

Written Testimony of Tamika Mapp, District Leader, 68th AD Part D
City Council Public Safety Committee
New York City

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Good afternoon, Council Members and esteemed colleagues. My name is Tamika Mapp, and I proudly serve as the District Leader for the 68th Assembly District, Part D. I appreciate the opportunity to submit my written testimony before you today regarding a critical issue that affects the heart and future of our communities: the gang database. I am writing to urge the City Council to take decisive action to dismantle this harmful system—a system that not only misidentifies innocent individuals, particularly our youth, but also imposes long-lasting, unjust consequences that hinder their ability to flourish.

I. Introduction and Overview

For too long, the gang database has been a tool that, while designed to assist in public safety, has inadvertently created a mechanism of exclusion and marginalization. The database, intended to identify individuals with alleged ties to gang activity, has instead become a catch-all system that wrongly labels our children. This misidentification has severe ramifications on their education, employment prospects, and overall well-being. When a young person is mistakenly flagged as gang-affiliated, they are burdened with a stigma that precedes them into every facet of life, from school admissions to job opportunities, and even housing prospects.

As a District Leader deeply committed to the welfare of our community, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative potential of youth when they are nurtured and supported. Yet, this potential is systematically undermined when our children are branded before they even have a chance to develop and demonstrate their true character. The time has come to critically assess and ultimately eliminate the gang database, ensuring that our children are given a fair chance at a promising future.

II. The Impact on Our Youth

Every day, I meet families who are grappling with the repercussions of this flawed system. The gang database's broad criteria and opaque processes mean that many young individuals are erroneously categorized as potential gang members based on circumstantial evidence or mere association. This misclassification is not just a bureaucratic error—it is a profound injustice that inflicts lifelong damage.

Consider the story of a young person in our district, who, despite excellent grades and a commitment to community service, was flagged in the database due to a misinterpreted association. This label followed the child into adolescence, affecting college admissions and leading to discriminatory treatment in internship and job applications. The mental and emotional toll of such a label is immeasurable. Our children are not born criminals; they are born with the

potential to lead, innovate, and inspire. Yet, by embedding a presumption of guilt into their records, we deny them the opportunity to shine based on their merits.

The database not only affects individuals but also sends a harmful message to the broader community. It implies that certain neighborhoods and the young people who reside there are predisposed to criminal behavior—a message that is both damaging and self-fulfilling. When children internalize these expectations, it becomes far more challenging for them to break free from the cycle of disadvantage and disenfranchisement. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that our public safety measures do not undermine the very communities they are meant to protect.

III. Why We Must Eliminate the Gang Database

The primary purpose of any public safety initiative should be to protect and uplift the community, not to cast an irreversible shadow over the lives of our most vulnerable members. The gang database, in its current form, fails to do this. Instead, it creates a permanent record that often inaccurately reflects an individual's involvement or intentions. Here are several reasons why this database must be abolished:

1. **Injustice Through Misidentification:** The criteria used to determine gang affiliation are overly broad and frequently subjective. Many innocent individuals, especially young people, are caught in the crosshairs of an algorithmic or anecdotal system that does not account for context or redemption. This leads to a situation where an error in judgment early in life can lead to a lifetime of diminished opportunities.
2. **Long-Term Societal Consequences:** The label of gang affiliation can stigmatize a person for life. This stigma creates barriers in education, employment, and housing, effectively curtailing the potential of individuals who might otherwise contribute positively to society. Our community cannot afford to waste the talents of our young people by branding them before they have had the chance to demonstrate their true potential.
3. **Erosion of Trust in Public Institutions:** The use of the gang database without rigorous safeguards or opportunities for redress erodes public trust in law enforcement and government institutions. When citizens believe that they are being unfairly targeted and labeled, they are less likely to cooperate with public safety initiatives and more likely to view their government with skepticism. Restoring faith in our institutions requires us to dismantle systems that contribute to these perceptions.
4. **Alternative Solutions Exist:** There are more nuanced and equitable methods to ensure public safety that do not involve broad-brush labels. Community-based interventions, increased oversight, and restorative justice programs can serve as effective alternatives. These approaches not only address the root causes of gang involvement but also provide pathways for rehabilitation and growth.

IV. Call to Action

Our commitment to public safety must be balanced with a commitment to justice and opportunity. As a community leader and advocate for our children, I am writing you with a simple yet powerful message: we must eliminate the gang database. By doing so, we are not only

correcting a system that unjustly penalizes our youth—we are affirming our belief in the potential of every child to grow, learn, and become a contributing member of society.

I urge the City Council Public Safety Committee to take immediate steps toward reviewing and ultimately abolishing the gang database. Let us redirect our efforts and resources toward initiatives that foster true community engagement, support at-risk youth, and provide avenues for personal and professional growth without the burden of a wrongful label.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the current gang database does not serve the interests of our community. It undermines public safety by perpetuating stigma and hindering the development of our future leaders. Our children deserve the opportunity to flourish free from the shadow of misidentification and the lasting consequences that follow.

I respectfully ask the Council to join me in advocating for a safer, more just, and more equitable system—one that upholds the dignity of every individual and ensures that our community's future is bright and full of promise. Let us work together to transform our approach to public safety and create an environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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