

ABOLISHING THE YALE POLICE DEPARTMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

The social movements of the past year have caused many people to question whether policing can ever truly create safety in their communities. But for us at Yale, these movements have affirmed our longstanding belief that a private, militarized police force has no legitimate place on our campus.

**This pamphlet was made and distributed by
the Abolition Alliance at Yale:**

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Yale Undergraduate Prison Project
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Modern policing is rooted in the violences of slavery, the criminalization of Black and other racialized groups, and the colonization of Indigenous peoples. Because policing is foundationally violent and racist, it should come as no surprise that it cannot be “reformed” away. If we value true safety, we must divest from all forms of policing and reinvest in our New Haven community.

Abolishing the Yale Police Department is a necessary first step.

Abolition Alliance at Yale (AAY) is a coalition of Yale undergraduate students, graduate and professional students, faculty, and staff who have joined [Black Students for Disarmament at Yale](#) in organizing for the abolition of the YPD. Together, we demand that Yale:

1. Immediately disarm the Yale Police Department
2. Implement a robust Differential Response System devoid of police officers by the end of the 2020-2021 Academic School Year
3. Begin chunked defunding of the Yale Police Department immediately so that it can be totally dismantled by 2023, and
4. Reinvest the YPD budget to support New Haven organizations that actually protect, serve and uplift Black and Brown communities

This pamphlet will explain that YPD is an expensive, undemocratic and unaccountable institution that terrorizes and harrasses community members and plays no meaningful role in preventing crime on campus or keeping students safe. It will also lay out alternative structures that Yale can invest in to support real safety on campus and in New Haven.

As you read, we encourage you to ask yourself this simple question:
Why should the YPD exist?

THE YALE POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Yale Police Department is a private, militarized college police force that exists in a city already patrolled twice over by the New Haven and Hamden Police Departments. Together, the three departments form what community organizers have termed the **Triple Occupation of the City of New Haven**. YPD officers are armed 24/7 and “have all the powers conferred upon municipal police officers for the city of New Haven.”^[1] Aside from a similar funding source, **the YPD is separate in authority and mandate from Yale Security** (which manages the security systems, offers security escort services, and responds to lock-outs). The YPD is a full-fledged, armed police department with its own militarized S.W.A.T team. Its officers are essentially NHPD with more funding per officer, that answer only to Yale University. They can arrest anyone in the city, with their felony arrest powers extending to the borders of Connecticut, encompassing over 3 million people who are unaffiliated with Yale. As police officers, they are protected by governmental immunity, which is the Connecticut equivalent of federal qualified immunity. As Yale employees, however, the officers are accountable only to University administration.

As the oldest college police force in the country, the Yale Police Department stands as a symbol for, and active continuation of, the violent protection of the University to the detriment of the city's local communities. The Yale Corporation spends millions of dollars each year on the 'triple occupation' of New Haven, only creating more harm in Black, racialized, working class, poor, and otherwise imperilled communities. Abolition is about diverting resources to what actually keeps people safe. A world where Yale meaningfully invests in the well-being of New Haven is a world where the police are obsolete.

A HISTORY OF PERPETUATING VIOLENCE

Violence is endemic to police departments, and the YPD is no different.^[2] In 1894, the very first Yale officers considered their primary objective as “keep[ing] all suspicious characters from the campus,” which included kicking “tramps” out of basements and a “colored gentleman” out of a building entrance.^[3] The YPD grew increasingly militarized alongside other campus police forces in the 1960's and 70's— around the same time that colleges saw an increase in BIPOC students and political dissidents on campus.

[1] Section 3 of Public Act No. 83-466 of the Connecticut General Statutes

[2] For a fuller account of the YPD's racist history, see Black Students for Disarmament at Yale's (BSDY)'s [zine](#)

[3] As [described](#) in the autobiography of Bill Wiser, one of the first two Yale Police officers

UNSPRISINGLY, THE YPD'S PATTERN OF RACIALIZED AGGRESSION HAS PERSISTED IN RECENT YEARS

In 2007, two YPD officers racially profiled a Black sixteen-year-old. In 2015, YPD officers held an unarmed, Black student at gunpoint. In the early hours of April 16, 2019, Yale Police officer Terrance Pollock and Hamden Police officer Devon Eaton fired sixteen shots into a car where a young, unarmed Black couple were sitting and singing love songs to each other. Eight months later, the University announced that officer Pollock, who had not been charged by the state, would be moved to an administrative, non-patrol, position. YPD's most recent use of force data also shows that the highest frequency of use of force incidents occurred during medical calls. BSDY maintains a list of YPD's incidents against the community that can be found [here](#).

THE YPD HAS A PATTERN OF RESISTING ACCOUNTABILITY

By design, the department is all authority and no accountability. Even though its powers equal those of the New Haven Police Department, the officers' positions as employees of a private corporation shield them from public accountability. For example, the YPD is not currently under the New Haven Civilian Police Review Board's jurisdiction. In 2007, the YPD initially refused to release the information of the officers involved in the racial profiling incident until it was ordered to do so by the Freedom of Information Commission. In 2015, the YPD again denied requests for information, this time the bodycam footage of the 'napping while Black' incident, where a white graduate student called the YPD on a Black graduate student napping in a common area on campus. Though the incident and identities of the students are widely publicized, Yale refused to provide the YPD bodycam footage in order to "protect the students' identities." The pattern continues: in 2020, a YPD officer blocked the release of a civilian complaint.

VERY PLAINLY, WHY DOES THE YPD EXIST?

Despite the mounting evidence that all police departments are structurally racist and undermine public safety, and that YPD specifically is violent and unaccountable to the community it serves, some members of our community continue to insist that the YPD can and should be reformed. Underlying that assertion are two assumptions: (1) that the YPD are ultimately necessary because they are in fact protecting us from crime, and (2) that reforms to YPD are capable of addressing the violence within policing. **However, both assumptions are baseless.**

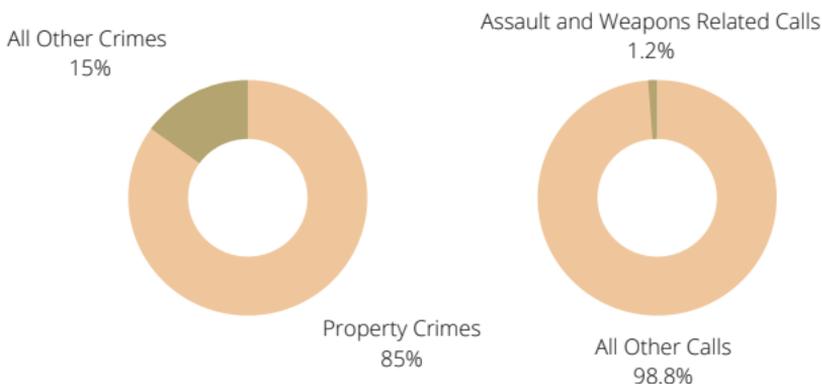
1) THE YPD ISN'T MAKING US ANY SAFER (THEY ARE FAILING EVEN AT THEIR OWN MANDATE)

YPD's campus communications might have you believe that police officers are necessary because they are "fighting bad guys" on a daily basis. However, we know that a lot of what we code as "crime" is situational and racialized. Offering a militarized police department as a public safety solution assumes that every societal issue can be solved using the only tools police wield: the power of force and the power of arrest. How relevant are these powers to responding to the problems that take place on our campus?

The YPD isn't "fighting bad guys." **The majority of the crime the YPD deals with are property crimes.** For instance, in 2018, **85% of crimes were property crimes.** And they don't even do a good job at that: an analysis of YPD's data shows their average case closure rate from 2011 to 2018 was just 8.05%, dipping as low as 2.7% in 2018. This average closure rate is nearly three times lower than the state-wide average and more than two times lower than the average for New Haven. In that same time frame, the YPD reported \$2,342,302 in values lost due to criminal activity, and only recovered \$127,662. Furthermore, between 2015 and 2019, only 2.05% of all crimes logged were assault and weapons related, and the majority of what YPD's crime logs dealt with protecting assets.[4]

In fact, **the YPD routinely overstate their importance.** While the YPD bolsters their legitimacy by claiming[5] to receive close to 20,000 - 30,000 calls a year, **the actual number was closer to half that.**[6] Not only was this claim misleading and untrue, but the calls that YPD did receive rarely had to do with preventing violence or stopping any sort of crime. Between 2015 and 2019, only 1.21% of calls to YPD were related to assault or weapons. Meanwhile, **nearly a third of the calls received were for the transporting of checks in 2019.**

These statistics demonstrate that serious crime is rarely an issue on Yale's campus, and that YPD is largely incapable of "solving" or preventing the crime that does occur. In fact, far from creating safe conditions, YPD's behavior endangers the groups that they consistently target.



[4] All raw data was obtained directly from the YPD under the Freedom of Information Act.

[5] An interview given by the Assistant Chief to the YDN can be found [here](#)

[6] The full YPD call records can be found at: defundypd.com/resources

(2) NOWHERE HAVE POLICE REFORMS BEEN PROVEN TO MAKE POLICE SAFER.

Banning choke-holds in New York did not stop the NYPD from using one to murder Eric Garner. Closer to home, officer Terrance Pollock had both his bodycam and dashboard camera off during the New Haven shooting, even though activated cameras were mandatory. Here we should again consider the historical and ongoing function of policing, which is not the protection of people, but the protection of property, whose interests in this country are fundamentally aligned with white supremacy and capitalism. Band-aid reform cannot fix the systemic problems inherent to policing.^[7] How long can we keep watching supposedly “reformed” police departments continue to kill Black and brown people, and yet continue to suggest the same things over and over again?

POLICE DO NOT LEAD TO SAFETY

As abolitionists, we join generations of Black organizers, activists and scholars in recognizing that policing is a tool of social control, political repression and racial capitalism. The police, an institution created for and wholly structured around violence, cannot create community safety. Instead, as we have seen time and again, the police endanger the lives of people who have been constructed as criminal—Black and other racialized people, the poor, the mentally ill, trans and queer folks. Those with multiple of these identities are especially put at risk. It is far cheaper and easier for municipalities and universities, like Yale, to throw money at their police forces than to grapple with the root causes of harm, to admit their complicity in creating conditions of inequity, and to develop and support holistic visions of community safety. But in allowing our governments and schools to continue to invest in policing, we allow them to prioritize the comfort of their white and wealthy constituents—those accustomed to, if not reliant on, the constant surveillance of Black and other criminalized people—over the wellbeing of the community on the whole. Policing creates an illusion of safety for some. Abolitionists work to make safety and justice a reality for everyone.

[7] See BSDY's [response](#) to recommended YPD reforms for more on why reform is not an option

AS ABOLITIONISTS, WE SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN HOLISTIC COMMUNITY SAFETY

Calling for the end of policing does not mean that we ignore the forms of oppression and violence that exist in our communities. It means we think collectively about how to address them at the root. Abolition calls for a deeper reckoning with the historical and ongoing structures that cause all of us harm. Abolitionists understand that punishment via a criminal legal system is not a proxy for accountability, healing, or repair. Abolition invites us to identify and support the real pillars of health and safety—things like education, health care, access to meaningful work and leisure time, nutrition, childcare, housing, and mental health services.[8] We know that the safest communities have ample access to each of these things. New Haveners support this sort of justice reinvestment. 63 percent of voters support divesting \$33 million from New Haven's \$43 million-plus police budget and re-investing those funds in public education and community-based violence prevention programs for youth.

ABOLITION ISN'T UNTHINKABLE: WE HAVE DISBANDED YALE-AFFILIATED POLICE BEFORE.

In 2003, 54 Yale-New Haven Hospital police or “constables” had their arrest powers revoked.[9] The movement for revocation began after YNHH constables arrested workers and graduate students for second-degree criminal trespass while passing out union leaflets. The first two arrests took place on the same day that two of Yale’s unions, Local 34 and Local 35, voted to authorize a strike. Outraged by these arrests, which appeared to be in retaliation for the exercise of free speech, an undergraduate member of the New Haven Board of Alders introduced a resolution calling on the Board of Police Commissioners to revoke the YNHH constables’ power of arrest. On November 22, 2002 the Board of Alders passed this resolution, voting 18-2-2. Subsequently, the Board of Police Commissioners voted by a margin of 4-to-1 to revoke the arrest power of the YNHH constables. The mayor upheld this recommendation. One Police Commissioner asserted, “the general concept of private companies having special police powers, it doesn't belong in the 21st century.”

[8] Mariame Kaba, “Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police.” New York Times, June 12, 2020. “People like me who want to abolish prisons and police, however, have a vision of a different society, built on cooperation instead of individualism, on mutual aid instead of self-preservation. What would the country look like if it had billions of extra dollars to spend on housing, food and education for all?”

[9] Oxford Languages: A constable is defined as a “peace officer with limited policing authority, typically in a small town”

ABOLISHING YPD WILL HELP YALE SUPPORT A NEW HAVEN THAT IS SAFE AND JUST FOR ALL OF ITS RESIDENTS.

As abolitionists at Yale, we consider the many ways that Yale has caused and exacerbated unsafe conditions in New Haven by hoarding wealth, refusing to invest in community services and supports, and creating an environment of extreme inequity.

While the city of New Haven posted a \$13 million dollar deficit for the fiscal year ending in June 2020, Yale projected a \$203 million dollar surplus.

Yale has an **endowment of \$31.1 billion dollars**, but because of its status as a 501(3)(c), Yale is not technically required to pay property taxes to the city.

Yale makes a \$13 million charitable donation to the city each year, but community leaders agree that this amount is a drop in the bucket. Mayor Eilicker compared Yale's charitable donation to that of a billionaire who makes a \$100,000 donation to a soup kitchen, but avoids paying the \$100 million she owes in taxes. He says, "New Haven will struggle more and more unless the university decides to accept its responsibility to the residents of the city." [10]

The mayor has called for Yale to raise its annual contribution to \$50 million. But this demand is conservative, given that community groups have determined that Yale's fair share is closer to \$158 million.[11] New Haven Rising launched the Yale: Respect New Haven campaign to mobilize community members to demand that Yale pay this amount annually.[12]

Abolishing YPD and reinvesting its budget into New Haven would be a small but meaningful step towards making good on its ethical obligations to make an equitable contribution to the city. This money could support the community's vision of true public safety, paying for services such as education, affordable housing, or childcare.

[10] Thomas Breen, "Yale Posts \$203M Surplus; City Projects \$13M Deficit." New Haven Independent, Nov. 10, 2020 available at https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/yale_surplus_city_deficit/

[11] See Matt Smith, "Opinion: Time for A Yale 'Fair Share' Pivot." New Haven Independent, Nov 24, 2020. Available at https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/opinion_yale_fair_share/

[12] See yalerespectnewhaven.org

IF INVESTED IN, ALTERNATIVES TO POLICING WILL BETTER SATISFY OUR PUBLIC SAFETY NEEDS ON CAMPUS.

We believe that Yale must implement a differential response system, which would offer other types of professionals as resources to people seeking assistance. By engaging appropriately qualified responders, such as social workers, student aides, and medical/mental health professionals, instead of deploying an armed response through YPD, we can more successfully address a wide variety of campus and community issues.

Even the pro-policing consultants that Yale hired to review its department recommended that the university implement a differential response system. Doing so would be consistent with moves made by New Haven, which recently announced a plan to create a community crisis response team to handle 911 dispatch calls regarding mental health and behavioral issues. [13]

BSDY's September 2020 Report, "Black Students for Disarmament at Yale Presents: A Path to Abolition" draws from working differential response models across the country to outline how Yale might create police-free systems that better respond to mental health calls, medical emergencies, noise complaints, lost or found property, walking escorts, and sexual assault/harassment. [14]

YALE COULD TAKE MANY FURTHER STEPS TO CREATE A SAFE CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY

By committing to increasing student and worker safety through providing increased funding for mental health and counseling, hiring counselors of color and LGBTQ+ counselors, and reducing the wait times for appointments to a maximum of two weeks; eliminating the Student Income Contribution, which exacerbates the already vast inequalities that exist between wealthy, mostly white students and low-income and/or first-generation students of color; and providing increased and adequate funding for disability accommodations. These are just a few of many provisions that Yale might embrace to promote the safety and wellbeing of all members of campus.

[13] Thomas Breen, "New Program Centers Social Workers, Not Cops." New Haven Independent, Aug. 18, 2020. Available at https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/crisis_response_team/

[14] "Black Students for Disarmament at Yale Presents: A Path to Abolition." Sept., 23, 2020 at p. 3-6. Available at https://9c74d225-4db8-42f8-89cb-63c148b0c45b.filesusr.com/ugd/8d34db_80b46f8b946a40e39a624d45cfc1d820.pdf

So, why does the YPD exist? No, seriously: why?

What could the justification possibly be for funneling tens of millions into a private, militarized, and unaccountable police force that is at best a drain of funds and at worst a source of violence? So far, public safety efforts at Yale have continued to expand the police force without ever interrogating the ethics and necessity of its existence. But to think an entity needs to exist just because it already does is circular, and unimaginative. Not only have pathways to holistic visions of true public safety been paved by the abolitionists before us, but we live alongside brilliant scholars and community organizers that are continually doing the work of reimagination. People's lives are at stake, and we cannot wait. It is time for Yale to truly reimagine safety, and offer compassionate and effective solutions to the wider New Haven community. **It is time to abolish the Yale Police Department.**

**Want to join the fight?
Visit www.defundypd.com to
take action**