



**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing – Education
Delivered by: Quadira Coles
March 23, 2021**

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).

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 here, again, to 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. There is citywide consensus that the emotional and mental well-being of students as well as support and preparedness of school staff should be atop the city's education priorities. Over the past year, students have lost access to their school buildings and had to rapidly adjust to new routines and a new method of learning that has exposed a multitude of educational inequities within the New York City school system. Neither school communities nor students were prepared for this, and these experiences will continue to shape how students show up in their new educational settings now and in the future.

It is clearer than ever that the Mayor misled the public by announcing that the NYPD was "defunded by \$1 billion" in June 2020, and now with the Fiscal Year 2022 budget we are reminded that reductions were not only modest but nonrecurring. Since July, in fact, the Fiscal Year 2021 budget has already grown by \$150 million. In addition, despite the Mayor's math including the transfer of the School Safety Division to the DOE, the division is still operating under the NYPD's budget. The FY22 plan has the NYPD's school budget bigger than ever.

These are just a few of the instances where City government has promised one thing to the public in the name of "Police Reform" and done the complete opposite in practice and implementation. As plans come to light and decision making remains non transparent to the public aside from comments captured during oversight hearings, we call on the Council to vehemently reject any potential new hiring of school cops in this fiscal year and in the years to come.

We want to use this education budget oversight opportunity to raise components of the Mayor's and Council's Police Reform & Reinvention proposals that will require new or additional expenses.

To start, the proposed reforms by the Council and Mayor 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 in schools and redirect the money once spent on policing to transform our schools in a direction of healing and support – rather than expediting misguided reforms through compliance with Executive Order 203.

Our police-free schools demand includes the total end of police access to school buildings. None of these proposals do anything 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 strongly oppose Introduction 2211, which codifies the transfer of the NYPD's school policing division within the DOE with the retention of 5,250 (would-be 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.

We are grappling with a long legacy of school-police violence. 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.

We strongly encourage the Council to reject the Mayor's attempt to codify a school safety transfer through Executive Order 203 as described in his draft plan. **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 proposals are skewed towards the priorities of the NYPD 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.