



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony for the New York City Council
Committee on Public Safety & the Committee on Education**

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September 20, 2018

RE: Res. 0514-2018, Int 0381-2018, Int 0639-2018, Int 0866-2018, Int 0869-2018, Int 0872-2018, Int 0876-2018, Int 0880-2018, Int 0893-2018, Int 0894-2018, Int 0912-2018, Int 0921-2018, Int 0922-2018, Int 0923-2018

Good afternoon Chairpersons and Committee Members. My name is Ashley Sawyer and I am the Director of Policy and Government Relations at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE).

GGE is a 16 year old, Brooklyn-based youth development and advocacy organization committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. GGE challenges structural forces, including racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and economic inequity, which constrict the freedom, full expression, and rights of transgender and cisgender girls and women of color, and gender non-conforming people of color. GGE is also a member of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC).

In 2016, GGE began a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process with over 100 students from New York City public schools. Students between the ages of 9 - 23 shared their experiences and their recommendations for ways to ensure that schools are safe, affirming places for all students. Students described their experiences with school police, metal detectors, and other instruments of surveillance. **Students overwhelmingly indicated that the presence of police in schools did**

not make them feel safer. In fact, students are quoted in our report saying that they felt as if they were in a prison when they attended schools. There is data supporting the experiences shared by the student participants in our research. National advocacy organizations have shared data clearly demonstrating that the presence of law enforcement disproportionately harms Black and Latinx students, as they become the targets of school based arrests.¹ Increased collaboration between the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and school principals, deans, and teachers would only further that trend.

We use the term “criminalization” to describe the patterns and practices which mirror a carceral, prison-like environment within schools and send the message to students, that they are harmful or dangerous. Often criminalization shows up through constantly searching students or sending them through metal detectors, under the suspicion that they are carrying weapons, assigning law enforcement agents to monitor their halls, and arresting students in school. Criminalization impedes learning and does more harm than good.² Worse, it diverts precious resources away from strategies that have the potential to transform schools.³

As a result of horrific school shootings and other forms of violence locally and nationally, we applaud the City Council for thinking strategically about a community response to preventing and responding to incidents of in-school violence. However, it was only recently that the DOE finally started consider restorative approaches to school discipline and moved towards decriminalizing schools. We hope that the bills that the Council is considering today do not result in a shift away from the positive steps that the DOE has begun to take.

¹ Advancement Project, Alliance for Education in Schools, Dignity in Schools, & NAACP LDF <http://dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Police-In-Schools-2018-FINAL.pdf>

² Brea L. Perry & Edward W. Morris, *Suspending Progress: Collateral Consequences of Exclusionary Punishment in Schools*, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122414556308> (2014).

³ Ashley C. Sawyer, *Healing, Not Metal Detectors Will Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, <https://jjie.org/2018/01/10/healing-not-metal-detectors-will-dismantle-the-school-to-prison-pipeline-for-goo-d/>

We do not believe that additional policing and surveillance of students is a necessary condition to yield the ultimate goals of student and school safety. **We are deeply concerned about any increase in the NYPD's influence, presence, or oversight of New York City schools, as suggested by the proposed bills. The involvement of the NYPD in the proposed Emergency Preparedness Task Force (Int 0866) should explicitly set the expectation to not further the criminalization of New York City students, particularly black, and Latinx youth of color.** We encourage the City Council to add language to this legislation so that the DOE's time and resources are best spent investing in student and school safety by engaging trained professionals who are most well positioned to support students.

It is critical that we remember that the professionals and community members who are best positioned to develop and evaluate protocols for responding to student's mental health needs are *not* members of law enforcement. Instead, this should be in the purview of healthcare and education professionals, people who are trained in childhood and adolescent brain development, people who are culturally competent, and people who are not invested in making arrests or removing students from the school environment. To that end, we implore the Council to consider adding language to Intro 0869 to ensure that any mental health response from schools does not default to the NYPD as the personnel that are expected to support young people experiencing a mental health crisis.

We believe that Resolution 0514 introduced by Council Member Treyger is an important start toward doing the work of keeping students safe, and improving student outcomes. Having *at least* one full-time counselor and social worker for every 250 students, as recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCS) is an essential, base level, strategy to keep students safe.⁴ **The research stemming from our *Schools Girls Deserve* report revealed that students wanted more counselors in their schools.** Students felt that having

⁴ Scott E. Carrell, Susan A. Carell, *Do Lower Student to Counselor Ratios Reduce School Disciplinary Problems*, Contributions to Economic Analysis and Policy, Vol. 5, Issue 1. (2006), <http://www.schoolcounselor-ca.org/files/Advocacy/Lower%20Counselor%20Ratios%20Equal%20Less%20Discipline.pdf>.

guidance counselors and social workers would be a crucial first step toward making schools into healing and affirming learning environments. As the resolution states, there are now more School Safety Agents (SSAs) than the total number of both guidance counselors and social workers combined. This is a startling demonstration of the city's values. We have not invested the appropriate resources to bringing in the professionals who are committed to supporting students. Counselors and Social Workers who are equipped with an anti-racist, culturally competent, gender responsive analysis are crucial to doing the work of keeping schools safe and allowing students to learn.⁵ Staff should be equipped to support students of varying religious backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and races. These staff need to have a manageable caseload, one that allows them to know the students in their care, and effectively offer services and supports.

Thank you again for allowing us the opportunity to share our expertise and for holding today's hearings. We hope to be in continued conversations with members of this body to ensure that schools are safe, affirming, and healing environments for all students.

⁵ Diane Flinn, Georgette Norman, Sejal Patel & Yvette Robles, *Professional Development: White Anti-Racism*, Teaching Tolerance (Southern Poverty Law Center), <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/white-antiracism-living-the-legacy>.