



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony to the City Council
February 18, 2021 Hearing of the Committee on Education
Delivered by: Quadira Coles**

Good afternoon Chair Treyger and members and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Quadira Coles and I am the Policy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity.

GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, that challenges structural forces, including racism, sexism, gender-based violence, transphobia, homophobia, and economic inequity, which constrict the freedom, full expression, and rights of transgender and cisgender girls and young women of color, and gender non-conforming youth of color. We do this work through direct service, advocacy, and culture change. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around ending gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and sexual abuse, for close to two decades.

We are offering testimony today to talk about restoring safety and dignity in our schools for returning students. We remain consistent in our demand that the Council prioritize police-free schools and invest in students' education with services, programs and support that address the inequities that were laid bare by the pandemic and transition to remote learning. The emotional and mental well-being of students, school climate and a healing-driven transition should be the city's primary priorities. Over the past year, students have lost access to their school buildings, many have lost family and friends and many lost employment opportunities and took on new responsibilities in caretaking as families tried their best to navigate the pandemic. These experiences will shape how students show up in their new educational settings now and in the future.

The proposed legislation by the Council further entrenches policing in schools instead of meeting the needs of school communities. This culture of surveillance and criminalization pushes students out of schools and forces them into carceral systems. You all have the opportunity through the budget negotiation process to eradicate violence at the hands of law enforcement and reinvest the money once spent on policing to transform our schools in a direction of healing and support.

We strongly oppose Introduction 2211, which codifies the School Safety Division within the Department of Education with the retention of 5,250 (former) policing staff. This piece of legislation also maintains discretion to any NYPD employee who "reasonably" believes action to be necessary to address an imminent risk to public safety or property. Our police-free schools demand includes the total end of police access to school buildings. Intro. 2211 does nothing to acknowledge schools' need for resources, or otherwise resolve to invest to support schools in ways that set police-free schools up for success.

We are grappling with a long legacy of school-police violence. Proposing that agents in the division under the DOE do not have to wear uniforms or materials of the NYPD is nothing more than a symbolic gesture rather than an attempt to address the legacy of school policing. Refusing to dismantle the division means that school police complicity in policing culture will continue to mean an interruption of young people's education.

By blanket transferring with "periodic training" we are leaving a huge gap for young people to suffer in the meantime while we all wait for the culture of policing to "shift." Outsourcing conflict to "school safety personnel" is not a remedy to conflict; it is not the transformative investment that we are demanding in order to meet the needs of school communities. Intro 2211 potentially commits an unknowable or unspecified mass of funding to training former police on abstract matters (like "equity" or how to "honor the dignity and humanity of students") instead of investing in a whole-school approach to accountability and restorative justice, including ways that students can hold adults accountable, as well as ways that adults within buildings can hold each other accountable at all levels of the power. You cannot train into people to honor the humanity and dignity of students.

On Introduction 2188-2020 sponsored by Councilmember Ayala, we fundamentally do not believe police should be interacting with young people, and that includes young people in crisis. Moreover, this bill proposes to reroute responses away from police and to school staff, and in many schools those school staff just do not exist. We demand funding and investments in school staff that are there to care for and support young people. Lastly, we do not support new or continued spending on training for school police. This bill must reject that recommendation.

On Introduction 2226-2021 we ask that reporting differentiate between retention and turnover – identifying the number of positions added during the reporting period as well. On Introduction 2227-2021 we ask for the inclusion of procedures developed by the DOE and NYPD pursuant to section IV. 33 of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) for principals to report misconduct by public safety personnel and uniformed members of the NYPD. Further, a description of cases where principals were not satisfied with the performance of public school safety personnel, pursuant to section IV.32 of the MOU, and the number of requests for a change in public school safety personnel or uniformed officers assigned to the school, and a description of the outcome of the request. This bill, as is, excludes the sections of the MOU that address principal complaints of school police misconduct, or dissatisfaction with police performance, that communities have long lifted up as in need of immediate attention.

Our demand is to disband the school policing division, not transfer. This "transition" will require an opaque and potentially boundless financial commitment that could otherwise go to building something that more closely mirrors what we need, rather than what is convenient or the lowest possible lift. These bills are skewed towards the priorities of law enforcement instead of new, big, sustained investments in the whole school community. If the Mayor and City Council close the "COVID Achievement Gap" and make sure that students and staff are supported next year, the focus should be on supporting pathways to young people's leadership, employment, and resources in their schools and communities – not policing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.