

STATEMENT OF PAUL C. MAURO, FORMER NYPD INSPECTOR AND ATTORNEY
HEARING ON RESTORING LAW AND ORDER IN HIGH-CRIME U.S. CITIES
BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
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Chairman, Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

My name is Paul Mauro. I served twenty-six years with the New York City Police Department, including a number of years dedicated to the counterterrorism mission that defined the post-9/11 era. I retired four years ago, after a career spent in the city where I was born and still live. I am now a practicing attorney. My perspective is shaped by decades on the ground — from street patrols in the 1990s to terrorism investigations across the globe — and by my continued concern for public safety in the city I call home.

Through a criminal-justice lens, New York’s modern history is a story of collapse, renewal, and now, regrettably, decline. From the 1970s into the early 1990s, it was widely known as “the ungovernable city.” Businesses and families fled, revenues evaporated, and New York teetered on bankruptcy. Violent crime in America rose [270 percent](#) between 1960 and 1980, peaking nationally in 1991 at 758 violent crimes per 100,000 people. At that moment, nearly half of Americans told pollsters they were [afraid to walk alone](#) at night near their homes.

New York’s revival began in the 1990s, late in the Mayor David Dinkins administration, when he increased police strength and appointed Police Commissioner Ray Kelly. It accelerated under Mayor Giuliani and the “broken-windows” approach — a policy that paired visible enforcement of low-level offenses with the capacity to respond in numbers, engendering a sense of order throughout the city. That capacity was augmented by the bipartisan 1994 Crime Bill, championed by then-Senator Joe Biden and signed by President Clinton. It was the largest criminal-justice overhaul in U.S. history, providing funding for more officers, better equipment, and improved coordination with federal authorities, including enforcement against criminal aliens wanted on felonies.

It worked. Crime dropped in New York— year after year, record after record. Under broken-windows policing, quality-of-life offenses, always in response to community complaints, were now addressed. Enforcement often meant a summons, not a jail cell. Officers could move loiterers, ticket open-air marijuana use, and intervene before disorder escalated. Specialized units handled homeless encampments and cold-weather rescues. The result was a transformation:

neighborhoods reopened, commerce returned, and the entire city became a global model of urban recovery.

Then came September 11th. The NYPD suddenly had a new mission: counterterrorism. Well over a thousand NYPD officers were detailed to this new mandate. Yet, contrary to expectations, crime continued to fall under Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Kelly, who had returned as Police Commissioner. Additionally, the NYPD built one of the most sophisticated counterterrorism programs in the world while maintaining historic safety.

The next major inflection came with the election of Mayor Bill de Blasio. Despite fears of regression, crime at first continued to decline because de Blasio appointed Commissioner William Bratton, a highly skilled and experienced law enforcement executive. From 2014 through 2016, index crime fell another [nine percent](#), while the city's jail population actually dropped [eighteen percent](#) – a phenomenon which Bratton referred to as “a peace dividend.” Over the prior twenty years, at that point, crime had fallen [76 percent while the jail population was cut in half](#) — the long-sought “sweet spot” where public safety increased and incarceration decreased simultaneously.

Since that time, however, we have watched a steady unraveling. Criminal-justice “reforms” — no-cash bail, discovery rule changes, Raise-the-Age legislation, among others – have coincided with visible deterioration in street conditions. Disorderly-conduct summonses, for instance, once the linchpin of street enforcement, fell [ninety-one percent](#) after 2015. Recruitment has plummeted, leaving patrol cars short-staffed and officers working at over-capacity, with forced overtime driving up the budget and pension costs. Standards have been loosened, risking scandal later. Although shootings and murders have recently dropped, major felonies over the past fifteen years are up more than [sixteen percent](#). Low-level recidivism is universal. New Yorkers have lost faith in the NYPD's ability to solve the problems that affect them most.

Behind those numbers lies an even grimmer truth: most crime simply isn't reported. [National Crime Victimization Survey](#) data show that only about 38 percent of urban violent crimes and 25 percent of property crimes are reported at all. The gap between reality and statistics is enormous. The *New York Times* once estimated that [ninety thousand packages](#) a day are stolen in New York City; yet NYPD larceny totals for that year captured less than [two-days worth](#) of those larcenies.

On the streets, police no longer respond to many quality-of-life calls. Complaints about homeless encampments are referred to social-service agencies that lack authority to act. Restaurants close because patrons are harassed and burglaries go unreported. In truth, everyone in uniform is simply overwhelmed.

The streets and subways reek of disorder. Research suggests that forcibly housing or committing just [1,000](#) to [2,000](#) of the city's most severely mentally ill homeless individuals — a small fraction of the total — would produce a visible improvement in street conditions. Likewise, the *New York Times* found that roughly 327 repeat offenders account for about [one-third](#) of all

shoplifting arrests, yet prosecution remains rare. Chain stores absorb the losses as “shrinkage,” passing the cost to consumers. As we say in New York, we lock up our toothpaste here, not our perpetrators.

Meanwhile, in perhaps the most ominous sign for the future, the city is closing the Rikers Island jail — a functional if aging facility — and replacing it with four new jails dispersed throughout New York. These new jails will only have about [3,500 prisoner beds, down from roughly 11,300](#) today. At a moment when revolving-door justice already undermines deterrence, New York is preparing to literally *eliminate* two-thirds of its jail capacity.

Our newly elected mayor, Zohran Mamdani, has pledged to reduce police headcount and replace officers with social workers. He has publicly called the NYPD “[racist, anti-queer, and a major threat to public safety](#).” Recall that the NYPD is majority minority, and has been for decades. Mamdani has vowed to shut down the NYPD’s Gang Database, a vital tool for detectives working to suppress gang violence. He has also vowed to disband the unit trained to handle demonstrations — the same unit that safely managed the recent takeover at Columbia University. He has said, “[When the boot of the NYPD is on your neck, it’s been laced by the IDF](#).” In fifteen years of counterterrorism work, I never made a single case with the Israeli Defense Forces; what I saw instead were American cops protecting American lives. And yes, a great number of my bosses and detectives were proud Muslims officers.

Matters that were once routine now trigger confrontation due to the incessant public vilification of law enforcement. A small ICE operation this year that arrested [nine criminal aliens](#) — wanted for robbery, burglary, and assault, and other charges — sparked a near-riot. Federal officers acted lawfully; city police were uninvolved in the operation, and merely responded to maintain order. Where they then became targets themselves.

To that point, there has been great outcry regarding the use of the National Guard in a law enforcement capacity. It’s important to note that visible, uniformed presence still works. Since 9/11, the National Guard has manned [New York’s transit hubs](#) without controversy. Separately, Governor Kathy Hochul recently expanded that presence to 1,000 troops in the subways; she then touted a [42 percent drop](#) in subway crime since 2021. In Memphis, homicides and robberies fell [46 percent](#) within two months. In Washington, D.C., violent crime dropped by half during the federal surge there, earning Mayor Bowser’s publicly [expressed gratitude](#). Note that the National Guard is not answering 9-1-1 calls; they are simply a visible presence, extra eyes and ears and deterrence. The formula is simple: when law enforcement is visible, crime falls.

New York has long been a laboratory for criminal-justice policy. It has the nation’s largest police department, with a long record of innovation. We know what works: adequate resources, active enforcement, and respect for those who keep order. We also know what fails: demoralizing the police, shrinking jail capacity, and glorifying disorder in the name of reform.

The federal government can help with funding, sure. It could make federal funding contingent on good police practices. But it can also help by changing the national narrative — by standing with law enforcement rather than vilifying it. Please believe me when I tell you: when politicians support police, it is felt, down to the street level. When they vilify police, it is felt that much more. Is it any wonder that since 2019, [assaults on NYPD officers are up sixty-three percent](#)?

The prime directive of any nation, the reason nations form, is to protect its citizens. How is it good policy, or even logical, to abdicate that responsibility for political reasons? While our political differences are certainly real and abiding, how can it be good practice for mayors and governors today to make public safety decisions based purely on political calculation?

Every community, whatever its politics, wants the same thing: to live safely and with dignity. Those who secure that right deserve not scorn, but support. Please consider helping to change that narrative.

Thank you very much for allowing me the privilege of speaking here today.