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City Council Committee on Education

Testimony of Hope Lyzette Newton
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My name is Hope Lyzette Newton, an impacted parent advocate with the Center for Family Representation's Policy and Education Advocacy Team. We represent 2400 parents in abuse and neglect proceedings in Queens and Manhattan. They face a variety of allegations including educational neglect. I also serve on both the Steering and Outreach Committee for the Healing-Centered Schools Working Group.

Thank you Chair Treyger and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to speak on what is on every parent's mind: a safe environment where our children feel psychologically, physically and emotionally safe to learn and grow.

School safety agents train for 17 weeks at the NYPD Police Academy. They learn about law, police and behavioral science. They learn how to write summonses, detain and arrest, with deadly force...if necessary.

School teachers, principals, social workers, guidance counselors and administrators go to college for at least five years. They study everything from child psychology, child development, early education, leadership, counseling to special education and more. A graduate degree is required with field placements to apply what they have learned.

When you give those with the least amount of education and skills the responsibility to solve problems for children in school environments instead of those trained and skilled to deal with those problems, you are creating an environment where no one feels safe. A law enforcement zero tolerance policy approach to safety that excludes children from schools, creates an environment where the criminalization of school-based conflicts and behavioral issues are normalized. That does not prepare students for success. It grooms and prepares them for prison.

As the NYPD Division of School Safety budget continues to increase, the NYCDOE school budget for guidance counselors and social workers continues to decrease.

"Defund the police" means to stop increasing budgets for police-trained school safety agents to handcuff, detain and write summonses and to increase the number of guidance counselors and social workers trained to deal with childhood trauma and conflicts in school.

A holistic healing-centered approach, an evidence-based proven practice, centering both student and staff wellness, needs to be implemented to address the challenges NYCDOE, children, families and our communities will face on the other side of COVID when children return to school after more than a year with limited social emotional connection to families, friends, and peers. A Healing-Centered approach is needed.