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NYC Students Testify Against School Security Division Transfer to the DOE, Call for Police-Free Schools

Urban Youth Collaborative members demand Council Members reject “Public Safety and Security Bill” ([Int. 2211](#))

Councilmembers Lander, Menchaca, and Kallos joined in opposition to the bill

Bill would fund retraining of +5,000 SSAs — despite budget crunch for teachers, social workers & guidance counselors

****[Click here for footage of the full hearing](#)****

NEW YORK — Five members of the Urban Youth Collaborative, all of whom are current or recently-graduated students in New York City public schools, today testified in opposition to the “Public Safety and Security Bill” ([Int. 2211](#)) at the [Committee on Education Hearing](#). If passed and signed into law, Int. 2211 would codify the transfer of School Security Agents (SSAs) from the NYPD to the Department of Education. In maintaining and increasing funding for SSAs, this bill would further entrench policing in New York City schools instead of investing in the staff and programming that students and advocates have called for.

Last week, the Urban Youth Collaborative — together with Dignity in Schools, Girls for Gender Equity, New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), and Teachers Unite — sent an [open letter](#) to City Council members calling on them to vote against Int. 2211. Ahead of the hearing, City Council Members Brad Lander, Carlos Menchaca, and Ben Kallos all committed to voting no on the bill.

“I am humbled to be one of the allies to this extraordinary youth-led police-free schools coalition. I am announcing my opposition to 2211,” said **Council Member Brad Lander**. “The idea of police-free schools comes from young people, and it’s pretty appalling that the City Council would think it could take it from you, decide how it was going to happen in ways that you oppose, move that forward as a bill, and that anybody would think that’s cool. If you’re serious about working with young people on issues of school safety, it is obvious: join in coalition with the young people who are demanding police free schools.”

“Police free schools means no safety agents, period — whether it’s the DOE or the NYPD. To get there, we need a process that consults our youth so that we can figure out the solution together. Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, which is why I’m shocked to learn that the bill was created without a single youth voice at the table,” said **Council Member Carlos Menchaca**. “We shouldn’t be spending millions of dollars retraining thousands of professionals steeped in a culture of violence and punishment. We should instead spend millions of dollars investing in resources for our schools. I’m going to be your voice in the Council— because this bill is not the way.”

“I am one of the few, proud council members who voted against the budget — not only in June, but in November — because it didn’t fund the NYPD. All it did was use a cheap accounting trick to move money from an NYPD budget line to a DOE budget line and it didn’t get police out of schools,” said **Council Member Ben Kallos**. “The school-to-prison pipeline happens because you have police in schools. Imagine what would happen if we spent half a billion dollars on actually helping our kids, instead of policing them. No on Intro 2211!”

Since February 1st, over 75 City Council candidates have [pledged](#) their support for UYC’s [Vision for Police Free Schools](#), which calls for total divestment from the School Security Division and re-allocation of those funds into guidance counselors, social workers, and restorative justice programming.

“As a young Latino boy, I feel scared and unsafe in my school when SSA’s are around. I remember a time when I was walking to the bathroom and an SSA stopped me and asked to see my hall pass, which I did not have since my teacher had lost it. The SSA immediately started to yell at me and scold me like I did something awful. He sent me to detention — but he said he could do worse if he wanted to,” said **Josh Melendez, a 7th grader at James Kiernan Jr. High School in the Bronx**. “Intro 2211 is just a way to retain police in our schools by another name, but more importantly it continues to expand on the violence and trauma that my peers and I face day to day. This is why it is important to vote no on Intro 2211.”

“My school is located a couple blocks away from where Eric Garner was killed. It’s unbelievable to know that the same police from that precinct are in my school. It’s even more infuriating that the city spends more than \$450,000,000 on police in schools — and even more so now that all they are doing right now is policing empty buildings,” said **Brielka Rodriguez, a 9th grader at Curtis High School on Staten Island**. “Transferring SSAs from the NYPD to the DOE is not what young people like myself want. Now, more than ever we need the City Council to listen and stand by us. I want to go back into a school building that prioritizes students’ needs and well being, not that criminalizes us just because of our skin color.”

“I remember one morning, hearing SSAs telling a group of ESL students to speak English in the hallways. Every day during metal detector scanning, students get patted down and our belongings are searched carefully. This happens inside of our school, a place where we are supposed to feel safe. In those moments, none of us do,” said **Yazmin Aquino, a high school senior at the Academy for Excellence in Leadership in Brooklyn**. “Our city cannot pretend that taking off a uniform and adding training will address the trauma that students have experienced for years. I am here asking you to listen to the youth and vote no on Intro 2211.”

“As an immigrant student in NYC, I was choked up after I saw so many school safety agents on my school campus. I remember my first day in school and how anxious I was to see so many officers that worked in a school facility. I felt intimidated when I had to go through metal detectors in order to get to the classroom,” said **Dariel Infante, a high school senior at Multicultural High School in Brooklyn**. “Mayor De Blasio’s states that he plans to invest in mental health support staff in schools. Why not just use the School Safety Division funding to do that, instead of spending unnecessary funds to deepen police involvement in schools? I am

asking the city council representatives to vote against the transfer of SSA's to the DOE, and invest in the needs of students.

“ I went to a high school that encouraged a school to prison pipeline. There were more School Safety Agents than guidance counselors and therapists, and teenagers were constantly getting into fights and suspended,” said **Jazmin Morales, a recent graduate of the High School for Law Advocacy and Social Justice in Queens**. “The majority of the students that attended my high school were black and brown students. A social worker or therapist was never called, it always had to be security. We want police-free schools!”

About the Urban Youth Collaborative: UYC is a coalition of students from across New York City fighting for transformative education reform that puts students first, with a focus on replacing harmful policing in schools with restorative justice and trauma-informed care. The UYC coalition is made up of members from the [Future of Tomorrow](#) of Cypress Hills Local Development and Corporation, [Make the Road New York](#), and [Sistas and Brothas United of the Northwest Bronx](#).

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