



NYS Senate Hearing –4 March 2022

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles, Director of Organizing of The Brotherhood Sister Sol

My name is Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles and I am the Director of Organizing of The Brotherhood Sister Sol.

We at The Brotherhood/Sister Sol continue to be appalled by the fact that our schools remain underfunded and under-resourced. Currently, the funding for our schools does not include monies to address the dire need of adding student support staff in NYC public schools. Our vision for education in New York City includes safe, restorative, healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must pursue policies that value and respect the dignity of students, caregivers, and their communities. This requires providing schools equitable resources, adopting a culturally responsive curriculum, preventing trauma, repairing harm, and promoting restorative practices.

For more than 25 years, we at The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) have been at the forefront of social justice, educating, organizing, and training to challenge inequity and champion opportunity for all. With a focus on Black and Latinx youth, BroSis is where young people claim the power of their history, identity and community to build the future they want to see. Through unconditional love, around-the-clock support and wraparound programming, we make space for Black and Latinx young people to examine their roots, define their stories and awaken their agency. We educate, we organize, we train. It is in doing this that we have cultivated a cadre of young organizers who themselves are demanding change in New York City schools.

Alongside our youth organizers, at The Brotherhood Sister Sol, we want to ensure the health and wellbeing of all NYC public school students. We demand that New York State requires all schools to have a student-to-student-support-staff ratio of 1:100. This will necessitate an increase in the budget for NYC public schools so as to quadruple the number of student support staff – including but not limited to Guidance Counselors, Career Counselors, College Counselors, Therapists, and Social Workers. This vision for education in New York City includes safe, restorative, healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. This vision requires that the State Senate and Assembly pass [S1969/A5019](#) so as to insure that all elementary, intermediate, middle, junior and senior high schools throughout New York State have a full-time licensed social worker and a full-time licensed psychologist on staff to meet the needs of their students. This vision would also necessitate the passing of [S4782/A666](#) and thus requires all public school districts and boards of cooperative educational services employ at least one registered professional nurse in each school building. Our schools, all schools should have the student support staff that our young people deserve. In a world worsened by COVID, our young people need equitable schools, trauma-informed support staff, and restorative practices that help them succeed.

Furthermore, w at The Brotherhood Sister Sol demand an end to the criminalization of youth and students of color and the deconstruction of the school-to-prison pipeline. We need our state senators and assembly to pass the Solutions Not Suspensions bill ([S7198/A5197](#)) Our schools' overreliance on suspensions only leads to pushout of marginalized students. To address issues worsened by COVID-19, we as a state have to meaningfully shift our education system and, instead, create pathways to student success. New York State must pass this bill so that we can lead our nation in investing in student and community-led restorative justice and safety strategies. Failure to invest in student success and divest from policing culture will mean that our city continues to fail our youth.

Today, New York City is far from where it need be to ensure student success as our schools face troubling realities:

- School segregation leads to chronic underfunding of schools in New York state which has negative and disparate impacts for Black, Latinx and low-income students given subsequent resource disparity.^[iii]
- Only 77.3% of the 1.1 million children in the DOE system will graduate on time and only 55% of NYC high school graduates will graduate college-ready.^{[iii] [iv]}
- 1 in ten NYC public school students is houseless.^[v]

Additionally, in a nation in which 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker^[vi], New York City has more school safety agents (SSAs) than any other school district in the U.S. The presence of police in our schools has disproportionately impacted students who are low-income, Black, and Latinx, who are more likely to be the subject of exclusionary discipline and police response at school than their white peers.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the futures all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD. This history of underfunding results in cutting courses, programming, and supports our youth need. It is a part of the equation that leads to push out and lowered graduation rates. This is exemplified in the difficulties our students have in getting their needs addressed within school halls a reality that results, for far too many, in a diminished future.

We need our elected officials to invest in our students, their successes, and their academic futures. We agree that “federal, state, and local dollars must prioritize counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses instead of police.” We must deconstruct the school-to-prison pipeline; end Broken Windows policing; and truly decriminalize low-level offenses that lead to our youth having negative contact with the state and carceral systems. And, we must do this now in order to safeguard our young people. Increasing access to quality, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses while creating solutions and not suspensions is a great way to invest in our larger communities and our holistic futures.

For more information regarding our campaign, please contact Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles (mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org, 212.283.7044).