

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARD
JULY 13, 2022**

Good evening,

My name is Nick E. Smith, and I am testifying on behalf of Jumaane D. Williams, the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank the Civilian Complaint Review Board for holding this hearing today.

The Civilian Complaint Review Board, or CCRB, is a vital part of the city's infrastructure to hold the New York Police Department accountable for acts of misconduct and abuse of authority against civilians. The work they do is important, and they are frequently met with resistance by the NYPD. Public Advocate Williams, then a member of the City Council, was a champion sponsor of the Community Safety Act, which was passed in 2013. The CSA took aim at discriminatory policing practices and instituted a new and more robust accountability structure in the city surrounding policing. Still, there is so far to go, and continuing to strengthen the CCRB's authority and independence must be a priority for the city.

One of the proposed rule changes would allow the CCRB to self-initiate investigations into bias-based policing or racial profiling. Currently, city law requires the board to receive a complaint from a member of the public in order to begin an investigation into alleged NYPD misconduct. While the CCRB receives many complaints—over 750 during the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests—there are undoubtedly far more incidences of police misconduct than is reported. When people experience abusive or inappropriate behavior from the police, they are vulnerable, and may be hesitant or scared to share what has happened to them. Many New Yorkers do not know how to file an official complaint with the CCRB, or how long they have before the statute of limitations expires. In the age of smartphones and social media, many acts of police misconduct are quickly publicized; this rule change would allow the CCRB to react to and investigate what they are seeing in real time.

The CCRB has also proposed new rules to make the investigation process more transparent and easier for the public to understand. For civilians, and especially for people who primarily speak a language other than English, the legal terms typically used in reports are often confusing or difficult to understand. Replacing the term “unsubstantiated” with “unable to determine,” for example, makes it clearer there was not sufficient evidence to establish whether or not there was an act of misconduct. Importantly, the updated language also adds bias-based policing and racial profiling as well as improper use of body worn cameras to the definition of “abuse of authority.” The CCRB operates for civilians, and all communications must be in language that everyday New Yorkers can understand.

It is clear that we must prioritize empowering and increasing resources for the CCRB so they are able to fully hold the NYPD accountable. The proposed rule changes, particularly giving the CCRB the power to initiate its own investigations, are a step in the right direction, one that we must continue.