



**Testimony to the New York City Council's Committee on Education
Oversight - Fall 2021 School Reopening Protocols**

Delivered by: Ashley C. Sawyer, Esq.
Senior Director of Campaigns
Girls for Gender Equity

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Good afternoon Chairperson Treyger and committee members, my name is Ashley C. Sawyer and I am the Senior Director of Campaigns at Girls for Gender Equity. Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) is a Brooklyn-based, policy and youth development organization that advocates to remove the systemic barriers which prevent cisgender and transgender girls and gender non-conforming youth of color from leading self-determined lives.

Thank you for convening today's hearing regarding public health and safety for New York City public school students. It is important to remember that our city is living through multiple public health crises; the public health crisis of COVID-19, and the racial injustice that extends into the lives of students of color, including Black girls.

This week GGE released [40,000 Interventions: A 5-Year Lookback report](#). As you are aware, this report is made possible by the Council's Student Safety Act. This is the 5 year anniversary of the data being made available to the public, and as you can imagine, Chair Treyger, the data is shocking and concerning. **For example, Black girls in NYC schools were 8.3x more likely than other girls to be stopped by, questioned by, or interact with police in their schools. More than eight times.** Our data show that Black girls make up a disproportionate percentage of



the students who are arrested in schools, and are overrepresented in every area where police data is collected. **The data show that the NYPD utilized restraints on students an average of 6 times per school day.** Across the 5,522 cases of use of restraints, 51% of cases were in instances of arrest, 22% were in instances of “child in crisis” police responses. We believe that there is a better way.

[Last year, we provided research indicating the devastating impact](#) of COVID-19 on cisgender and transgender girls on non-binary youth of color, and we provided a blueprint for a path forward that reallocates resources away from policing toward creating healthy and affirming schools, that teach students about consent, and that are rooted in real restorative practices. GGE [joined over 100 youth organizations in February signing a letter](#) to ask the city to not hire new school police, we remain steadfast in our commitment to both raise awareness around the harmful impact of school pushout on Black girls, and queer and trans youth, and make sure that this body is aware that there is another way to ensure safety as schools reopen.

[Across the country](#), students have been forced to witness brutality at the hands of school police. In the past year, there have been two “viral” moments where Black girls were assaulted by school police, including one where a student was tossed to the ground and made unconscious. In New York specifically, [Black girls were 57% of all school police interventions involving girls](#) despite the fact that Black girls are only 22% of the public school student population.

The presence of school police exacerbates what is known as the “school-to-prison-pipeline” or school pushout, and further entrenches these racial disparities. Policing is harmful both in and around schools, our analysis of the more recent CCRB data shows that [girls of color are disproportionately impacted by NYPD misconduct](#). For these reasons we are imploring this body to ensure that this year’s budget does not further these inequities. To be clear, **we are in complete opposition to the hiring of 250 new school police and call on Council to block the**



rollout of this plan. For this coming academic year, we are again calling for the complete divestment from the School Safety Division of the NYPD, and the reallocation of those resources into education ([community schools](#) and deeply-rooted restorative programs), and community-based supports for young people.

Students returning to school this fall will be holding memories and still living through some of the most tumultuous, challenging experiences of their collective lives. The COVID-19 pandemic means that many students of color will be unfortunately experiencing the ongoing effects of trauma, loss, and will have significant social, emotional, and mental health needs. **My deep fear is that their pain will be met with punishment. The only way to prevent that is to invest in healing-centered schools and not increase the presence of police in NYC schools.**

Thank you council members for your dedication and responsiveness to these critical issues. We look forward to continuing this conversation and offering our expertise as you enter into the 2021-2022 school year.