

# **Black Students for Disarmament at Yale Presents: A Path to Abolition**

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23rd September 2020

## Introduction

In June of 2020, we as Black Students for Disarmament at Yale (BSDY) presented the Yale Administration with four demands:

- 1. Immediately disarm the Yale Police Department;**
- 2. Implement a robust Differential Response System devoid of police officers by the end of the 2020–21 Academic School Year;**
- 3. Begin defunding the Yale Police Department immediately so that it can be dismantled by 2023; and**
- 4. Reinvest these funds to support New Haven organizations that protect, serve and uplift Black and Brown communities.**

This document serves three purposes: (1) to develop the theory behind each demand (2) to provide a framework for the Yale Administration in implementing each demand, and (3) to serve as an accountability metric for the Administration— so the public and future students know the work we have done in showing these demands are realizable, and the Administration is unable to claim otherwise.

We know how student movements can go. Even after agreeing to demands, administrators often delay implementation proceedings, sideline activists, and rely on institutional amnesia (i.e. graduating students cycling out of the movement every year) to let the momentum die. We don't want years of committee hearings, task force meetings, and policy analyses. We compiled this document to lay the groundwork for the University and jumpstart a lot of those processes, but we cannot and should not take the place of Yale Administrators' work. Private, militarized policing that arose to maintain white capital cannot keep Black, Indigenous and low-income communities safe. We have already shown that [mere reform is not enough](#). The New Haven community is still overpoliced, and we need radical change —this is how.



## I. Immediately Disarm the Yale Police Department

Yale police officers are armed around the clock. Not only does that put community members at risk, but their departmental activity shows that it is largely unnecessary. Roughly one-third of the calls that the department receives are related to door and welfare checks— having armed officers execute wellness checks has led to the murders of Atatiana Jefferson and numerous unarmed Black folk. Additionally, the YPD most frequently attends to different kinds of calls that don’t necessitate an armed response, such as motor vehicle stops, lost or found property, noise complaints, and medical emergencies to name a few<sup>1</sup>. YPD leadership often gesture to the possibility of school shootings in order to justify their weapons. However, recent history shows that [school shooters are more likely to stop firing on their own than be stopped by an armed officer](#). A recent [ACLU publication](#) puts it more succinctly,

“There is no evidence that arming school officers increases overall safety or improves relationships within school communities. Having an armed officer stationed in schools has neither prevented nor stopped “active shooter” incidents. It did not at Columbine High School nor has it elsewhere”

Furthermore, research suggests that increased [militarization makes police officers more violent](#), and that [even the presence of a gun can elicit aggressive behavior](#). Of all the solutions to police violence, the simplest is to take away the mechanism of such violence as soon as possible— especially as implicit bias and de-escalation training are [yielding disappointing results](#). For years, the New Haven community has been advocating against the arming of Yale’s privately funded and publicly operating police department, so we stand by them in demanding that **Yale must immediately disarm the YPD.**

Disarmament isn’t new— and it works. Officials at Portland State University have [announced the disarming of campus police](#), following tireless efforts by student activists. In Britain, New Zealand, Ireland, Norway, and Iceland, police officers are often unarmed on patrol. All of these countries have considerably lower rates of police killing civilians. New Zealand has the highest rates of police killing civilians from within the group and, even then, it has a rate over sixteen times less than that of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> The YPD’s call logs can be found on our website <https://www.defundypd.com/resources1>

It is imperative that Yale University follow the lead of PSU Campus Police and other unarmed campus police forces to implement department-wide disarmament policies as soon as possible. In understanding the complex mechanisms involved in defunding the Yale Police Department, disarmament is to act only as an immediate, intermediary policy until the final goal of dismantling is achieved.

## **II. Implement a robust Differential Response System devoid of police officers by the end of the 2020–21 Academic School Year**

From homelessness, to overdose and intoxication, to counterfeit bills. We expect police to be the answer to everything— and they are only making things worse. Taking a step back, it is nonsensical to expect one institution, whose only tools on hand are violent force and arrest, to handle a wide array of social issues. By instead engaging appropriately qualified responders, such as social workers, student aides, and medical/mental health professionals, we can successfully address a wide variety of campus and community issues efficiently, and in a manner that does not rely upon and perpetuate a carceral logic.

**Yale University must implement a robust differential response system to tackle issues on campus.** A differential response system is not only the more ethical solution, but adequately replaces the majority of the YPD’s day to day function. We know this for two reasons: (1) the vast majority of calls the YPD receives don’t necessitate an armed response, and (2) 85% of the crime the YPD deals with is property crime<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, there have already been local moves towards differential response. New Haven officials recently announced a plan to create a [“community crisis response team” to handle 911 dispatch calls regarding mental health and behavioral issues](#). The goal of the program is to “provide social services rather than criminal charges or a hospital visit for people in crisis”. Additionally, one of the primary recommendations from 21CP’s assessment of the Yale Police Department is implementing a version of Differential Response.

The differential response system could take many forms. Drawing from existing models and recommendations from community organizations, we have included some suggestions below about what responses to specific issues on campus could look like without police.

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<sup>2</sup> The most recent publicly available data is from the 2018 Yale Annual Security Report.

## A. Mental Health Calls

Responses to mental health calls may include utilizing existing campus resources— such as SHARE, Walden Peer Counseling or Yale Mental Health and Counselling—so that the first responders to a student experiencing a mental health crisis are mental health and medical professionals specifically trained in providing psychological care. Every effort should be made to ensure that students are equipped with information on every mental health resource available to them.

*Examples of Successful Mental Health Differential Responses:*

- [CAHOOTS](#) (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets) is a 24/7 mobile crisis intervention service in the Eugene-Springfield metro area of Oregon. CAHOOTS dispatches a medic and a crisis worker (who has had at least several years of experience in the mental health field) for cases of emergency medical need or psychological crisis, including but not limited to substance abuse, suicide prevention, and housing instability. CAHOOTS covers around 20% of the local police department’s calls.
- [COPE](#) (Community Outreach for Psychiatric Emergencies) is based in Hennepin County, MN and is a 24/7 mobile mental health emergency response organization. Like CAHOOTS, rather than sending law enforcement to the scene, COPE dispatches clinical psychologists, psychiatric nurses, social workers, and more. Their goal is “to help people stay safely in their homes, jobs, schools, and communities.” Since its founding in 2006, COPE now receives more than 1,000 calls per month.

We also echo the demands made by [Students Unite Now](#) to expand mental health resources for students; greater accessibility of mental health resources and the hiring of more racially/ethnically diverse mental health staff would help to decrease mental health crises at Yale in the first place.

## B. Medical Emergencies

We appreciate the administration’s current policy, which protects students from being charged with alcohol and drug violations when seeking help in medical emergencies. In line with this, Yale should ensure that the first responders to all medical emergencies are medically trained professionals, and not armed police. Especially given that the highest percentage of the YPD’s use of force incidents occurred during medical calls.

## C. Noise complaints

In place of calling the YPD to report a noise complaint, Yale could adopt a system that resembles [UNC-Chapel Hill's Party, Police Free Program](#). More specifically responders (this could range from college aides and FroCos, to Yale Security or other hired support personnel) sign up to receive noise complaints from fellow students. These complaints, received through an anonymous online form, email, or text, would then be dealt with by alerting the suite, house, or apartment that they need to lower their noise levels.

#### **D. Lost or found property**

The YPD frequently respond to calls about lost or found property. Instead of a police response, Yale could implement a robust Lost and Found in each residential college as well as a few other central places on campus (i.e. libraries or Payne Whitney) that is inspired by [Tokyo's Lost and Found system](#). Found items can be reported at any Lost and Found location where it can then be logged into an online system. Students who have lost items can access the online system, and visit the Lost and Found to retrieve their item.

#### **E. Walking Escorts**

Yale Security's walking escort service is a good example of what differential response and campus public safety could look like without police. We suggest that the administration conduct a review of the current service to ensure that it is accessible and inclusive to all members of the Yale Community.

#### **F. Sexual Assault/Harassment Calls**

YPD is not adequately trained in handling sexual trauma and assault. We demand that Yale more actively seek to educate its students about resources such as SHARE, the Title IX Office, and the University-Wide Committee on Sexual Misconduct, which are all university resources that *do not* involve the YPD, especially since students from BIPOC communities often have had negative experiences with the police. We suggest that the YPD reroute all sexual assault and harassment calls to the aforementioned resources, along with survivor-centered transformative justice policies and other specialists trained in supporting survivors of assault. We also acknowledge that advocating for survivors does not end here. For more preventative measures, we ask that the university actively support the research conducted by organizations like [Engender](#) and advocate for gender-integrated social spaces as opposed to the current model of Greek Life. We echo the demands written by [UPenn's Coalition Against Fraternity Sexual Assault](#) and the [list of demands](#) for sexual assault response by Penn graduate students.

The YPD are often in charge of attending to calls where there is no justifiable reason to have armed police intervene. We have touched on several examples, but there are many more current YPD functions that could be covered by a differential response team (eg. welfare checks that make up around one-third of all YPD calls). The Yale Administration has repeatedly proclaimed the importance of Yale’s Public Safety Responsibility—robust differential response is what an ethical, responsible and effective Public Safety System should look like.

### III. **Begin defunding the Yale Police Department immediately so that it can be dismantled by 2023**

According to the most recent data obtained from the FBI national database, Yale University has the 7th largest campus police force in the country<sup>3</sup>. However, as discussed above, the majority of the Yale Police Department’s activities could be carried out by responders that don’t rely upon and reinforce carceral logics. Even in recognizing that the YPD deals with a few instances of violent crime (other than those related to sexual assault), the small fraction of violent crime does not justify the existence of such a large, private, and militarized police force, separate from municipal police. The defense system must be commensurate to the threat, and right now the relationship is grossly skewed. As we highlighted in our open letter, maintaining a police department despite the systemic racism within policing is an act of complicity. We have explicitly [made the case](#) that any proposed reforms either fall short of meaningful change, or entrench the YPD’s overreach. Systemic racism cannot be reformed out of policing —**the YPD must be defunded and dismantled**. As long as police budgets remain bloated while social services are under-resourced, we will have relinquished any honest claim to providing safety for the public.

Yale University has still not provided us with an itemized budget for the Yale Police Department specifically<sup>4</sup>, despite our ongoing request under the Freedom of Information Act. **We demand that the University provide immediate transparency on all YPD finances, along with publishing a plan on what downsizing the department would entail, such that it is dismantled by 2023.** This plan may include the following: a commitment to no new police hires, reductions in overtime, and an outline of the redundancy process such that employees’ contractual rights are still respected. Furthermore, the University must cease spending on excessive and violent

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<sup>3</sup> Knowles, Jared. “Campus Police Data 2016 Civilytics” *Campus Policing Toolkit*. Civilytics Consulting (2020).

<sup>4</sup> The University has provided us with the budget for Public Safety as a whole, which encompasses spending on Yale Security as well as the YPD, that we have made available to the public on our website: [defundypd.com](http://defundypd.com).

police operations, such as the Special Weapons and Tactics (S.W.A.T) team, immediately. Through disarmament, spending on weapons can be further halted.

#### **IV. Reinvest these funds to support New Haven organizations that protect, serve and uplift Black and Brown communities**

The relationship between the city of New Haven and Yale is nearly strained beyond repair. Most recently, the [disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) on the health and finances of Black and brown members of the New Haven community has highlighted the damage done by centuries of segregated development, from redlining to [“urban renewal.”](#) This euphemistic language serves to mask the destructive, racist phenomena it describes and which Yale has exacerbated by acquiring non-taxable property en masse, effectively decimating New Haven’s social service network. The armed and unaccountable Yale Police Force, which has terrorized Black and brown people in New Haven, has rightfully provoked the community’s mistrust. There is a [clear relationship](#) between housing segregation and the over-policing of Black neighborhoods, which YPD’s exacerbates by existing as a second New Haven armed force. As long as poverty and houselessness are criminalized in our city rather than regarded as the failures of our society and our institution to fairly distribute the necessities of life, Yale bears some responsibility for crime in New Haven.

It is due time that Yale fosters a new relationship with New Haven by **eliminating the budget of the YPD and transferring those funds to a process of criminal justice-focused participatory budgeting that brings together the Yale community and New Haven residents.** This demand must be situated within Yale’s larger responsibility to New Haven— Yale must commit to paying 100% of its [fair share to New Haven](#), which amounts to \$146 million a year in revenues lost to unpaid property taxes.

Participatory budgeting was first developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 in order to increase [civic input in government decisions](#). Participatory budgeting was developed based on the idea that, through involving all citizens in budgetary allocation, people who were typically marginalized and excluded from processes of governance and decision-making could be integrated and prioritized within a more egalitarian framework, improving outcomes and empowering those with [the least traditional influence](#). Acknowledging the successes of the method in Latin America, Chicago’s 49th ward implemented a participatory budgeting process in 2009, in which discretionary funding for the district can be allocated based on citizen input, as [decided through community meetings](#). Although this

project was limited in scope, it was well-received in the community and has continued. Similar initiatives have spread to [New York and California](#).

Yale can lead by example by funding the first-ever private university-funded participatory budgeting process. Discussion of the merits of participatory budgeting has [recently gained](#) a new degree of urgency and traction, as communities across the country begin to contemplate how funds from punitive and carceral institutions can be used to fund community care and alternatives to policing.<sup>5</sup> A [criminal justice-focused](#) participatory budgeting process, by which Yale will cede all control over to the community, will contribute to healing the relationship between Yale affiliates and New Haveners which has been eroded by Yale's broken promises and its meager voluntary contributions to the city.

## Conclusion

Black Students for Disarmament at Yale first demanded the disarmament of the YPD in April of 2019, and demanded the defunding and dismantling of the YPD in June of 2020. There has been no attempt at communication from the Yale administration in this time despite the over 8,000 signatures on our petition, and the support of undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty members and community organizers. [We have held public teach-ins, published an op-ed, written a zine, released a response to the 21CP Report of YPD, and have now given you a path to abolition.](#) As undergraduate students with only limited access to the internal workings of Yale, we have laid out the groundwork for an ethical, just and responsible reimagination of Public Safety at Yale. We have shown you why this work needs to be done for the safety of your students and community, given you ample resources on why abolishing YPD force is feasible, and given you specific examples of what a world without YPD could look like. The Yale Administration must be responsible for the rest of the implementation. We demand that by **September 27th**, the Yale Administration **make a public commitment to convene a committee of community organizers, students, faculty, local residents, and BSDY members to develop and publish a written plan that outlines the pathway to fully dismantle the YPD by the year 2023.**

Your community deserves to be heard.

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<sup>5</sup> Participatory budgeting is a key pillar in the Movement 4 Black Lives's "Community Control" platform.