

A Message from Director Elizabeth Glazer

Anger. Anguish. Disgust. Sorrow.

Who did not feel this and so much more as the last minutes of George Floyd's life faded before our collective gaze? Once again, we witnessed reckless disregard and indifference for human life by an officer of the law sworn to protect us. An outrage in so many ways including the shattering, again, of the compact that we have made with police when we confer the awesome power to use force. And an outrage because that compact has been broken too many times, especially with communities of color.

Who was not alive to the telescoping of history in that hideous moment: the scar of racism that has marred our country from its inception, validated in its framing documents, devaluing who counts as a person in what should be the unity of "we, the people?" We are not voyeurs of Black death.

We must look not just at our own history, but our present-day reality. In this city that we love for its vibrancy and diversity, we are still divided by neighborhood, class and race. Distress runs deep in neighborhoods suffering from concentrated poverty, high unemployment, limited educational opportunity, dilapidated physical conditions and poor healthcare options contributing to unspeakable mortality rates. Here too, the hand of the justice system falls heaviest on people of color.

My office is committed to untying this knot of poverty, race and injustice that wraps repeatedly around a life's course. Over the past six years, with so many partners, the city has driven crime and incarceration rates to the lowest of any big city in the nation. We have begun through our investments and actions to redefine who "owns" safety and how it is produced. The importance of communities having voice and agency in creating safety is central, and we have worked closely with residents to realize what we call the "civilianization" or "democratization" of safety.

Our office funds and is committed to the expansion of neighborhood-led strategies that support the health and well-being of the most vulnerable communities in our city. [The Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety \(MAP\)](#) brings city agencies, community-based organizations and residents in public housing communities together to identify and solve problems and direct resources with the goal of reducing crime by tackling the systemic inequities that cause it. [The Crisis Management System \(CMS\)](#) is a network of credible community organizations and individuals who mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence. These ground-up interventions amplify the voices of communities and position their leadership as central to the neighborhood's ability to thrive. They signify a new way of promoting and sustaining safety that calls for an increase in engagement and a decrease in law enforcement intervention.

These efforts, together with the shrinking of the justice system show a path towards a different way of realizing safety, one founded less on state coercion and more on people's participation, less on responding after harm is done and more on creating the opportunity that forecloses harm. It recognizes both the value and the limits of the criminal justice system in securing our safety.

The people who work at MOCJ are invested deeply in this work and in this city. We are public servants. Many of our colleagues come from the neighborhoods we serve, feeling and fighting every day the tension, between working for a government that many in this city are estranged from and advocating and deploying the good that government can deliver. In its best aspect government is the arterial network of reform—even in hard economic times—with budgets and an infrastructure created to lift people up.

The last few weeks have distilled fear, anxiety and anger in a kaleidoscope of actions. So much of our police force operates professionally and in good faith, as we have seen most strikingly as many have knelt and marched with protestors across the city in common cause.

But there have been discordant images and actions. Each breaches the compact and triggers a history that must be acknowledged and lead to a re-dedication to accountability. These have been personal to my office, as many have experienced and live with an ever-present foreboding that they will be stopped by the police even performing mayor's office business such as delivering COVID crisis supplies to neighborhoods. Many of my colleagues saw reflections of their own faces and families in videos of unacceptable enforcement actions. These breaches of trust and civility and even the law are a strike against us all and are contrary to the trajectory of our work and accomplishments as a city. Since the beginning of this administration, the incarceration rate has been brought down to a level not seen in more than 50 years and arrests overall are down by the thousands, as we forge a new model of safety centered in community voice. But we need to do more, as the hand of justice is not even and racial disparities persist.

If ever there was a moment for government to be a force for good it is now. If ever there was a moment to act it is now. It is time to hold ourselves accountable for the racial inequities that undeniably shape our city. It is time to make clear-cut and transparent the operations of police, and government more generally, accountable to the people we serve. And, even in a time of economic crisis, the massive retrenchment of the criminal justice system as crime has fallen, should allow us to invest not only in responding to crime but preventing it in the first place by opening up opportunity, revitalizing our neighborhoods, igniting a virtuous cycle that will sustain us in fat times and lean.

We hope still to bend the arc. The life of the city is in her people and in her streets. That is where our safety lies too.