

TPID Hears Ideas for Achieving Meaningful Police Reform

At the Three Parks Club meeting held via Zoom on July 8, club members and friends logged on to hear from Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and from Farhang Heydari, Executive Director of the Policing Project at NYU School of Law. In light of the current protests demanding police reform, both offered ideas for meaningful changes.

Borough President Adams, a 22-year veteran of the NYPD, described current City law enforcement agencies as dysfunctional and lacking a coherent mission. He called for reinventing the system and creating a new, proactive, and neighborhood-based version of public safety. In his view, the police department could improve personnel management and reduce headcount by using more civilians to staff non-patrol jobs. Budget dollars could then be shifted to other social service agencies. A community-based

response system could be developed to handle non-emergency, non-violent situations. Most importantly, money could be allocated to provide a strong community infrastructure to support underserved youth populations.

Heydari's organization, the Policing Project, is a nonprofit that "partners with communities and police to promote public safety through transparency, equity, and democratic engagement." Its emphasis is on what it calls "front-end," or democratic, police accountability, meaning ensuring that the public has a voice in setting transparent, ethical, and effective policing policies and practices *before* the police or government act. The goal is to achieve public safety in a manner that is equitable and respectful of public values, and to give underserved communities a voice in setting transparent, ethical, and effective policing policies. Its advisory board consists of a wide range of organizations committed to police reform, including civil rights groups, major city police departments (Houston, Chicago,

Tucson), and grassroots and community organizations.

Heydari struck a moderate tone. He acknowledged that the term “defunding police” has become confusing for many individuals, and proposed that a good way to think about reform is allocation of resources to police based on their core strengths and training. Police are trained to respond with force and arrest, so other professionals might be better equipped to handle situations in which force or arrest is not the best outcome. According to Heydari, the Policing Project looks for ways to shift social service responsibilities and budget dollars away from police department in areas where it is inappropriate and instead allocate those dollars to other public agencies. Regarding police unions as hurdles to reforms, he noted their acceptance of the need to change varies by locality across the country—there is not a broad brush. In New York City, the Project also supports, for starters, public disclosure of police disciplinary files, a ban on police chokeholds, the prohibition of race-based false 911 calls, and a requirement that all branches of the Police Department undertake a

comprehensive review and modernization of policies and strategies. The Policing Project co-founder Barry Friedman, is currently a special advisor to AG Letitia James on an investigation into NYPD's response to the protests over the killing of George Floyd.