

CHAIR
Budget & Revenue

COMMITTEE MEMBER
Codes
Finance
Health
Rules
Transportation

**THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK**



BRIAN A. BENJAMIN
Senior Assistant Majority Leader

DISTRICT OFFICE
(212) 222- 7315
163 West 125th Street
Suite 912
New York, NY 10027

ALBANY OFFICE
(518) 455-2441
Legislative Office Building
Suite 917
Albany, New York 12247

May 7, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor
Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea
City Hall
New York, New York

Dear Mayor Bill de Blasio and NYPD Commissioner Dermot F. Shea:

No U.S. state and U.S. city has been harder hit by the Coronavirus than New York and New York City. Additionally and more tragically, our state and city have the greatest number of Coronavirus deaths and the virus is disproportionately impacting communities of color.

These are highly stressful times as our constituents and fellow New Yorkers: a) deal with the burden and sacrifice as essential workers in the epicenter of this pandemic; b) endure the grief of losing loved ones and colleagues due to the pandemic; c) take on the formidable task of homeschooling their children during a crisis; d) personally experience nationwide record unemployment during a time of extreme income and wealth inequality.

With all that our communities of color are already going through it is unconscionable that we as a city would add the stress and trauma of an unequal and unfair double standard for the enforcement of social distancing rules.

The nation and the world's eyes are on New York City as we collectively fight to mitigate and end the spread of COVID19. As we often do in many areas and with a variety of issues, New York City leads the way for the nation. Unfortunately during this time, with the world's eyes on us, the world is also bearing witness to our long-standing, shameful reputation for racialized policing that singles out and harms people and communities of color. We have seen the images and videos of police officers enforcing social distancing rules in affluent white communities by passing out masks, while in lower income communities of color police officers use unnecessary, brutal force and/or arrests to enforce social distancing.

As a result of the recent as well as the long-standing biased policing actions of the NYPD towards communities of color, we believe that the NYPD should not be the agency to enforce social

distancing rules. We are calling on you to immediately put an end to these practices, and instead partner with trusted community groups (e.g., cure-violence and/or faith-based groups) and have them work in the community through an extensive public education campaign. This will be far more effective in persuading neighbors to adhere to social distancing rules. We want a person of color to oversee this new community program and for these trusted community groups to be compensated for their work and to be the ones engaging our community members on this issue not the NYPD.

Time is of the essence for getting this new community program up and running as summer is fast approaching. Soon more and more of our fellow New Yorkers will be out on the street and we want to ensure that they do not experience a summer of biased policing and arrests. Instead we must emphasize community unity and trust through the collective fight to mitigate the spread of COVID19 through local education and awareness.

Sincerely,



Sen. Brian A. Benjamin, SD 30

Sen. Jose Serrano	Mem. of Assm. Diana Richardson	City Comptroller Scott Stringer
Sen. Jamaal Bailey	Mem. of Assm. Charles Barron	
Sen. Alessandra Biaggi	Mem. of Assm. Michael Blake	City Public Advocate
Sen. Leroy Comrie	Mem. of Assm. Carmen De La Rosa	Jumaane Williams
Sen. Brad Hoylman	Mem. of Assm. Inez E. Dickens	Manhattan Borough
Sen. Robert Jackson	Mem. of Assm. Harvey Epstein	President Gale Brewer
Sen. John Liu	Mem. of Assm. Nathalia Fernandez	
Sen. Velmanette Montgomery	Mem. of Assm. Walter Mosley	Council Mem. Alicka Ampry-Samuel
Sen. Zellnor Myrie	Mem. of Assm. Yuh-Line Niou	Council Mem. Diana Ayala
Sen. Kevin Parker	Mem. of Assm. Felix W. Ortiz	Council Mem. Justin Brannan
Sen. Roxanne Persaud	Mem. of Assm. N. Nick Perry	Council Mem. Andrew Cohen
Sen. Jessica Ramos	Mem. of Assm. Victor M. Pichardo	Council Mem. Brad Lander
Sen. Gustavo Rivera	Mem. of Assm. Daniel Quart	Council Mem. Bill Perkins
Sen. Julia Salazar	Mem. of Assm. Robert Rodriguez	Council Mem. Keith Powers
Sen. James Sanders, Jr.	Mem. of Assm. Linda Rosenthal	Council Mem. Donovan Richards
	Mem. of Assm. Al Taylor	Council Mem. Carlina Rivera
		Council Mem. Rafael Salamanca