



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Jumaane D. Williams

November 1, 2019

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio:

We write today to urge you to find resources in southeast Queens that will help mitigate the growing plague of gun violence.

As you know, an innocent, 14-year-old boy, Aamir Griffin, was shot and killed on October 26 while playing basketball at a court near the Baisley Park Houses in Jamaica, Queens. Aamir was a beloved member of his community who helped his neighbors bring in groceries when the elevator was out of order. He never broke curfew or missed a day of school. Aamir died while doing what he truly loved, playing basketball. He was already being scouted by college recruits and scored the game-winning basket for his high school team a few days before he was killed.

Simply put, Aamir lost his life because the plague of gun violence in our city is so pervasive that kids cannot play basketball in their neighborhood without endangering their lives. But more policing is not the answer. An NYPD observation tower was placed above Foch Boulevard weeks before the shooting, and officers were patrolling the area near the court at the time of the shooting. If the solution to gun violence was simply increasing police presence, Aamir might be alive today and southern Queens would be one of the safest areas in the city.

Unfortunately, southern Queens has only seen an uptick in violence despite the increased police presence. This August, shootings in southern Queens jumped by nearly [56 percent](#), to 14 from 9. And shooting victims are more likely to die in southern Queens than in other areas of the city because residents live [farther away](#) from trauma centers than residents in other neighborhoods. The region only has one remaining trauma center that may close soon because it is tens of millions of dollars in debt.

It is clear that the state and city must provide extensive investment in local communities and incorporate community based organizations into our public safety plans to fight the pandemic of gun violence. Since residents of southern Queens have some of the longest



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commute times in the city, many youth are left alone after school, on weeknights, and on weekends. Our communities, including southeast Queens most urgently, need job training and other afterschool programs to provide youth with alternative activities during their time out of school. As such, we urge both of you to identify funding to provide support for the following initiatives and programs:

- Reopen Local Community Centers & Extend Hours: The state and city must work to reopen community centers in southeast Queens, including the community center at Baisley Houses. This center, which closed in 2008, can be the site of additional community programming run by local nonprofits. Reopening community centers will ensure young residents will always have a safe place to spend their time away from home. Additionally, existing community centers, including the Edward Byrne Center, should be open in evenings and on weekends.
- Bolster Afterschool Program Partnerships with Smaller Community Based Organizations: The state and city must provide more funding for smaller community based organizations (CBOs) across the five boroughs and in southeast Queens. While programs like CURE Violence are vital, smaller CBOs can provide a level of personal attention that only programs who have known their participants for years can provide. This should include programs at churches and other hyperlocal entities that operate at all times of day, including late at night. Unlike larger CBOs, these hyperlocal CBOs are already invested in their communities and are providing vital programming now despite their limited resources.
- Expand Beacon Programs: The state and city must open more Department of Youth & Community Development Beacon programs in additional schools across the city that provide participants with an opportunity to acquire skills needed to graduate from school, succeed in their career field, and remain active in their communities. These programs operate in the afternoons and evenings and when schools are not open, ensuring local youth and adults have programs they can attend that are open late at night or on weekends.
- Increase Funding for Trauma Centers & Open Additional Centers in Southern Queens: The state and city must work to support the remaining trauma center in southern Queens, located at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center, and partner with current hospital systems to identify entities that can open additional facilities, including trauma centers, in southern Queens. It should also ensure that trauma centers and hospitals citywide have sufficient resources and that city residents who live in communities plagued by gun violence live within a few minutes of a trauma center.
- Develop & Fund Anti-Violence Curriculum in NYC Schools: The state and city must develop and fund an evidence-informed anti-bullying and anti-violence



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curriculum in our schools to provide students with methods and strategies for identifying, preventing, and addressing violence in their communities.

- Create Universal Youth Employment Education Program: The city must pass my legislation to create a Youth Employment Education Program for all school-age NYC residents, regardless of their immigration status. It would provide students with opportunities to learn essential skills needed in the workplace while also providing them with a grant of no less than \$1,500 for participating in the program. Studies have shown that providing youth employment can reduce crime, and this bill will provide just that.

We were able to track down funding to strengthen programs in Brownsville. Now, we must find it for southeast Queens. But we cannot do so without your help and leadership. We know these programs work, and we just need the investment. If we can afford to spend \$9 billion to open new jails in each borough, we can afford to spend as much to make major investments in communities of more color that are most targeted by over policing and trapped in the cycle of mass incarceration, like southeast Queens.

For any questions or further discussion, please contact Nick E. Smith, First Deputy Public Advocate for Policy, at nsmith@advocate.nyc.gov. Thank you very much for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jumaane D. Williams
Public Advocate for the City of New York

Adrienne E. Adams
Council Member, District 28



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Leroy Comrie
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James Sanders, Jr.
State Senator, District 10

cc: Stacy Lynch, Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of the Mayor
Kelly Brady, Director of Correspondence, Executive Office of the Governor
Councilmember I. Daneek Miller
Councilmember Donovan Richards
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Queens Borough President Melinda Katz