



December 14, 2020

To Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and City Council Speaker Corey Johnson:

Advocates in Black, Latino, Asian, and LGBTQ communities have long pushed back against the abusive practices of NYPD Vice. This unit is notorious for racially discriminatory policing, corruption, false arrests based on gender presentation, and for sexual misconduct. As highlighted in a recent ProPublica investigation published on December 7, this unit's actions have cost the city over \$1 million settlement fees in false arrests since 2014. **Given the racially discriminatory abuse, corruption, and ineffectiveness of NYPD Vice in prostitution arrests, we ask for a joint city-state oversight hearing on NYPD Vice.**

The racial disparity of arrests is particularly harmful. In majority Black and Latino neighborhoods, police have made three times as many arrests as in whiter neighborhoods. Of the 1,800 people charged with prostitution, 89% are non-white, and of the 3,000 accused of attempting to buy sex, 93% are non-white, predominantly from Black and Latino neighborhoods, despite that surveys with sex industry workers show that over 65% of customers are white.

Furthermore, undercover police have consistently engaged in unethical and deceptive practices, including sexual violence and obfuscating police recordings, in order to earn overtime pay for making these low-level arrests. Bribes from brothel owners and others who promote prostitution have been widespread in the department for decades, including offering half-priced sex to police in exchange for protection. Officers known for sexual abuse on the job have also been repeatedly shielded from legal accountability for their behavior. Detective Ludwig Paz was even convicted last year of running a prostitution ring with up to 8 locations, even while serving as an officer in the NYPD.

The majority non-white, cis and trans women arrested for prostitution includes a large percentage of undocumented immigrants, due to Vice's predilection for preying on women who are less likely to report abuse. In the ProPublica article published on December 7th, **Sergeant Stephen Antiuk described the "perks" for undercover officers who "have a nice, cold beer and watch a girl take her clothes off - and he's getting paid for it."**

- Several mothers described a particular undercover officer baiting and entrapping them, texting, stalking them, knocking on their doors and demanding sex, persisting even when

they refuse, then sexually molesting them before calling his team for backup to arrest them, resulting in a 27-year-old single mother losing custody of her child.

- An undocumented woman in a Chinese massage parlor described being forced by officers to disrobe and walk naked, handcuffed, around the massage parlor, even as she begged the officers to let her put her clothes on.

The Legal Aid Society has written to the NYPD inspector general describing “incidents that demonstrate a serious lack of training, protocol and supervision.” Of the 80 sealed Court cases of this officer *alone*, **17 women** spoke to The Legal Aid Society about this officer’s inappropriate touching and sexual misconduct prior to their arrests. However, due to the “conveyor belt” of the Human Trafficking Intervention Courts, which incentivize women to quickly agree to resolve their cases rather than fight false or abusive arrests, NYPD misconduct is routinely shielded from public view.

Brooklyn Defender Services attorney Jillian Modzeleski stated that “the NYPD has broken the law by concealing evidence. This revelation demands an investigation.”

The primary motivation for these arrests are to serve the personal monetary gain of NYPD Vice officers. Detectives can easily add 30% to their salaries through “collars for dollars” baiting of “low-hanging fruit.” **In fiscal year 2021, the NYPD will be overspending its overtime budget by \$400 million, which is more than the city Health Department spent in fiscal year 2019 on emergency preparedness, addiction treatment, communicable diseases, immunizations and HIV prevention combined.** In spite of cost, these operations fail to tackle issues of human trafficking. Detective Efrain Collado told ProPublica, **“You’re not going to get traffickers the way they’re doing it. Change has got to come from the top.”**

Multiple detectives interviewed at the NYPD admitted that these arrests are ineffective and even counterproductive for pursuing criminals who force people into prostitution. Several officers have admitted that the process is “a joke,” “a waste of time and funds,” and “a revolving door.”

This process fails to actually help potential trafficking victims. Instead, police ensnare the most vulnerable people of color, including women, trans and LGBTQ youth, as well as men of color walking on the street in Black and Latino neighborhoods who are entrapped by honeypot “john” stings, often falsely, leading to over \$1 million of settlements paid for false arrests.

**Given the racially discriminatory abuse, corruption, and ineffectiveness of NYPD Vice in prostitution arrests, we ask for a joint city-state hearing on NYPD Vice.**

**We recommend discontinuing undercover operations that aim to arrest people who sell or buy sex, and the dissolving of the NYPD Vice unit.** Furthermore, officers who have committed abuses and misconduct while working within the Vice unit should not be transferred into other departments without accountability for their actions.

We also recommend an open investigation into the practices of the Vice Squad by the Department of Investigation, and an independent investigation into the recordings of prostitution and patronizing arrests, which have repeatedly failed to be turned over to defense attorneys and prosecutors. We ask for convictions be vacated in cases where recordings were made but not disclosed. We also ask for funding to the NYPD Vice Squad be reappropriated towards services for victims of human trafficking.

As elected officials, our governing mandate is to resolutely and without hesitation defend the interests of the most vulnerable people in our districts. We call on the Assembly, Senate, and City Council to hold an oversight hearing on the misconduct of the NYPD Vice Unit.

Sincerely,



Ron Kim, Assembly Member District 40



Jessica Ramos, Senator District 13



Jimmy Van Bramer, City Councillor District 26  
65



Yuh-Line Niou, Assembly Member District



Julia Salazar, Senator District 18