



*A Coalition of Civic, Greening, Recreation and Economic Development Groups*

**City Council Parks committee  
Hearing on park safety**

**New Yorkers for Parks Testimony  
November 13, 2003**

**Introduction**

My name is Allison Farina and I am the Director of Government and Community Affairs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I would like to thank Chairman Addabbo for scheduling this hearing and for taking steps towards ensuring that every park in every neighborhood has the enforcement patrol needed to protect its community.

**Overview**

After four brutal attacks on women in NYC parkland last fall, New Yorkers began to question the safety of our parklands. Since this time, when the issue of park safety moved to the top of NY4P's agenda, two press conferences and one Parks Committee hearing have been held, and two separate pieces of legislation have been introduced. At the most recent press conference, a few weeks ago, Council Member deBlasio called for an additional \$5 million for more PEP officers in parks. We think that more money for PEP is needed. The most recent bill, Intro 436, simply calls for the NYPD to regularly report on crime in parks to the City Council. While this measure seems easy to implement, this legislation seems to have come to a halt over the summer months. Looking forward, concrete steps must be taken towards better ensuring the safety of our city's park and recreation spaces.

The bad news is that over the past four months, NY4P has tracked – through reported newspaper stories -- 25 instances of violent crimes that occurred in city parks. This is disturbing. Crime begets crime, driving away users and creating emptier and less cared for spaces. When people feel safe in their parks, they use parks and in turn, deter drug dealing, graffiti and criminal behavior.

High-profile parks including Bryant, Central, Battery, and Madison Square, have a dedicated security / police presence that protects park users and public property. As a result, these parks are some of the safest in the country. However, all neighborhood parks have no dedicated security / police force. In fact, there are fewer than 200 PEP officers to patrol the almost 29,000 acres of city parkland.

### **Legislative Agenda**

While NY4P supports Intro 436, much more can be done to improve safety in parks. NY4P makes the following recommendations towards ensuring a safer environment for park users and a more effective DPR park patrol.

- **Track and map all crime in all parks**
- **Grow the Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP)** into a farther-reaching security force
- **Create a Parks Division within the Police Department.** Similar consolidations have been made regarding our schools and subways, resulting in a marked decrease in criminal activity.

Finally, the NYPD and DPR must collaborate to ensure that, regardless of the city's fiscal situation, New York City's parks and recreation spaces will not slide back to the conditions of the 1970's – dilapidated and unsafe.

Thank you.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

### **National Comparisons**

NY4P has performed extensive research into park safety programs nationwide and found that initiatives in Houston and LA provide excellent examples for NYC on how to increase park safety.

### **Houston**

The Houston Police Department tracks crimes by type and location. When a crime is committed in a park, Houston Police track the crime and classify the incident by location, noting if the crime occurred in a Park & Recreation Area, Zoo or Swimming Pool. Such categorizing assists in tracking specific types of crime in parks and provides useful information for deterrence strategies.

### **Los Angeles**

#### *Safe Parks Program*

Los Angeles provides another example of interagency collaboration between the Police and Parks departments, as well as an example of community input and public accountability. Since September 1997, the LAPD has placed an increased emphasis on park safety through the “Safe Parks” Program. Neighborhood parks in high crime areas are targeted for increased patrols as well as physical and programmatic upgrades. Park Rangers and LAPD officers have linked their databases and also hold regular joint meetings to target crime in parks.

Moreover, the LAPD has brought citizens into the process through a “Safe Parks Community Survey” program that is accessible via their website and enables anyone to register their opinions and concerns about safety in neighborhood parks.