

Russell Squire
Chair

Will Brightbill
District Manager



505 Park Avenue, Suite 620
New York, N.Y. 10022-1106
(212) 758-4340
(212) 758-4616 (Fax)
www.cb8m.com – Website
info@cb8m.com – E-Mail

**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Social Justice Committee
Monday, April 24, 2023 – 6:30PM
*This meeting was conducted via Zoom***

Please note: The resolutions contained in the committee minutes are recommendations submitted by the committee co-chairs to the Community Board. At the monthly full board meeting, the resolutions are discussed and voted upon by all members of Community Board 8 Manhattan

MINUTES

CB8 Members Present: Lori Bores, Sarah Chu (Co-Chair), Saundra I. Coleman (Co-Chair), Wendy Machaver (Public Member), & Rita Popper

Resolutions For Approval:

Resolution 1: Disbanding of NYPD's SRG

1. Presentation by Isabelle Leyva, Senior Organizer, New York Civil Liberties Union on NYPD's Strategic Response Group
 1. NYPD Strategic Response Group (SRG) was founded in 2015 as a counterterrorism and protest policing unit. NYCLU and advocates have raised concerns about the conflation of the two. The presentation from NYCLU is included at the end of the minutes.
 - i. NYCLU Protest Monitoring Program has documented the brutality of the SRG program. By definition, the SRG manual defined "BLM movement, Occupy Wall Street, and Anti-Trump Demonstrators" as violent and those protests were consequently targeted.
 - ii. 2015-2020, 91% of complaints filed against SRG were from POC, 60% of whom were Black.
 - iii. SRG lacks transparency on funding, scope, and size. Concerns regarding the lack of oversight continued as NYPD did not show up at a March 2023 hearing held by the NYC Council.
 - iv. Over 200 community members participated in the hearings and testified to SRG's escalatory force. Concerns have been raised about the whom the SRG does and does not protect. For example, SRG participated in sweeps of homeless encampments but escorts and shield anti-abortion activists at clinics.
 - v. SRG officers have higher numbers of complaints compared to other NYPD officers and higher levels of substantiation at the Citizens Complaint Review Board.
 2. NYCLU initiated a campaign in January 2022 to disband the SRG through the budget process and to reinvest the estimated \$130M back into communities. Community District 8 in Manhattan is among the regions to which SRG is deployed.

2. Q&A (Summarized for Brevity)
 1. Comment: The SRG unit operates on taxpayer funding and the overtime budget has imploded and is alarming. This is happening to people who are overpoliced. There are so many existing units that can do the same work at NYPD.
 2. Q: How did NYPD selected deployment districts?
 - i. Isabelle Levya (IL): 20 precincts were selected for high crime. The council members (CMs) pushed back, but we don't have more information.
 3. Q: The Mayor lives here, but it doesn't matter to me how it was decided. This unit has to go. It's the complete opposite of community policing, like sending in the marines. What can we do to convince our CMs to be on board?
 - i. IL: CMs care a lot about their constituents. Going to CM as a constituent as CB member, we have a statement of support that is a google form. [For open letter from 21 CMs to NYPD, see [here](#)]
 4. Comment: I live in the community and know Saundra from BLM. I saw the SRG at Planned Parenthood. The large police presence deters people seeking reproductive healthcare.
 5. Comment: This feels like a shows of bias, like they are working with one side and policing one side. Direct people to the [Human Rights Watch report on kettling \(at NYPD\)](#).
 6. Q: I agree with the resolution, but am against defending the police. If this group is \$200M then put that money into other policing.
 - i. IL: The risk of keeping the SRG funds in NYPD that the same units can be recreated with different names. NYPD is not short on funds and is over budget. We can't prevent SRG if we don't remove the money.
 7. Q: This is not about defunding police. NYPD had a budget and went over budget. There is a lot of waste in police department. I'm for disbanding and focusing on housing the unhoused, mental health, and public housing. What is the SRG doing in our area?
 - i. IL: We don't have information beyond that it is supplementing routine enforcement. NYPD refuses to answer questions from CMs. Other than deploying SRG to high crime areas, we don't know anything further.
 8. Q: Is the budget solely from NYC or do we need to worry about state and federal funding? What happens if these officers are absorbed into local precincts? Can we use language that only initiatives that are fully transparent can be funded? Is there a tally of CMs who support disbanding SRG?
 - i. IL: SRG members are voluntary and would return to their local precincts if SRG is disbanded. They would not stop being police officers. Reports from inside the NYPD is that officers joining SRG are looking for more action - "hats and bats." NYCLU has a running chart of everyone they've reached out to on SRG. NYPD testified to the rates at which they don't follow the CCRB discipline recommendations for SRG.
 9. Q: Does NYCC still have a chance to address SRG this year?
 - i. IL: The budget is due June 30th and there is a second round of hearings in mid-May.

Resolution

Resolution proposed by Rita Popper, seconded by Lori Bores

Whereas, we have been alarmed by the dangerous conduct and practice of the NYPD's Strategic Response Group (SRG) unit; it is wholly different from our experience with the 19th Precinct and the antithesis of what we believe community policing should be,

Whereas, the SRG has proven itself to be an escalating force that causes harm and because we find it disturbing that a militarized counterterrorism unit is dedicated to policing First Amendment activities protected by the constitution, we take the position that it has no place in our community or any other community,

Whereas, the over 200 New Yorkers gathered at a NYC Council hearing in March 2023, NYPD did not appear and has not responded to requests for basic questions of accountability about the SRG, which we find unacceptable as government agencies must be fully transparent to the people they serve and must respond to democratic oversight,

Whereas, New Yorkers want to feel safe, for the police to protect us all equally and without bias; we have found the SRG to have overstepped its peacekeeping responsibilities and to have jeopardized free speech, racial justice, women's health, and reproductive health,

Whereas, should the SRG be disbanded, SRG officers should not evade accountability for their actions as members of the unit and should be retrained before they are reintegrated into their precincts,

Whereas, the NYC Council will be engaging in budget negotiations soon and we believe that our budget should represent our values and the future we aspire to for the City of New York,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, Community Board 8 Manhattan calls for the NYPD SRG to be disbanded and for the City of New York to divest from any form of militarized policing and reinvest in programs that strengthen communities and support equity,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED Community Board 8 Manhattan encourages our elected officials to support community safety and First Amendment activities by disbanding the SRG.

Motion approved (4-0-0, 1 public member in favor): Lori Bores, Sarah Chu, Saundrea I. Coleman, Rita Popper; Wendy Machever (Public Member).

3. **Old Business** – None
4. **New Business** - None

This meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm

Saundrea I. Coleman and Sarah Chu, Co-Chairs

The NYPD's Strategic Response Group



NYCLU
ACLU of New York

What is the Strategic Response Group?

The Strategic Response Group (SRG) is a **militarized unit** of the NYPD known for its **abuse** of protesters and community members

Founded in 2015 as a counter-terror unit, the SRG has morphed into a protest policing unit known for its **brutality, racial bias, and misconduct.**

The SRG's initial budget of \$13 million ballooned to \$90 Million within its *first year*. **The current estimated budget of the SRG is \$133 Million per year.**

There is **no transparency** around the size, scope, function, or funding of the SRG. With no oversight, this unit operates as a rogue entity.



The problem with the SRG

Biased Training

The SRG's bike squad manual identifies two types of protester crowds: "peaceful" and "violent." Examples of violent crowds include "BLM movement, Occupy Wall Street, and Anti-Trump Demonstrators."

- Of complaints that included race between 2015-2020, 91% of complainants were POC.

Bloated budget

The SRG is overfunded and lacks adequate transparency on the funds, size, and scope of the unit.

Violence

The SRG is an escalating force that brings the threat of brutality to nonviolent protests

Misconduct & Bias

SRG officers receive an abnormally high number of misconduct complaints compared to non-SRG officers.

The Campaign

In January of 2022, the NYCLU, along with more than 60 organizations, launched a campaign to disband the SRG and re-invest its funds back into our communities.

On March 1st of 2023, City Council held an oversight hearing on the SRG. New Yorkers testified for nearly 5 hours about the trauma and harm that has been inflicted by this unit.



Why This Matters

In November, the NYPD announced that the Strategic Response Group **would be deployed to 20 precincts** across New York City, predominantly in Black and Brown neighborhoods that they consider to be “high-crime” areas.

These deployments are most concentrated in the Bronx, followed by Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. Beyond stating that the SRG would be supporting with street enforcement, there has been **no transparency** around what this deployment will look like in communities.

After 3 years of documenting the SRG’s conduct, it is clear **this unit causes harm everywhere it is deployed**. New Yorkers deserve to know that the SRG is coming to their communities, and what that means for them.



**THE SRG IS BEING
DEPLOYED INTO
YOUR COMMUNITY.**

**HERE’S WHAT
YOU NEED
TO KNOW →**

NYCLU

Council Member Support

CM Sign-ons

- Christopher Marte
- Crystal Hudson
- Alexa Aviles
- Carmen De La Rosa
- Chi Osse
- Shaun Abreu
- Tiffany Caban
- Shekar Krishnan
- Sandy Nurse
- Carlina Rivera
- Kristin Richardson
- Jordan
- Jennifer Gutierrez
- Shahana Hanif
- Lincoln Restler
- Charles Barron
- Pierina Sanchez
- Julie Won
- Althea Stevens
- Rita Joseph
- Shaun Abreu
- Gale Brewer
- Kevin C. Riley
- Farah Louis
- Amanda Farias

Open Letter From New York City Elected Officials in Support of Disbanding the NYPD's Strategic Response Group

We, the undersigned elected officials, are writing in support of the campaign to disband the NYPD's Strategic Response Group (SRG). The SRG is a notoriously violent rapid response unit responsible for inflicting violence on New Yorkers. To protect the safety and First Amendment rights of New Yorkers, the NYPD must be held accountable for the SRG's abuse, and the unit must be disbanded.

The SRG was formed in 2015 in the wake of the Ferguson uprising with a dual purpose: protest policing and counterterrorism. This conflation of terrorism with protest has led to predictable results. Time and time again, when SRG arrives on the scene, officers escalate situations and injure New Yorkers who are exercising their First Amendment rights.

After pushback from advocates, who cited concerns around the criminalization of protest and the militarization of police, the NYPD promised in 2015 that the unit would "not be involved in handling protests and demonstrations." The NYPD broke that promise just months later when the SRG made arrests at protests for Freddie Gray. By 2016, the unit's budget had ballooned from \$13 million to \$90 million. The number of officers in the unit doubled to an estimated 700. The NYPD offers very little transparency on the funding, staffing, and deployment of SRG in our communities.

During the 2020 protests, the SRG's brutalization of demonstrators came into full view. On June 4, 2020, the SRG descended on demonstrators in Mott Haven before the 8pm curfew. With demonstrators unable to escape, SRG officers brutally beat, zip-tied, and arrested 263 protesters, medics, and legal observers. Sixty-one people were injured. Human Rights Watch called this conduct "intentional, planned, and unjustified."

The SRG's violence did not end in 2020 and is not limited to protests. On June 5, 2021, the SRG was deployed to enforce the 10PM curfew in Washington Square Park. At 10:01, dozens of SRG officers clad in riot gear descended on the park, where they [tased](#), [beat](#), and kettled park-goers, people experiencing homelessness, and at least one photographer. Twenty-two people were arrested, including a pair of park-goers who were on a date. After clearing the park, SRG officers chased community members [several blocks down the street](#).

The SRG was also central to homeless encampment sweeps throughout 2022, when SRG officers were deployed to violently clear encampments and even arrest unhoused residents. In April of 2022, while the suspect in the subway shooting was at large, dozens of SRG officers were clearing an encampment [mere blocks](#) from where the shooter was apprehended. More recently, the SRG made 7 arrests of clinic defenders outside of the Bleecker Street Planned Parenthood, where the unit is regularly deployed to escort anti-abortion activists from the nearby church to the clinic.

What you can do

As an individual

- **Sign up to get involved in the campaign:** nyclu.org/srg-signup
- **Call your Council Member:** Urge your representatives to support the campaign to disband the SRG

As a community board

- **Issue a resolution in support of:**
 - Disbanding the SRG
 - Keeping the SRG out of your community.
- **Distribute materials:** Connect with the NYCLU to distribute educational materials in your community.

Who to contact: Isabelle Leyva,
ileyva@nyclu.org