



**Testimony for the New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services
Oversight: Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget
March 11, 2021**

Thank you to Chair Rose and members and staff of the Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nicole Hamilton, I am currently the Director of Community Partnerships at Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) and previously served as the Director of Urban Leaders Academy, GGE's social justice school-based after-school program for almost 10 years. I am testifying today in strong support of returning full funding to the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and to speak specifically to concerning trends of outsourcing youth work to the NYPD.

Introduction

Almost exactly one year ago today, GGE convened a Zoom call of over to 100 youth service providers, educators, city agency employees, mental health professionals, social workers, and others out of necessity in rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the upheaval it has caused. Recognizing that there is strength in numbers, we decided to continue to meet regularly in an effort to organize a critical mass around some of the issues and challenges we were facing as Youth Service Providers. The most emergent issues identified by the group include but are not limited to: educational access and equity, mental health and social service supports, restorative practices in the digital space, support for youth workers and afterschool providers, policing and surveillance, funding, and the City budget. Here we are, almost a year later, still holding space to support this dynamic group of people who love, serve and support young people day in and day out.

Last September, the Youth Service Providers Network published a letter which we titled 'A Call to Action - Maximize Resources and Restore Healing'. The letter stated four demands, one being for the city to 'resource the work' by reducing the NYPD's expense budget and re-allocating funds back into schools and youth-serving organizations. We all know that young people are in desperate need of safe and supportive spaces to process some of the trauma they have experienced due to COVID-19 and witnessing the murders, assaults, and dehumanizing disregard of Black people at the hands of the police. Young people also need spaces to heal and reconnect with joy, play, and community.

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget Proposal

DYCD is facing continued and disproportional divestment. We thank the Council for your leadership in preserving SYEP in some form after the Mayor proposed its cancellation in FY21, and we thank the Council for the stated commitment to returning SYEP slots for the summer of 2021. However, we are concerned that the funding for SYEP falls short of sustaining SYEP in its entirety – as funding in FY22 is just 75% of what it was in FY20. Further, funding for DYCD in FY22 is \$200 million less than what it was in FY20.

Many of the young people you find at City Council, or in these zoom hearings will not forget the times when they shared their stories, raised their voices, and demanded that you do better by them, only to have their

programs cut and defunded, taking away valuable life experiences and often, as in the case with SYEP, financial resources needed to help support their families in hard times such as these. They will not forget.

Young people are severely impacted by these cuts because they take away vital resources that they need while continuing to siphon these funds into the budget of NYPD. Young people are watching and listening and they will not forget that their cries for the City to stop criminalizing, dehumanizing, and traumatizing them day in and day out by the ever-looming presence of police have been consistently ignored. They will not forget that the City sends officers who wield the power to enact deadly force into their schools and onto their playgrounds and in their train stations, at their bodegas, their youth programs, and in the very buildings where they live.

Despite their outrage and pleas, the City doubles down and finds even more ways to give the NYPD access and portals into the lives of young people. We know that quality programs are a protective factor in the lives of many young people, yet it seems that the City is willing to forfeit their protection in order to bolster the budget of the NYPD, who are ironically called to serve and protect and often do the opposite.

Fund Positive Youth Development

We call on the Council to invest in programs that build skills, cultivate communities, heal past hurt and harms, spark inquisitiveness, value individuals for what they bring, validate, affirm, connect, uplift and support. This is your chance to prove that you have not only been listening but that you have heard and will honor the experiences of young people in our city in a way that is undeniable: by putting forth a budget that reflects that they are a priority and not an afterthought and that their well being is paramount.

By fortifying the communities of care that are already in place to serve young people with funding, staff, resources, space, equipment, we create environments that can sustain safety and positive culture, free of police. Instead of outsourcing youth worker positions like camp counselor, after-school provider, or coach, to the police, invest that money back into building up the people who have been undervalued and underpaid, yet still doing the real work all along. When we call for police-free schools we are calling for new pathways to school-based employment focused on restorative practice, care work, and resisting criminalization. We cannot continue to place such political emphasis on displacing school police if we do not equally consider how pushing the NYPD into youth-serving jobs indirectly displaces thousands of youth workers who are dedicated, equipped, and ready to give young people the specific, age and developmentally appropriate care and attention they want, need and deserve.

Defund Youth Policing

In addition, the public needs full transparency about all current relationships, with their budgetary impact, between DYCD and the NYPD. We heard this morning that DYCD collaborated with the NYPD at the Police Academy to start up the new Youth Coordination Officer program, endorsing the use of police as a DYCD outreach strategy. This is outrageous! Young people must be able to be outside, play, and have joyful everyday youthful experiences without police intervention! The Mayor's March 5th "Police Reform and Reinvention" proposal expands on what we've seen in our communities – the tangling together of youth programming and policing. With SYEP, for example, we understand the NYPD is one of the larger SYEP worksites where youth are placed at local precincts, 1 Police Plaza, and other NYPD units/commands.

The City has created devious and secretive partnerships between the NYPD and DYCD, forcing young people to interact with police at Beacon and Cornerstone Centers, and DYCD-contracted youth-serving organizations. We see this in schools where the City makes plans to train NYPD in restorative practices so that they can sit in circle and be privy to intimate details of young people's lives. Again we see it when school police are deployed to meal distribution sites and given thermometers to take temperatures when young people enter school buildings.

What's worse, the Patrol Guide is continuously and outrageously adapted so that police are instructed to perform a myriad of tasks with the intent of insidiously infiltrating youth spaces, just so that they can stay in close proximity to young people, even when young people themselves have stated that they are not welcome. And let's face it, those jobs rightfully belong to other people: people without the legal authority to use physical and deadly force or carry with them the threat of imminent criminalization. Those jobs belong to food services workers, restorative justice practitioners, counselors, school nurses, parent coordinators, and a long list of other positions that are severely understaffed and also require specific skill sets and levels of expertise and experience in youth development. The NYPD's intelligence-driven policing model, its information-sharing practices across City agencies, its omnipresence and surveillance infrastructure, makes it clear, apparent, and imperative that DYCD must be free from the NYPD.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.