



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

Statements from Advocates and Community Leaders in Support of Senate Policing Reform Package

BRIAN KAVANAGH June 9, 2020



The Senate Majority released the following statements in support of the package of legislation moving through the Senate to reform policing in New York State.

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Statements in Support of the Senate Majority's Policing Reforms Legislative Package

Dr. Hazel N. Dukes, President of the NAACP New York State Conference and a Member of the NAACP National Board of Directors, said, “We at the New York State Conference of the NAACP have long worked alongside our legislative leaders to realize the repeal of 50-a and the passage of these other important reforms. We stand with them in their efforts to permanently change our system for the better, and we look forward to the Governor signing these bills.”

Reverend Al Sharpton, Founder and President of the National Action Network, said, “NAN and I have worked hard with the families in New York and across the country to listen, advocate for and help enact much needed legislation to address police reform. The current systems in place only serve to aid and abet police misconduct, police cruelty and police brutality and these bills are a step forward to ensure mechanisms of accountability are in place to avoid senseless killings and egregious violations of our human rights. We are here today for the countless families that have lost loved ones and will continue to move the needle to ensure law enforcement officers are fully transparent and abiding by the law.”

Communities United for Police Reform Organizing & Policy Coordinator Carolyn Martinez-Class said, “For the last week, New Yorkers have been calling for a complete upending of the status quo and an end to police violence in this state. The demands though are not new – for years, Communities United for Police Reform and the Safer NY Act Coalition have been calling on the state legislature to repeal the 50-a police secrecy law and pass the Police STAT Act. Following the leadership of the families of New Yorkers killed by police, we have also organized since 2015 to codify a strengthened special prosecutor law for killings by police. Today, the New York State Senate & Assembly are at the brink of voting on these historic bills. When these three bills pass this week, New York will move from an era of absolute police secrecy to become one of the most transparent states in the country when it comes to police misconduct, discipline, low-level enforcement and killings by police.”

New Yorkers United for Justice Chief Strategist Khalil A. Cumberbatch said, “As a formerly incarcerated New Yorker, I know firsthand that we are far less safe without trust and transparency— and that means accountability and public scrutiny for police. Given broad public support and longstanding buy-in from lawmakers and law enforcement across the state today, by repealing 50-a, New York State’s legislature has come down on the right side of history and put unity first. We look forward to Governor Cuomo’s signature, as he has pledged he’ll swiftly do - and look forward to a statewide conversation about the benefits of the necessary repeal to every New York community following passage.”

New Yorkers United for Justice Board Chair Norman L. Reimer said, “New York affirmed today that our State stands for transparency in policing, a vital step toward restoring confidence in law enforcement which is so undermined when a black or brown person, like George Floyd or Eric Garner, dies as a result of an encounter with an officer with a history of misconduct. With the full repeal of 50-a, police accountability takes a step closer to becoming a reality by allowing misconduct engaged in by a police officer to be accessible by the public. Although we are many steps away from having a truly just, fair, and safer criminal justice system, this is an important step in the right direction. This achievement is owed to the perseverance and efforts of dedicated advocates and legislators from suburban, urban and rural districts who unified with a mission to pass real reform under the leadership of Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins who rose to meet the moment.”

Center for Constitutional Rights Executive Director Vince Warren said, “The repeal of 50-a and passage of the Safer NY Act are key, doable steps to expose police misconduct and make Black people, and other people of color who have long borne the brunt of police violence and abuse, safer. The Center for Constitutional Rights commends the New York State Senate for heeding the calls of visionary community members, organizers, and countless others across

the state who are calling for accountability, transparency, and justice.”

The Brennan Center for Justice said, “Albany should seize this moment to repeal 50-a. This is a long-needed step towards police accountability, which is critical to winning and maintaining the public’s trust. Without that trust, law enforcement can’t serve their communities effectively.”

Hispanic Federation President Frankie Miranda said, “The murder of George Floyd underscored the history of our nation’s darkest moments — civilians, overwhelmingly from communities of color, being targeted and killed by police officers who have long disciplinary records. Officers who displayed dangerous misconduct remained on the force because their records remained confidential and out of public view. We now join the call to reverse that policy and add transparency and accountability for the safety of our communities. A measure pending in the New York State Senate to repeal ‘50-a’ to allow public disclosure of police misconduct and disciplinary actions would bring these documents out of the darkness and protect our civil rights and our democracy.”

Bronx Defenders Executive Director Justine Olderman said, “We applaud the full repeal of New York’s 50-A law and the passage of the STAT Act. There is no one bill or law that can legislate away generations of state-sanctioned police violence. But these bills are critical tools in holding police accountable for their misconduct.”

Brooklyn Defender Services Executive Director Lisa Schreibersdorf said, “Today’s victory belongs to the people of New York who took to the streets to protest police violence against Black people, called and emailed their elected representatives, and made their demands for justice heard. It also belongs to the families of people killed by police who organized across

New York for many years and refused to give up. Repealing Civil Rights Law 50-a brings much-needed transparency to police discipline and, as public defenders, we look forward to translating that transparency into accountability in court. We also stand with those demanding an end to all forms of white supremacy, structural racism, and state violence – in the streets and behind bars – and commit to continue our advocacy toward that end. I thank the Senate and Assembly for passing this law and I hope Governor Cuomo upholds his promise to sign it as is.”

The Jewish Community Relations Council said, “The Torah commands us to ‘not stand over the blood of your fellow.’ In the wake of recent events, we are called to act. We recognize the difficult work the NYPD does, and the passing of 50-a will help increase transparency and trust between police and communities by identifying bad actors in the police.”

FreedomWorks Vice President of Legislative Affairs Jason Pye said, “Greater accountability and transparency in government are rooted in the conservative principles of limited government. That is why the public deserves to have the ability to review personnel records of law enforcement and see if there were sanctions put in place when there was a substantiated complaint of misconduct. While Albany lawmakers repealing 50-A, in and of itself, is not a panacea, it’s a step in the right direction for New York to begin to provide more accountability and transparency.”

Jews For Racial & Economic Justice Movement Building Organizer Leo Ferguson said, “Jews For Racial & Economic Justice demands the swift signature of (S.8496/A.10611) the #Repeal50A bill. Within our own community, Jews of Color have led Jews of every background, and from across New York State, in calling for the repeal of this heinous law. The obligation to admonish our brothers and sisters when they do wrong is sacred to our

Jewish tradition. 'Rebuke, yes, rebuke your brother lest you carry his sin.' (Leviticus 19:17) The NYPD has shown itself incapable of admonition, discipline or correction when it comes to crimes committed by officers and bears responsibility for those crimes. We support a full repeal of 50-a as an important step in bringing the NYPD into compliance with the values of our democracy which demand a transparent institution that can be held publicly accountable for its mistakes."

Drug Policy Alliance Managing Director of Policy Advocacy and Campaigns

Kassandra Frederique said, "The time is up for transforming New York's policing. As mass protests gather strength across the country in response to police violence and systematic racism, we share the grief, outrage, and demand for accountability and justice. For years we have pushed for the Safer NY Act, including critical legislation repealing 50-a for increased transparency on police misconduct, establishing the office of the Special Prosecutor, and the Police STAT Act and join with our allies in applauding their passage today. As we continue to work to end the racist drug war, we know our work is not possible without demanding justice for Black and Latinx lives and an end to police violence."

New York Civil Liberties Union Lead Policy Counsel Michael Sisitzky said, "The suite of bills that lawmakers are poised to pass into law will deliver powerful and necessary changes to the way police function across New York state. These overdue measures signal the end of the culture of police secrecy and make important transparency measures the norm in New York, rather than a carefully guarded exception. By repealing 50-A, passing the Police-STAT Act, and codifying the office of special prosecutor to investigate in cases where police kill people, Black and brown New Yorkers will gain protection and the families of people killed or harmed by police will gain powerful ways to seek justice. There's no one bill that can address the systemic crisis in policing or the racist impact of decades of broken windows policing, but

this package makes serious progress toward dismantling a system of impunity and police violence.”

FIERCE-NYC Executive Director Mustafa Sullivan said, “Repealing 50-a is just one step closer to real accountability for police officers who abuse, harass, and terrorize our community- some have been arresting youth as young as five years old. The youth have shown us clearly we all should know what happens when cops break the rules and their supervisors and top cops look the other way.”

Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society Tina Luongo said “A comprehensive repeal of Police Secrecy Law 50-a and advancement of other needed police reforms are now just one pen stroke away, and with these bills codified into law, New Yorkers will be better able to hold their police department accountable for misconduct committed in their communities. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and we know that transparency is a critical first step to change the way police interact with communities in New York. The Legal Aid Society thanks Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie for quickly and rightly responding to the overwhelming calls from New Yorkers for immediate and meaningful action by prioritizing this legislation. We urge Governor Andrew Cuomo to enact this bill into law at once. Lastly, we must acknowledge that this moment is wholly the result of communities of color - those who have long shouldered abuse from the police - rising up and demanding change.

New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers President Timothy W. Hoover said, “Civil Rights Law 50-a has been a blight on the fair administration of justice since the day it was enacted. Its repeal is long overdue. We commend the Legislature for taking another step toward a rational, enlightened criminal-justice system. There is much more to be done to

ensure that all New Yorkers receive equal treatment from their government, but make no mistake, this is a concrete achievement.”

32BJ SEIU President Kyle Bragg said, “As a union of mostly Black and Brown essential workers, fighting for racial justice and police reform is part of our core beliefs. We applaud the New York State legislature for taking a big and necessary step to address systemic issues of police brutality and racism in law enforcement by passing a package of bills aimed at increasing transparency, accountability and justice. We are pleased to see the State Senate take action now to repeal 50-a, which would make police disciplinary records public and increase accountability for harm done to New Yorkers; passing the Police Statistics and Transparency Act, which would require public data reporting from police departments across the state; and passing the Special Prosecutor bill, which would codify the Attorney General’s ability to investigate and prosecute cases of police-involved deaths. These laws will provide a strong framework to secure our rights in our continuing fight for justice for all New Yorkers.”

NYSNA President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN said, “The historic set of police accountability reforms moving through the state legislature are long overdue. When nurses hear ‘I can’t breathe,’ we know it’s an emergency—not only at the bedside, but in the streets. Let justice begin to breathe today as we adopt policies to end anti-black police violence throughout New York.”

NYPIRG Executive Director Blair Horner said, “The Senate’s action to repeal section 50-a of the civil rights law (S.8496) promotes transparency, enhances accountability, and builds public trust. NYPIRG applauds the state Senate for acting to open these records to public scrutiny.”

League of Women Voters of New York State Executive Director Laura Ladd Bierman said, “We applaud the Senate Majority for taking swift action in passing a package of comprehensive civil rights and government transparency reforms in the wake of the horrific murder of George Floyd and other Black lives tragically and unjustifiably taken at the hands of our police. These reforms will inject much needed transparency and finally bring accountability.”

Rockaway Youth Task Force Executive Director Milan Taylor said, “Black and brown youth throughout New York City are disproportionately impacted by police violence and racist policing practices. Laws like NYS CRL 50-a perpetuate a culture of secrecy that precludes accountability for officers involved in misconduct and denies justice to families of victims. Repealing 50-a and promoting true police transparency through passing the STAT Act are necessary steps towards ending this cycle of systemic police violence against Black and brown youth and low-income communities of color.”

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