sup>1</sup> We support the current bill introduced by Speaker Cory Johnson to defund the police by \$1 billion over the next fiscal year and acknowledge it as a step forward; however, we reiterate our support for cutting the NYPD's budget by half.

### III. WHY DO WE MAKE THIS CALL?

- **Because Black Lives Matter.** Systemic racism is firmly rooted in the NYPD and is affirmed every day by the Police Benevolent Association (PBA). We condemn the NYPD's continuation of institutionalized violence against Black lives, and demand an end to it.
- **Because we have a right to protest without being terrorized.** Over the past several weeks, millions of New Yorkers have been able to watch - almost in real time - police *instigate* violence against scores of peaceful protesters in every borough. We condemn NYPD's brutality, demonstrated when officers rammed people with SUVs, attacked on-duty essential workers, flashed white supremacist hand signals, threw a young protestor to the ground so hard that she had seizures, pointed guns at crowds, covered their badges to shield themselves from any accountability, and used our City's obscene curfew to silence peaceful protest. Many other instances of police violence have gone undocumented
- **Because we see (and experience) this kind of "misconduct" every day.** The NYPD paid out \$69 million last year to settle claims of police misconduct. It waited five years to fire Daniel Pantaleo. It used subway fare enforcement and social distancing measures as an excuse to terrorize Black and brown New Yorkers. We shouldn't be surprised at what we're seeing, and it's time to use our union's strength to help end it.

### IV. IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE CITY BUDGET

Our call to defund and reallocate takes on a particular urgency in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which, like police violence itself, has a disproportionate and racialized impact on Black and brown New Yorkers. Our city historically spends more on policing than it does on the Departments of Health, Homeless Services, Housing Preservation and Development, and Youth and Community Development combined. And, in the midst of the unprecedented budgetary challenges posed by the pandemic - which amounts to an estimated \$9 billion shortfall in tax revenue - the Mayor's initial funding proposal for the NYPD only reduces its budget by less than 1 percent. Consider, in contrast, that the Department of Youth and Community Service faces a 32 percent cut, or that HPD's capital budget faces a 40 percent cut.

Defunding the NYPD and reallocating its resources can play a crucial role in ensuring that indispensable programs can remain funded. This reallocation, along with the tens of millions that would otherwise be spent on settling NYPD misconduct cases, will go a

long way in overcoming the immense budgetary challenges posed by COVID-19. The City's current fiscal commitment to the NYPD suggests that armed police officers are the most important component of a safe, thriving city. The NYPD routinely proves this to be false.

## **V. BUDGET PRIORITIES**

How might we reallocate the NYPD's funding? Funding should be redistributed to new and existing programs managed by DC 37 agencies and our partner mayoral offices designed to:

1. Transition public safety from a police-centered approach to a community-based model, a transition requiring a radical reimagination of City services and the development of new programs and civil service positions
2. Improve equitable outcomes for New Yorkers, including addressing the social and environmental determinants of health that disadvantage communities of color

We believe City agencies are well positioned to take on this work due to our various expertise in the following work, including but not limited to:

- Social work and case management
- Mediation and consensus building
- Violence interruption and de-escalation
- Community outreach and engagement
- Contracting and partnerships with community based organizations
- Response to and prevention of discrimination and harassment
- Monitoring and enforcement of rules and regulations promoting the health, safety, and general welfare of New Yorkers
- Implicit bias training
- Traffic enforcement
- Physical and mental health education and substance abuse prevention
- Home visiting programs
- Food and resource distribution
- Youth education, recreation, and employment programs
- Arts and cultural programming
- Literacy and educational resources
- Information and referral services
- Support to small businesses
- Workforce development
- Financing the construction and preservation of affordable housing

- Rental assistance, tenant counseling, and homeownership education
- Designing and building vibrant, accessible public spaces
- Designing and building resiliency and flood protection projects to protect communities at the frontlines of climate change
- Implementation of street improvement programs for neighborhood safety and accessibility

We demand justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery. For Eric and Erica Garner. For all Black New Yorkers. We have an opportunity to serve as a model for the rest of the country by defunding the police in New York City and reimagining our approach to public safety. We should use it.

In Solidarity,

The undersigned

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Adriana Joseph, Local 374 Quasi-Public Employees  
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