



March 3, 2015

New York City Council
Committee on Civil Rights
250 Broadway - Hearing Rm, 16th Fl.
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chairperson Vanessa Gibson and esteemed members of the Committee on Public Safety:

Greetings. My name is Rashad Robinson and I serve as executive director of ColorOfChange.org. With more than one million members, we are the largest online civil rights organization in the country. We are Black people in America and our allies of every race, working to make government and corporations more accountable to the concerns of our community.

Over the past three years ColorOfChange has been deeply involved with organizing New Yorkers around ending Stop, Question and Frisk, the “Broken Windows” policing tactic, racial profiling and baseless stops of hundreds of thousands of Black and brown folks by NYPD officers each year. Our members have also organized and taken to the streets to demand systemic reforms and an end to the police killings of Black New Yorkers like Ramarley Graham, Akai Gurley, and Eric Garner.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has kept his campaign promise to drop the city’s frivolous appeal of the landmark case *Floyd v. City of New York*. The appeal was originally filed by his predecessor, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg. But as evidenced by the high profile killings of unarmed Black people like Eric Garner and Akai Gurley during Mayor de Blasio’s term, it’s clear that our leaders in city government have much more work to do in order to keep Black and brown New Yorkers safe from police violence.

The unfortunate police killings of Eric Garner and Akai Gurley don’t tell the full story of the day to the day trauma’s suffered by Black and brown New Yorkers at the hands of officers. In recent months, several videos have gone viral of horrifying instances of NYPD brutality:

- A pregnant mother in Sunset Park was thrown to the ground;12
- A chokehold was used on a pregnant woman in East New York;13
- A man was brutalized in a Harlem train station;14
- A 16-year-old with his hands in the air was pistol whipped by an officer in Brooklyn;15
- A man was beaten in the Bronx after simply asking why he was questioned;16

At the peak of Stop and Frisk, the rate of stops in Black New Yorkers in communities like, Brownsville was 572 stops per 1000. Prompting Mayor de Blasio to launch focus his campaign platform on ending discriminatory policing in New York City and he won because of the power of Black and brown people. But now the Mayor has indicated that both Stop and Frisk and Broken Windows are here to stay, the consequences of which are enormous. Black and brown New Yorkers who are arrested as a result of Broken WIndows violations end up stigmatized, burdened with fines and arrest records that make it harder to find jobs, secure loans or obtain housing, especially public housing. At the end of the spectrum are unnecessary civilian deaths.

We applaud City Council Speaker Mark-Viverito for setting reform of the city's criminal justice system as a high priority in her State of the City – her plans to expand civil legal services, create a citywide bail fund, and reform school disciplinary practices are essential to moving our city towards are sure fire ways to interrupt the pipeline to prison that so many Black and brown youth find themselves trapped in and creates a more fair equitable justice system for everyone. The Speaker's proposals to address the use of arrests in the enforcement of low-level offenses are necessary to end the unjust criminalization of Black and brown communities.

Even these much needed reforms may not be enough to end a culture of police violence and impunity which is why we've developed our CopWatchNYC.org police accountability tools. CopWatchNYC provides New Yorkers with helpful information on how to lawfully conduct cop watch and encourages them to monitor, record and expose police misconduct by sharing video footage. So everyone is doing their part to end racial profiling and expose discriminatory policing tactics.

About ColorOfChange engagement in the fight to end discriminatory policing in NYC

- Nearly 240,000 ColorOfChange members have demand justice for Eric Garner;
- Nearly 35,000 ColorOfChange members have demanded justice for Ramarley Graham;

- Nearly 9,500 ColorOfChange members have demanded an end to NYPD's racially targeted marijuana arrest crusade;
- More than 43,000 ColorOfChange members have demanded an end to the Broken Windows policing tactic;
- More than 2,000 NYC ColorOfChange members have demanded an end to the discriminatory Stop and Frisk policing tactic.

Two New Yorks

This issue hits close to home for me. I grew up on Long Island, the son of working class folks who own their business and worked hard to build a life for their two sons. I dreamed of living in New York City, which is where I now reside. I love this city. Besides being the capital of arts, media and culture, it's thought of as the capital of possibilities: The possibility that if you work hard and use your talents, you can make it here no matter where you're from. I grew up only a train ride away, but the city felt like another universe, illuminated by the bright lights of opportunity.

But what I've come to know is that there are two New Yorks, and the one you live in often depends on your race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. I have seen the side of the city where people are treated like criminals because of the way they look and the assumed size of their bank accounts. And I have seen the other side of the city, where people trust that they can walk through their neighborhoods without fear of being stopped, harassed or humiliated by police or security personnel without just cause.

ColorOfChange members are committed to ending racial profiling anywhere it may occur in the city and we are encouraging the City Council to use this hearing as an opportunity to hold both the NYPD and proponents of discriminatory policing accountable for practices that target, and even lead to senseless killings of Black and brown New Yorkers.

Voice of ColorOfChange members

“On behalf of Black Americans and other minorities who are being victimized by bias racial profiling police officers I am calling for help. Please help Black American citizens and other voiceless minorities live peacefully in America.”

“Please end the appalling "Broken Windows" policy and all such police-state type policies. They have no place in the United States.”

“I am tired of reading about the senseless killing being done by the people who we pay our taxes to serve and protect us. They are starting to be no better the the people they are suppose to be protecting us from.”

“Youth should all have equal opportunities to survive and thrive to become the

shapers of the future. Ramarley's life was cut short by the police who were hired to protect his life. His family should not know this kind of pain.”

“Broken Windows harasses New York neighbors, and enough is enough. Please use your office to set policies that treat black and brown citizens as equal human beings whose lives and talents are valued.”

“Is this what you mean by "protect and serve"? These officers should be fired, investigated, and, if warranted, tried for murder--which is more of a chance than they gave Eric Garner. If this is the type of policing meant by "Broken windows" policy (which I believe applies more to abandoned buildings, tagged public places, and overgrown lots), it needs to be halted immediately.”

“Hold them accountable! Police brutality and racial profiling has to be stopped. Look at Richmond, California - it can be done.”

Conclusion

In addition to the proposals laid out in Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito’s The Council and de Blasio administration must address:

- Unequal police enforcement for low-level offenses occurring throughout the five boroughs, in order to reduce the racial disparities in arrests so that they are not transferred to disparities in who receives summonses and desk appearance tickets.
- Passage of the pending Right To Know Act in the City Council to improve transparency and the daily interactions between civilians and the police.

The discriminatory ways in which our communities have been policed have gone unaddressed for too long, and we look forward to working with the Council to ensure all New Yorkers are provided with equal protection under the law. There remains important work ahead to ensure the enforcement of these reforms, but we are hopeful and confident that we are able to work with the City Council to ensure long-term accountability and an end to the types of dangerous and discriminatory tactics that put our communities at risk. And we hope now that NYC has abandoned its commitment to Stop and Frisk and Broken Windows -- a smart policy decision that would pressure other cities to end discriminatory policing as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rashad Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rashad" and last name "Robinson" clearly legible.

Rashad Robinson, ColorOfChange Executive Director