

New York City Needs a Stronger Vision for Effective, Accountable Policing

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New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani took office on a wave of enthusiasm about a new approach to governing. Along with signature issues like affordability and public transit, his [stance on policing](#) broke with that of his predecessor. As a candidate, Mamdani [promised](#) to “relieve the excessive burden we’ve placed on police officers” and to [allow officers](#) “to focus on serious crimes.” But the mayor has not yet articulated a clear policing strategy that will deliver these goals.

As a result, this administration has thus far failed to charter a new path on police. New York City Police Department (NYPD) Commissioner Jessica Tisch’s [focus](#) on “quality-of-life” policing—meaning enforcement of low-level but highly visible offenses in line with the [failed “broken windows” policing](#) of the past—is a [holdover](#) from the Eric Adams administration, which centered law enforcement to the exclusion of other evidence-based safety services. The commissioner [argues](#) that falling crime [validates](#) her “flood the zone” strategy, despite evidence [suggesting otherwise](#). Now, the city plans to hire [580 more officers](#) amid a [budget crisis](#). The NYPD [plans to surge](#) officers into communities this summer, particularly in the Bronx where many Black and Latino New Yorkers are likely to be affected. Low-level arrests have already [skyrocketed](#), propelling the city into yet another era of troubling, racially-disparate policing.

The Mamdani administration has made remarkable progress to deliver a new [Department of Community Safety](#) and to [close Rikers Island](#). But this progress is threatened by a “quality-of-life” policing strategy that is [overwhelming](#) a criminal justice system [already under significant strain](#). These vital policy decisions will make New York City safer and more just in the long run. However, to complement its broader community safety strategies, many of which will take time to stand up, the administration urgently needs a clear vision for the role of police in delivering safety.

To deliver safety, justice, and accountability, New York City’s policing vision must do the following five things.

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1. Focus on serious crime, faster response times, and case clearance rates

The surge in low-level arrests indicates that the NYPD is not prioritizing the kind of enforcement that will make New Yorkers safe from violence. The NYPD's main focus must be on responding to and solving violent crime—a role only the NYPD can play.

- **Focus on serious crime.** Research [continues to debunk](#) the notion that punishing low-level offenses prevents more serious crime. According to a [2017 report](#) from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on Proactive Policing, "Increasing misdemeanor arrests to control disorder generate[s] little or no impact on crime." By sweeping people into the criminal justice system and destabilizing their lives, arresting people over minor infractions like taking up two seats on the subway can actually worsen safety. Detaining someone for even one day [increases](#) the likelihood that they will be rearrested and enter into the [cycle of crime](#). Even minor interactions with the criminal justice system can have a [far-reaching impact](#) on housing and employment. In particular, "[broken windows](#)" policing burdens communities of color with intense scrutiny and punishment, undermining community stability and breeding distrust in law enforcement.

Mayor Mamdani has [committed](#) to allowing trained civilian first responders to handle issues that do not pose a safety threat, which will relieve the excessive burden on police. It will take time to [scale up](#) the Office of Community Safety to handle more of these issues, but it is likely the city's existing infrastructure can handle more than, for example, the [14 percent](#) of mental health-related 911 calls to which mental health workers are dispatched.

As the city grows these services, the NYPD should aim to limit the kind of low-level arrests that [may not further public safety](#). Officers should prioritize de-escalation and facilitate connections to service providers and community-based organizations where appropriate, especially for issues related to homelessness, mental health, and substance use disorders. The NYPD should consider whether refraining from arrests for certain low-level violations—such as [people lying down on the subway](#)—will allow officers more time to focus on serious crime, a strategic use of resources that should not be misconstrued as "de-policing."

- **Improve response times.** According to the [latest data](#), it takes the NYPD around 10 minutes to respond to "critical" crimes like gunshots or robbery, 12 minutes for "serious crimes" like auto theft, and nearly half an hour for "non-critical" crimes. These numbers are significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. When the police respond faster, the public feels safer knowing help is on the way; there is also some evidence that it [reduces crime](#) and [increases clearance rates](#). Importantly, a [Vera Institute of Justice analysis](#) found that 96 percent of 911 calls in 2025 in New York City did not involve violent crime and an estimated 34 percent could have been handled by trained civilian responders, which would have freed up police to respond faster to violent crimes.
- **Raise clearance rates.** In 2025, the NYPD had a [69 percent](#) clearance rate for homicides. While this is on par with the national average ([61.4 percent](#) for homicide in 2024), the city's overall [clearance rate](#) has remained relatively stable in recent years and there is room for improvement. In Chicago, police reached a 13-year high in 2025 with a [71.2 percent](#) homicide clearance rate. Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson has [credited](#) this success to optimizing and growing its detective bureau.

2. Use evidence-informed strategies in deploying law enforcement

Commissioner Tisch [frequently characterizes](#) her approach as “precision policing.” But surging officers to high-crime neighborhoods—which she has called “[flood\[ing\] the zone](#)”—is neither precise nor evidence-based. Research is clear that such policing tactics, often called “hotspot” or “zone-based” policing, can reduce crime [when done properly](#). In practice, that means using data to clearly define the issue being addressed, following practices rooted in [procedural justice](#), avoiding overreliance on [low-level arrests](#), and, importantly, providing social services to address the drivers of crime. On its own, crime reductions from hotspot policing [may be short-lived](#), as a heavy police presence does not [effectively address](#) underlying causes of crime. For long-term safety, the city must invest in [placemaking](#), [environmental design](#), and [supportive services](#).

In New York City, policing should reflect key tenets of evidence-based, [problem-oriented policing](#) and [focused deterrence](#) strategies, which pair policing with connections to community-based supportive services. These approaches recognize that police resources should be reserved for those issues they are best suited to address.

- **Use problem-oriented policing.** Problem-oriented policing involves using data and [community input](#) to identify safety priorities and designing proactive solutions to address these issues. Applying this approach to key issues in the city—including organized crime and high rates of domestic violence—can maximize safety while minimizing the [social harms](#) of broad enforcement.
- **Use focused deterrence strategies.** [Focused deterrence](#) models utilize law enforcement knowledge and enforcement capacity, alongside community-based strategies, to identify and minimize the risk of individuals engaging in violence. By identifying the relatively small subset of people at highest risk of engaging in violence and proactively connecting them with credible community-based support and services—like educational opportunities, job training, and counseling—focused deterrence can provide people with the resources they need to choose a different path. Law enforcement is there to act as a deterrent, but it works alongside a wide range of other resources and services. Notably, focused deterrence does not target entire communities or pursue a “broken windows” approach by relentlessly punishing low-level infractions. Rather, it proactively engages groups at risk of violence with services to address underlying drivers of violence, increase opportunity, and reduce risk.

To ensure that the NYPD uses these tactics strategically, equitably, and sparingly, the city should establish clear criteria for when, how, and for what amount of time to deploy a focused deterrence or hotspot policing strategy before evaluating whether to continue. These guardrails will help improve transparency and accountability, two qualities essential to evidence-based policing. In addition, establishing a policy to compile an after-action report soon after the focused deterrence has concluded will help the city assess what went well, what the impact was, and how to improve these focused policing tactics moving forward.

3. Recruit and train in keeping with these priorities

Simply hiring more officers, as Mayor Mamdani has [proposed](#), will not necessarily make New Yorkers safer. First, expansive hiring is [impractical](#): police departments nationwide are [struggling](#) to staff at pre-pandemic levels, even after [ballooning bonuses](#). Moreover, as crime has [declined](#) to record lows over the past several years including in jurisdictions with a shrinking police headcount, it does not seem logical that increasing the

current headcount of sworn officers or expanding the department budget will deliver better outcomes. Reviews of spending on state and local police over the last 60 years show [no correlation](#) between spending and crime rates.

- **Implement civilianization.** The city should make sure the NYPD is maximizing the use of its existing headcount, beginning with investments in civilianizing the force. This entails [employing civilians](#) for specific functions that do not require officers' expertise so that current sworn officers can be redeployed on patrol and other critical functions. This decades-old strategy has the potential to save costs, improve outcomes, and boost morale. Civilians can handle many of the administrative and management roles currently occupied by uniformed officers—such as transit and traffic enforcement, investigations, community engagement, forensics, and internal affairs—so that current sworn officers can be redeployed. A [2022 audit](#) called the NYPD's civilianization efforts “delayed and . . . unsystematic.” NYPD Commissioner Tisch has already moved [500 sworn officers](#) back to key roles like patrol, a first step in this direction.
- **Align training.** Additionally, existing officers must be trained in line with the city's needs. In [one three-city study](#), procedural justice training—training that ensures police treat people in fair and respectful ways and show trustworthy motives—was associated with a 14 percent crime decline, with officers making fewer arrests and residents perceiving them as less likely to harass or use unnecessary force. Several [recent studies](#) also found that rigorous de-escalation training leads to double-digit drops (anywhere from 28 to 40 percent) in use-of-force incidents. The NYPD does provide some such training, but the city should ensure it is adequate: procedural justice and de-escalation skills are [“perishable,”](#) meaning that they must be reinforced by regular training updates and a department culture that prioritizes safe, respectful, and constructive interactions with the public.

Alongside this training, the city must implement culture change that protects both officers and New Yorkers. The [trust gap](#) between [some New Yorkers](#) and the police can make this job difficult and [undermine safety](#) for everyone. Bridging this gap requires a [“guardian” approach to policing](#)—in which officers are “inclusive and respectful in interactions, display empathy, and exercise patience in citizen encounters.” [Research](#) shows that “guardian” culture within a department leads to more emotionally intelligent and procedurally just policing. Further, starting at the precinct level, the department should implement [individualized coaching](#) and [professional development](#) to promote officer resiliency, learning, and growth—from patrol ranks all the way up, with a particular focus on [sergeants](#) and equivalent mid-level roles that serve as a linchpin in shaping police culture.

4. Support officer well-being

The city must ensure not only that officers are at their best protecting the public but also that the city is protecting the well-being of its officers. In addition to the physical dangers, working in law enforcement is mentally taxing due to both the nature of the job and the intense schedule. The occupational stress can lead to [mental and physical health](#) issues, while working long hours and night shifts can also lead to [negative health outcomes](#), including impaired judgement.

The city should begin by making sure that shift scheduling is conducive to officer well-being. This includes managing mandated [overtime](#) as well as the recently [mandated 12-hour shifts](#). There may be better ways to manage regular shift work as well: for example, research suggests that [working four 10-hour days](#) followed by three days off leads to improved sleep, fewer health problems, fewer absences, and less overtime use

overall. The city should review its 2023 [flexible working pilot program](#) to determine what scheduling changes will most benefit officers and adjust shift patterns accordingly.

Further, the city should ensure that it is adequately protecting officers' mental health. The NYPD offers various forms of [mental health assistance](#), most notably through the Employee Assistance Unit, which offers a [24/7 peer counselor hotline](#), [critical incident debrief service](#), and [stress management training courses](#). Other resources include access to mental health services [through Northwell Health](#) and the [Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance](#) (POPPA). The city should evaluate these services for gaps and deficiencies in treatment options and availability.

Additionally, the city and the NYPD must consider the stigma related to stress and mental illness. This means ensuring that the department's policies and culture support people seeking care when they need it. Leaders must speak and act in ways that encourage people to look after their own mental health, while officers must know what support options exist and be given time to seek the care they need, particularly after a traumatic event.

5. Invest in a community safety workforce to enable scaling up civilian response strategies

By establishing the Office of Community Safety (OCS), Mayor Mamdani has [recognized](#) that “for too long, we have approached crime and safety by placing only ever-expanding expectations on the police department as we have asked them to address every failure of our social safety net.” But in order to meet outside demand for supportive services and enable police to refocus on core safety priorities, we need to invest in community safety workforce development.

As OCS continues to coordinate, develop, and scale community-based safety services, New York City will need to scale up a skilled, appropriately credentialed community safety workforce to realize this administration's bold vision. But the [well-documented shortage](#) of case managers, peer specialists, case coordinators, and other community safety professionals poses an operational risk.

Expanding this much-needed workforce [requires new mechanisms](#) for providing training, ongoing staff professional development, and credentials. One option is for City of New York (CUNY) community colleges to develop training in partnership with community-based organizations that provide behavioral health services, creating a talent pipeline for OCS and the city's organizations.

In addition, ongoing opportunities for continuing education and career growth could help [reduce burnout and improve retention](#). The city could accomplish this by creating on-demand training opportunities for people and organizations focused on community safety, similar to the [NYC Justice Training Institute](#) launched earlier this year by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance. The city should also establish relationships with leaders in [the field](#) and [other jurisdictions](#) to learn from their experiences developing civilian public safety workforce academies.

Beyond recruitment and training, the city should also ensure that community safety workers are paid a living wage, including by hiring staff as government employees when appropriate and by [writing living wage requirements](#) into future requests for proposals for contracted community-based organizations. This will make these career paths more desirable and sustainable.

- **Invest in 911 dispatch.** Finally, as the administration builds up OCS and enables the office to handle more situations, the city will need to invest in a 911 call center system and workforce that can ensure that each situation gets the right first responder. Despite the increasing capacity of the

city's mental health crisis response, police are dispatched to [86 percent](#) of mental health–related calls. Dispatching OCS in addition to other first responders will require not only upgraded call center infrastructure, but also 911 call operators who are trained to route calls to the right first responder.

New York City Has a Generational Opportunity to Lead on Policing and Community Safety

Too often, public conversations focus only on what the police should *not* do, while in practice, city government asks them to do *everything*. By outlining an affirmative vision for exactly what the NYPD *should do* to advance public safety and providing the necessary supports for this more focused mission, the Mamdani administration can deliver safety, justice, and accountability for all New Yorkers, as well as cement its status as a national leader in evidence-based policing and community safety.

Meeting these aims will require listening to New Yorkers and understanding their needs. Communities facing the kind of “disorder” that “broken windows” policing purports to address [need support](#), not overzealous enforcement. Fortunately, the city has an effective model for working with communities to identify and address concerns in the [NeighborhoodStat program](#), which now–Deputy Mayor of Community Safety Renita Francois helped architect. NeighborhoodStat, which was part of the [Mayor’s Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety](#), is a model for how the NYPD can collaborate with non–law enforcement to produce safety. Preventing crime and breaking its cycle—rather than just responding to violence after it happens—requires pairing policing with [community engagement](#) that gives people the resources they need to solve the issues that matter to their quality of life.

With the strategy outlined in this brief, the city can ensure that the police department functions within a comprehensive community safety strategy, delivering the “unprecedented, whole-of-government approach to making sure every New Yorker is safe in our city” that the mayor has [promised](#).

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