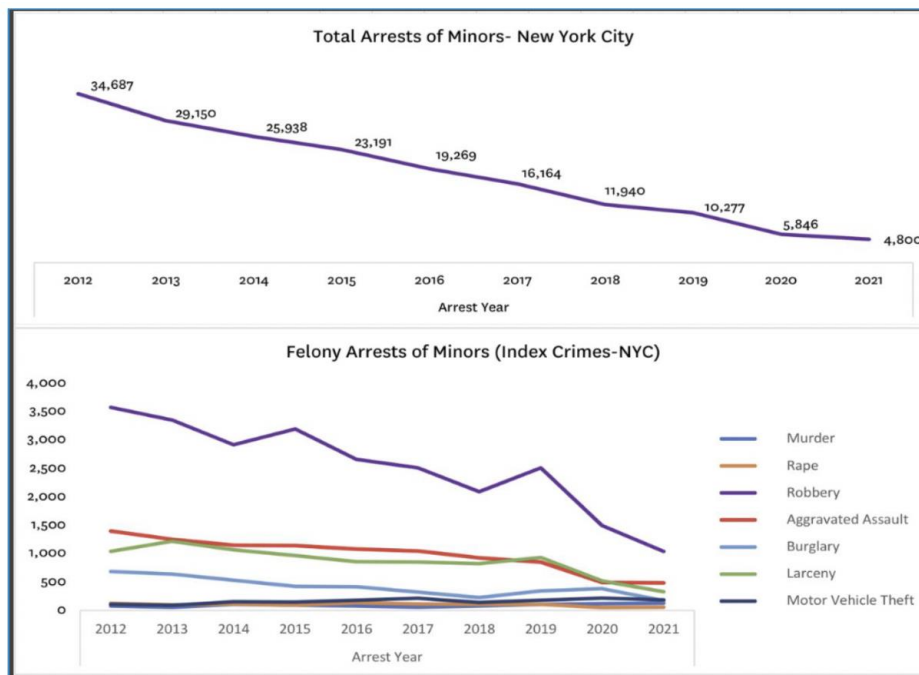


**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti
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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council
Preliminary Budget Hearing on Public Safety
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Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is a 79-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Hanks and all the members of the Committee on Public Safety for holding today's preliminary budget hearing.

In face of the rhetoric that has dominated many recent news articles on crime in New York, we believe it is essential to make clear that youth crime is not rising in New York City. Youth arrests and index crimes, which are serious property and violent crimes reported to the police, have continued to decline over the past ten years. Furthermore, young people are much more likely to be a victim of a gun crime than a perpetrator of a gun crime. The fear mongering around crime that is currently permeating many media outlets is destructive, dangerous, and untrue.



Any incident of violence is unacceptable, and we strongly support efforts to reduce violence in communities and support victims of violence. But the path to true safety and wellbeing is not through criminalization, but is instead through investments in youth and communities. Young people in New York have clearly expressed that they need and want access to housing, behavioral health care, afterschool programs, year-round employment opportunities and holistic supports – not further criminalization.

Below we will provide insights and recommendations related to key investments that will increase public safety. We have provided recommendations related to investments in youth services, housing, economic security, and behavioral health as part of other relevant preliminary budget hearings.

Invest in Youth Opportunity, Services, and Workforce

We were pleased to see the Mayor's State of the City highlight his Accelerator Apprenticeship program, which aims to support the hiring of 30,000 people into apprenticeships by 2030. This is an example of an investment into non-carceral services, and we believe programs like this should be made available to teens and young adults. We were also excited about Speaker Adams' recognition of the importance of supporting disconnected youth, including by expanding the Renaissance Technical Institute's program which free vocational training to young people, particularly special populations of youth such as justice involved young people.ⁱ We strongly support continuing to expand these types of investments in youth opportunities. As important as these proposed investments are, however, our city must go further to promote community safety by investing in youth-led community-rooted initiatives and by meeting the needs of special populations of youth.

The City can promote community safety by prioritizing the youth services ecosystem, including by supporting and strengthening the youth services workforce. CCC, in partnership with the Campaign for Children, recommends the following investments into youth services to help support the mental health, skill building, and emotional well-being of young New Yorkers:

- **Reverse** the \$29.3 million PEG for DYCD contracted programs;
- **Create** a path to universal and year-round youth services by **establishing** 12-month youth service contracts
- **Increase** the cost-per-participant rates for COMPASS and SONYC to set a wage floor of \$21/hour for staff
- **Shift** to a K-8 summer programming model to draw on the best aspects of Summer Rising and Summer Camp models. This model allows programs to be responsive to local needs, gives CBOs more control over their budgets and staff, and will ease the enrollment process.
- **Invest** \$4.8 million in GreenThumb to hire Community Engagement Coordinators, create full time youth engagement positions, and provide compensation to youth and gardeners

Young people who have lived experience with the foster system, homeless system, and justice system may be unaware of opportunities available to them or lack resources to connect to them.

We therefore urge city leaders to prioritize investments in and linkages to youth services and enhance supports that enable special populations of youth – including undocumented children, child welfare-involved, and justice-involved youth – to access year-round youth development programs and employment training opportunities.

In CCC's testimony to the [Committee on General Welfare](#), we highlight that youth experiencing homelessness in DYCD-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth, youth leaving detention, and youth transitioning out of ACS care should be made categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without first having to enter a DHS shelter. This will prevent young people from unnecessarily entering DHS shelter, make vouchers easier to access, and support the Administration's goals of eliminating youth homelessness. **City leaders must reform CityFHEPS so that runaway and homeless youth can utilize vouchers without having to enter the DHS shelter system, and must also eliminate the 90 day rule for CityFHEPs eligibility.**

By implementing the above recommendations and guaranteeing programs are accessible to all young people, NYC can confidently provide services for youth, help young people develop valuable skills and experience, and ensure that they have the support they need to thrive without interaction with the carceral system.

Promote Community Safety and Wellbeing by Investing in Community Services and Resources

CCC knows that investing in youth services is a key way to achieve community wellbeing, and youth across the City agree. In their 2023 Youth Agenda, youth leaders from the CCC Youth Leadership Course, CUNY's Intergenerational Change Initiative (ICI) and YVote named Economic Mobility for youth a top priority and urged the expansion of SYEP and the ability of all youth to access year-round employment.ⁱⁱ We need creative, non-carceral solutions to violence, and we urge the Mayor and the City Council to utilize the city budget to invest heavily in community programming, parks, housing, youth sports, employment, and behavioral health.

CCC therefore recommends the following:

- **Treat** gun violence as a public health crisis by investing in transformative community programs, including **expanding** investment in Cure Violence, credible messenger programs, youth engagement programs and other community-rooted programs that employ a public health approach to community safety
- **Fund** comprehensive civil legal services for young people facing barriers to employment, housing, accessing public benefits, or any other legal need
- **Close** Rikers and ensure the City remains on track with the closure plan
- **Redirect** \$425 million funding from school policing into opportunities for young people in schools and communities, **reject** the Mayor's proposal to hire 500 staff for school safety agent vacancies, and **reject** the Mayor's \$47.5 million "Enhancing Security Measures" proposal that would install remote surveillance technologies in our schools.
- **Restore** the PEGs of \$13.6 million in FY23 and the \$20.5 million in outyears for New York Public Libraries as they are essential community hubs.

This is a pivotal moment to shift how we approach community safety, and we must commit to resourcing systemically neglected communities and building support networks.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

ⁱ Adrienne Adams. State of the City. New York City Council. 2023. https://council.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/030823.Speaker_Adams_SOC_2023_Report.pdf

ⁱⁱ The 2023 Youth Agenda. 2023. Retrieved from: https://www.canva.com/design/DAFWzjE8Aj8/XzKyq9e-4FHi7BpWKUWLtg/view?utm_content=DAFWzjE8Aj8&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton