



Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition

103 East 196th Street

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Good Afternoon, my name is Coldayne Hayden. I'm a senior at the High School for Energy and Technology and youth leader with Sistas and Brothas United (SBU) and the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC) in the Bronx, New York. Thank you for having me here today. As the country dives into a national conversation about school safety, it is important that we center the voices of students. I am happy to represent my fellow New York City students, and youth of color from across the county.

In an ideal school environment, I would feel safe inside and outside. I would be happy to go into school because I would see the people who make me feel comfortable and whom I trust. Instead I feel caged in; unable to communicate, often feeling like there are a lot of eyes on me. Every day, my first contact with school is a metal detector. We have to line up, take our belts off, sometimes our shoes, and put our bags through the scanner. School police officers yell at us to hurry up and throw our belongings in, with no regard for what's inside. The metal detectors are often a place where we see a lot of confrontations from police. When we buzz, we are padded down and wanded. It doesn't make us feel welcomed and instead makes us late for class. It's frustrating that we have to go through all of this just to get into my own school. What is worse is that only students have to go through the metal detectors. What message does that send: that we are the problem; that we are what make schools unsafe. It's dehumanizing.

New York City schools have 5,500 School Safety Agents, our version of School Resources Officers, and only 2,800 full-time guidance counselors and 1,270 social workers. The school police are housed under and trained by the New York Police Department. Police patrol the hallways and lunchrooms, get called into the classroom to handle anything that is a discipline issue, and often times escalate conflict with students. I'm a big African American teenager, what I fear the most is that if I make the wrong move or start playing around with my friends, a cop will come tackle and handcuff me. It sounds like an exaggeration, but it's not. It's our reality. From the assault in Spring Valley in South Carolina, to the assault in Philadelphia, Black and Latinx students face police violence in schools. And for what you ask, regular student behavior like, talking back, being late, cutting the lunch line, wanting to use the bathroom, and refusing to hand over their cellphone. Remember when you were in school, did your wanting to use the bathroom lead to being put in a chokehold by a school police officer? Did being late for class result in being slapped in the face and kicked to the floor?

In New York City, Black and Latinx students make up 67% of the student population yet represent 92% of all arrests, 83% of all summons, and 84% of all juvenile reports in schools. It is clear to me that the over policing of schools in New York and across the nation, is actually an investment in the criminalization and incarceration of youth,



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specifically youth of color, LGBTQ youth and students with disabilities. This is a trend we see across the country, from Oakland and Los Angeles, to Wake County and Miami.

In my school I see many of my peers struggling with a lot of social and emotional issues. There is no space to talk about it in schools. We don't have enough supports. It pains me that my school is struggling with only one guidance counselor for 400+ students and no social worker to support the development of students. Instead, the NYPD responds to about 98% of all mental health emergencies in schools, where students are having a mental health crisis or emotional crisis. Between the 2016-2017 school year, about 97% of students handcuffed during 'child-in-crisis issues' were students of color. We even saw two 5 years olds handcuffed. I can't help but feel like we are treated differently, more aggressively, because of the color of our skin, the neighborhoods we come from, and how adults view us. Metal detectors, guns, police – that's all perceived safety. And that perception of safety is at the expense of us.

It is the responsibility of the Federal Government, states, cities and districts to fund the safety policies and programs that actually work. That includes restorative justice. Restorative Justice can fundamentally transform a school climate. It restores relationships, where there has been harm, and builds the level of trust we need in our schools. Through peace building circles, conflict resolution, and peer mediation, we have seen schools do away with zero-tolerance and criminalization. The High School for Energy and Technology shares a building with two other schools. One of the schools above mine is working to implement restorative justice practices. It has been powerful to see the relationships being built with students and staff. Students are trusted and treated with dignity and respect. I want that for my school, and all schools.

Increasing funding for more counselors, social workers, mental health supports, and programs like restorative justice is a much wiser investment; it's an investment in our education, our safety, our communities and us. Our cities must divest from school policing. We deserve schools where teachers are armed with books not bullets. We deserve to be treated as students not prisoners. We deserve to be heard. End the school-to-prison pipeline.

Thank you.