



New York City Council Committee on Public Safety
Friday, March 18, 2022
Committee on Public Safety- Preliminary Budget Hearing – Public Safety
Sherrise Palomino, Director of Advocacy and Programs

Good afternoon, my name is Sherrise Palomino, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). We are a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition, which includes over 400 organizations from across the five boroughs. Thank you to the Public Safety Committee for the opportunity to speak about our city's parks and parks enforcement patrol program. I also want to thank Chair Hanks for her leadership on public safety and her tireless commitment to parks in Staten Island. Members of this committee have a unique opportunity to push for adequate funding for our parks systems as it is a critical component of meeting the needs of park safety.

The NYC Parks Department has the appropriate model to enforce safety in our parks. PEP officers' jobs range from providing lifesaving first aid to responding to concerns of park patrons to supporting at-risk individuals in need of social services. They are all New York State certified Peace Officers. The issue for the PEP officer program is funding for our Parks.

The PEP officer head count is currently 380 total positions including council funded officers. Of those positions, 80 are set to expire on June 30 if the council does not allocate the funding to protect those jobs and commit to park safety. New Yorkers across all five boroughs want to see an increase in PEP officers. They reach out to New Yorkers for Parks asking us to fight for park safety by championing an increase in PEP officers. One of the city's crown jewels—Prospect Park—has two PEP officers at any given time for a park that exceeds 500 acres.

New Yorkers are demanding PEP officers in their parks. While it is fair to applaud the amazing work our police department continues to do. Communities want to feel safe with trusted PEP officers assigned to parks. Officers who they recognize and who have earned their trust. Community leaders want young people, particularly young men of color, to feel safe our parks.

We are overdue for transformative investment in our parks system – 1% of the city budget for parks could ensure the PEP officer program can grow to meet needs of communities across our city. The NYC Parks department does a valiant job maintaining these aging resources but needs more funding to do so. This is one of the many reasons why NY4P and the Play Fair Coalition are calling for an increase in the Parks budget to 1% of the city's budget – a call that the majority of City Council Members support along with Speaker Adams.

For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.
www.ny4p.org