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Senate Education Committee Hearing RE: Foundation Aid

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles, Lead Organizer of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol

3 December 2019

We at The Brotherhood/Sister Sol continue to be appalled by the fact that our schools remain underfunded and under-resourced. Currently, the funding for our schools does not include monies to address the dire need of adding student support staff in NYC public schools. Founded in 1995, The Brotherhood/Sister Sol (Bro/Sis) provides comprehensive, holistic, and long-term support services to youth who range in age from 8 to 22. Our Theory of Change is to provide multi-layered support, guidance, education, and love to our membership, to teach them to have self-discipline and form order in their lives, and then to offer opportunities and access so that they may develop agency. To be better agents in their own lives, our young people need more student support staff.

Before Fall 2020, our City and State officials should increase by the budget for NYC public schools and earmark this investment to the Department of Education for the hiring of Student Support Staff including but not limited to Social Workers, Guidance Counselors, Therapists, College Counselors, Career Counselors, Title IX Coordinators, Nurses, and more. Only in doing this will we bring down the ratios of students to staff to such that our students truly deserve. Additional funds may be saved from instituting a freeze on hiring school safety agents and these monies should be refocused to fund the salaries and the culturally relevant and gender-affirming training of Student Support Staff.

Youth in Bro/Sis, specifically our youth in our Liberation Program for youth activists and organizers, have personal accounts of what happens when there are more school police than Guidance Counselors, Therapists, and more. At our recent campaign exhibit, we had 197 attendees, many of whom shared their dreams for NYC public schools. Their visions included equity, holistic student support, restorative justice; their vision did not include more police and criminalization.

In 2018, there were 2,880 Guidance Counselors and 1,293 Social Workers serving the 1.1 million students in our New York City public schools¹. In 2016 there were 5,511 NYPD personnel in

¹ [Report on Guidance Counselors](https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/guidance-counselor-report-and-summary-feb-2019.pdf).

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NYC public schools, 190 of who were armed². These statistics are deplorable and indicative of our growing inability to support the full scope of the needs of our youth—especially the marginalized. In New York City, 114,659 youth³—1 in 10 students—are homeless and 74% of public school youth are economically disadvantaged⁴. Moreover, 96% of teens surveyed indicated that Anxiety and Depression are of the top problems they and their peers face⁵. Given these realities, having more NYPD staff than student support staff is a major injustice. For our students at Bro/Sis, having support staff would make all the difference.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the future all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD. We must use close the billion-dollar funding gap that exists for our schools so that we can begin to address the systematized oppression our students face as a result of a legacy of ignoring the needs of Black, Brown, and low-income communities. Our state fails to adequately fund our schools with the Foundation Aid formula. It has failed to reinvest monies to our schools as ordained by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. This history of underfunding results in cutting courses, programming, and supports our youth need. It is a part of the equation that leads to push out and lowered graduation rates. It is exemplified in the difficulties our students have in getting their needs addressed within school halls that results, for far too many, in a diminished future.

We need our elected to invest in our students, their successes, and their academic futures. We agree that “federal, state, and local dollars must prioritize counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses instead of police.” We must deconstruct the school-to-prison pipeline; end Broken Windows policing; and truly decriminalize low-level offenses that lead to our youth having negative contact with the state and carceral systems. And, we must do this now in order to safeguard our young people. Increasing access to quality guidance counselors, social workers therapists and other support staff in schools is a great way to invest in our larger communities and our holistic futures.

For more information regarding our campaign and the interactive exhibit, please contact Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles (mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org, 212.283.7044).

² [The \\$746 Million A Year School-to-Prison Pipeline](https://populardemocracy.org/news/publications/746-million-year-school-prison-pipeline),

<https://populardemocracy.org/news/publications/746-million-year-school-prison-pipeline>

³ [Data on Student Homelessness in NYS](https://nysteachs.org/resources/data-on-student-homelessness-nys/), <https://nysteachs.org/resources/data-on-student-homelessness-nys/>

⁴ [DoE Data at a Glance](https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance), <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>

⁵ [Most U.S. Teens See Anxiety and Depression as a Major Problem Among Their Peers](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/),

https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=fbe9a34b4a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_14_07_19_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-fbe9a34b4a-400308649



LIBERATION PROGRAM 20/20 CAMPAIGN DEMAND:

By 2020, we want an increase to the budget for NYC public schools so as to quadruple the number of student support staff (Guidance Counselors, Career Counselors, College Counselors, Therapists, and Social Workers). To do this, we need to perpetually put a stay on hiring School Safety Agents, divest from the School to Prison Pipeline, and institute a Student Support Staff to Student ratio of no greater than 1:100.

Additional Specific Demands:

Disciplinary Changes -

Remove Metal Detectors*

Prioritize additional training in de-escalation practices *and* Mental Health First Aid to personnel in schools with the highest number of summonses and arrests* **

Increase awareness and provide professional development for school personnel and SSAs on the impact arrests and suspensions have on students ****

End student arrests as well as the issuance of summonses and juvenile reports for non-criminal, non-violent violations and misdemeanors*

Implement Restorative Justice Practices citywide* ****

Mandate Guidance interventions before the use of suspensions*

Employ in-school suspension before out-of-school suspension, and ensure youth with in-school suspension are able to keep up with school work

Jails for youth under 21 years of age should also have quality schools

Programmatic Changes -

Incentivize and craft programs for college graduates of color (and marginalized peoples) to become counselors and therapists

Each school should have a student council/advisory board as well as licensed and qualified teachers

Each school should have a wellness center, a mental health center, and a college and career counseling center with a 1:100 ratio for personnel to students* **

NOTES:

These demands are listed in or supported by the research in the following reports:

* Urban Youth Collaborative and the Center for Popular Democracy's [\\$746 Million A Year School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Ineffective, Discriminatory and Costly Process of Criminalizing NYC Students](#)

** Borough Pres. Brewer's [WHO'S CARING: The state of school-based mental health care in NYC schools](#)

***[Young Women's Initiative Report Recommendations](#)

****Mayor de Blasio's [Safety with Dignity](#) Report

For more information on Liberation Program Campaign Demands, contact Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles, Lead Organizer at mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org

