November 25, 2019

Governor Andrew Cuomo
633 3rd Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Re: Invest in Better Transit and Community Needs, Not New Police Officers

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The eighty organizations signing this letter request that you cancel your plan to hire 500 new MTA police officers. The money the MTA plans to spend on increased policing should instead be invested in fixing and expanding accessible transit service for New York’s millions of subway and bus riders.

We also request that you and Mayor de Blasio withdraw the 500 MTA, NYPD and Bridge & Tunnel officers who were unnecessarily added to mass transit this past summer. The surge of additional police has exacerbated conditions of hyper-aggressive policing that criminalizes and harms Black and other New Yorkers of color every day.

In the past few weeks alone, viral social media videos have shown officers punch Black children, draw guns towards crowded train cars, and arrest immigrant food vendors and candy sellers for trying to make a living. While not captured on viral videos, people who are homeless and have paid their fare continue to be harassed by officers in the transit system and scapegoated. None of this makes New Yorkers who use mass transit safer. These actions criminalize poor and working class New Yorkers, who most depend on public transit, at a time when the state should be investing significant resources to end homelessness, lift caps on vending licenses, and target MTA monies towards improving service and accessibility.

Subway crime has been decreasing. Riders’ core concerns are with the long waits, inaccessibility, and general unreliability of transit service. Diverting revenue from basic operations to policing both kneecaps service and subjects riders to interference by law enforcement in their daily lives - including hyper-aggressive policing tactics and excessive force – as we’ve seen in recent videos.

The misguided and senseless plan to hire 500 new MTA officers is projected to cost at least $249 million over the next four years. Hiring new officers is mismanagement of funds and a misuse of the public’s scarce resources. The MTA is already in dire fiscal straits. The Citizens Budget Commission has shown that hiring 500 new MTA police officers will accelerate the growth of the agency’s yawning budget deficit by $260 million. Rather than merely being $740 million in the hole in four years, the MTA will

\[1\] The $249 million is the MTA’s projection. Citizens Budget Commission projects the cost to run in excess of $260 million in the 2020-2023 period.
\[2\] https://cbcny.org/research/high-cost-mtas-new-police-officers
face a $1 billion abyss if these officers are hired. The drive to add police to transit threatens to send the MTA’s finances toward collapse amid both a climate crisis and unprecedented capital reconstruction plan to finally modernize the subway and make unprecedented bus network improvements.

The associated costs of hiring new MTA officers would invite a death spiral of transit service cuts and falling ridership while increasing the likelihood of abusive policing incidents that Black and other communities of color face daily. In 2010, the MTA cut $67.8 million in subway and bus service. The agency’s own analysis the next year found the cuts had inconvenienced 15% of transit riders and caused a 1% decline in bus ridership. Today, even in the absence of a wider financial crisis, the agency’s own financial picture is bleak -- and that’s before the addition of 500 new officers, supervisors, pensions, and overtime to its balance sheet.

Earlier this fall, the MTA cut service on the most heavily used bus in Brooklyn, which saved only $2.4 million. Utica Avenue’s B46 runs through historic communities of color from East Flatbush through Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant to Bushwick. These communities are also the historic victims of over-policing and brutality. It is highly regressive policy to cut bus service, denying access to jobs, education, and essential needs, while also enabling increased police abuse, surveillance and incarceration in these communities.

We do not need more police in our public transit system – we need to fix the subways, end broken windows policing and end the false narrative of rising crime that scapegoates people experiencing homelessness, people who can’t afford to pay the fare, and people struggling to make ends meet as the cause of our increasingly unreliable, inaccessible, and unaffordable MTA.

In sum, we urge you to live up to your progressive vision and abandon this backwards plan. Divest from outdated, harsh, and unaffordable punitive tactics used to criminalize communities of color and poor people. Invest in the subway and bus service that empowers New York’s low-income communities and communities of color by providing access to the city.

Sincerely,
Communities United for Police Reform
Riders Alliance
ALIGN
Alliance for Quality Education
Arab American Association of New York
Apogee Journal
Audre Lorde Project
The Black Institute
BYP 100 NYC
Bronx Defenders
Brooklyn Anti-gentrification Network
Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Movement Center
Brooklyn NAACP
Brotherhood/Sister Sol
CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, CUNY
Center for Popular Democracy
Chinese-American Planning Council
Citizen Action of New York
Coalition for the Homeless
Color Of Change
Democratic Socialists of America - NYC Chapter
DRUM: Desis Rising Up & Moving
Equality for Flatbush
The Elevator Action Group/Rise and Resist
Faith in New York
Families for Freedom
FIERCE
Fight Back Bay Ridge
The Gathering for Justice/Justice League NYC
Girls for Gender Equity
Global Action Project
Harm Reduction Coalition
Immigrant Defense Project
Jews for Racial & Economic Justice
Justice Committee
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Society
LGBT Faith Leaders of African Descent
Make the Road New York
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement
Mijente
MomsRising
MoveNY
National Domestic Workers Alliance
New Kings Democrats
New York City Anti-Violence Project
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Communities for Change
New York Working Families Party
North Star Fund
NYC Environmental Justice Alliance
NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign
Peoples MTA
Picture the Homeless
Policing and Social Justice Project, Brooklyn College
Pratt Center for Community Development
PROP
Public Science Project
Red Hook Initiative
Riders Alliance
Rise Up Kingston
Rockaway Youth Task Force
Showing Up for Racial Justice NYC
St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
St. James Presbyterian Church
T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
TakeRoot Justice
Transgender Law Center
TransitCenter
UP-STAND
We Dream in Black
West Side Neighborhood Alliance
WITNESS
Youth Represent

cc:
Pat Foye, MTA Chairman
Andy Byford, NYCT President
Speaker Carl Heastie, NYS Assembly
Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Senate
Mayor Bill de Blasio