**MTA Board Meeting Testimony**

**“Investing in Safety Means Investing in Riders”**

**By Kara Gurl, Research & Comm Associate**

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Good morning! I’m Kara Gurl, Research and Communications Associate at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, PCAC.

Safety has been at the forefront of most riders’ minds over the past few months, with the tragic death of Michelle Go and so many other incidents, including the things we've just begun accepting as part of our day. You can feel it underground: people standing back against the wall or poles while they wait, opting for more crowded areas of the platform, and people visibly on edge. This isn’t the kind of atmosphere that makes regular riders feel welcome, and it definitely isn’t the way to get new riders to opt for transit.

We support the Governor and Mayor's new Subway Safety Plan that includes a holistic approach to addressing the issues that riders and transit workers experience underground. It’s encouraging that the city and state remain committed to working together to fix the homelessness and mental health crises, and we’re glad to see a collaborative approach to bring housing, treatment, and other support to people in need. Treating the root of this complex issue is the best way to find a solution that works, including the important aspect of enforcing the Code of Conduct.

No one should feel that living in the subway system is their only option, and being homeless in and of itself is not a crime. The long-term solution must include sufficient housing and support services above ground, to ensure that people don’t continue to seek shelter underground. Strategically-deployed teams need to be able to bring those who may harm themselves or others out of the system and into city and state-run services. This decades-long issue requires long-term investment from all stakeholders to find a solution.

There’s safety in numbers, and higher ridership will help with the perception and reality of unsafe conditions underground. New discount programs like fare capping are a great start, and will hopefully incentivize even more people to take transit. We need a holistic approach to making transit a more enjoyable and safe environment for everyone, including making it more affordable.

With safety remaining a priority for the Governor, Mayor, and the MTA, we’re confident that a safer future for transit is within reach. The recovery of the city, and the region, depends on it. Thank you.