

OPEN LETTER ON POLICE PRESENCE IN THE MTA

ATTN:
Governor Andrew Cuomo
Mayor Bill de Blasio
Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea
District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr.

District Attorney Eric Gonzalez
District Attorney Darcel Denise Clark
District Attorney Melinda Katz
District Attorney Michael McMahon
MTA Chairman Patrick Foye

02 . 10 . 20

To the Aforementioned:

As we enter the New Year, we, the collective body of artists and cultural workers of The Laundromat Project's alumni and extended communities, have co-written this letter from a place of deep commitment to the people of New York City. The Laundromat Project (The LP) is an internationally recognized organization that advances artists and neighbors as change agents in their own communities. Simply put, we are greatly disappointed and disturbed by the recent surge in police presence and aggression in the subway system as a solution to the MTA's financial challenges.

As residents of New York, artists, and members of The LP community, we are intimately aware of and concerned for the well-being of its most vulnerable citizens, including teen-agers of color, vendors of color, and low-income New Yorkers, many of whom are being disproportionately targeted by the unnecessary uptick in policing of the MTA system. We ourselves are from these segments of the population, and see them in our families and classrooms. Our proximity to vulnerable community groups alerts us to the need for substantive change to the social infrastructure of our city—rather than strategies such as fare evasion policing which do more to punish than support those who are under the most strain. Following former Mayor Bloomberg's recent public apology about the enforcement of stop and frisk policies under his administration, it is hard to believe that yet again, policing within public spaces is directly targeting perceived people of color and immigrants. Further, we highlight and admonish the absurdity of the recent vote to devote \$250,000,000 in public taxpayer dollars into the hiring of new NYPD officers to provide fare evasion enforcement for the MTA, which collects billions of dollars in revenue annually and defines itself as “public benefit institution.” We find the cost of maintaining these officers particularly disturbing given that the MTA reports less than \$250,000,000 annual revenue loss through fare evasion.

Creating financial barriers through such ongoing policies as fare increases for hardworking, low-income New Yorkers who contribute to the economic, cultural, and social fabric

OPEN LETTER ON POLICE PRESENCE IN THE MTA

of our city is not for the public's benefit. Tasing and tackling young people for minor infractions such as fare evasion is not for the public's benefit. Brandishing guns in transit stations in order to collect a missing \$2.75 is not for the public's benefit. These policies are extreme by any estimation and especially inappropriate when considered in context with the chronically underperforming public transit system that is less and less able to provide reliable service to New Yorkers.

The increased police presence in the MTA points to a corresponding rise in surveillance of low-income people of color throughout the city. We are particularly disappointed to see a rise in semi-militaristic policing put in place by our state and local Democratic leaders, many of whom ran on platforms aimed at increasing social equity. We are aware of the rise in conservative, often xenophobic policies throughout the world, but will not stand for a corresponding policy shift in our city. We point to the recent uprising in Chile: a direct response to their transit system's untenable fare increase and a threat to citizens' daily lives that resulted in a serious challenge to their government. The parallels are clear, and position New York City government's current policies—both with regards to increased police presence, and to impending fare increases that bear no corresponding increase in wages—on the wrong side of just and equitable governance that could ensure, at the very least, a utilitarian functionality in our city.

We, the co-signers of this letter, stand with the communities being targeted by these policies. As artists, activists, and cultural workers, our responsibility is to imagine and help manifest new worlds. We accept this task gladly and thus, call for the removal of the increased NYPD presence in the MTA. We call for expanded policies that provide reliable, affordable access to public transportation for low- and middle-income New Yorkers. We call for strategies that decriminalize, rather than target, poverty. We call for the MTA and NYPD to invest in additional anti-racist and implicit bias training by working with community-attuned organizations such as the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond and/or the Center for Racial Justice in Education. We call for New York City to stand up in support of its incredible diversity across all measures (race, religion, gender, sexuality, age, class, disability, and immigration status, etc.) to maintain a transit system that is safe and accessible for all.

Sincerely,

Joseph Cuillier

Shani Peters

Latasha Diggs

Bianca Moña

Sydney L. Mosley

Petrushka Bazin Larsen

Founder and Director, The Black School

Founder and Director, The Black School

Writer, Teacher, Harlem Resident

Cultural Worker

Artistic Director, Sydney L. Mosley Dances

Harlem Resident and Small Business Owner

OPEN LETTER ON POLICE PRESENCE IN THE MTA

Emma Colón	The Laundromat Project
Rasu Jilani	Cultural Network Curator and Social Sculptor, Lambent Foundation
Kemi Ilesanmi	The Laundromat Project
Ayesha Williams	The Laundromat Project
Salome Asega	Artist
Kearra Amaya Gopee	Artist
Priscilla Stadler	Laundromat Project Create Change Fellow Alumnus
Tijay Mohammed	Multidisciplinary Artist
Dionis F Ortiz	Visual Artist
Arielle C. Knight	Filmmaker
Ingrid Romero	
Ayodamola Tanimowo Okun- seinde	Assistant Professor of Interaction and Media Design Parsons The New School For Design
Chloë Bass	Artist
Hatuey Ramos-Fermín	Artist
Jennifer Jones	Artist and Teacher
Xenia Diente	
Allison Freedman Weisberg	Nonprofit Ed
Catherine Mbali	Arts East New York Inc.
Green-Johnson	
Katy Rubin	Artist
Katherine Toukhy	Artist and Arts Educator
Tomie Arai	The Chinatown Art Brigade
Joyce Leeann	Founder of Archival Alchemy®, The LP Alumna
Betty Yu	LP Alumni and Artist
Tendaji Ya'ukuu	Community Organizer
Akiva Steinmetz-Silber	
Christoper Lopez	Resident
Solana Chehtman	Cultural Producer
Caron Atlas	Cultural Organizer
Micaela Martegani	More Art
Seyi Adebajo	Filmmaker & Educator, Tengade Productions
Ryan Gilliam	Artist & Organizer
Roderick Schrock	Eyebeam
Jasmine Murrell	Artist
Alethea Pace	
Yvette Ramirez	The University of Michigan
Bayete Ross Smith	Interdisciplinary Artist, Journalist and Professor
Ari	

OPEN LETTER ON POLICE PRESENCE IN THE MTA

Keebs	The Black Artists Liberation Movement
Haifa	Artist, Curator
Salvador Muñoz	Artist
Noelle Ghousaini	Theatre Artist
Suzanne Broughel	Artist
Olaronke Akinmowo	Artist
Lindsay C. Harris	Artist, Curator, Youth Worker in Support Of LGBTQ+ Youth Of Color
Dalaeja Foreman	NYC Native, Organizer & Cultural Worker
Lizania Denisse Cruz	Artist
Moncho Alvarado	The Laundromat Project
Bridget Bartolini	
Tiara Ebony	Laundomat Project Staff
Maia C Palileo	Artist
Alejandra Nasser	Community Organizer
Stephanie Alvarado	Artist
Sarita Covington	
Sally Szwed	Artistic Director, Eyebeam
Lee	
Pelenakeke Brown	Artist
Sarita Daftary	

To add your name, sign here.