

BEN WETZLER

FOR CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 4

Creating a Community Where We Can All Feel Safe

New York is the greatest city in the world, but until every New Yorker—in every neighborhood, of every age and gender, from every walk of life—can feel safe on the streets and subways, we will struggle to live up to our potential as a city. Below is a summary of the actions I will take if elected to ensure that the East Side of Manhattan remains a safe and welcoming community for all New Yorkers. My entire career has been in public service here in New York, with a focus on developing strategies that work across policy areas and without regard for ideology or partisanship and I will pursue that same approach on the City Council.

1. Data-Driven Strategies for Policing and Quality of Life

Policing strategies that are targeted, data-driven, and responsive to changing patterns of crime are the most important element of a sound public safety policy. **The current “security theater” strategies have proven ineffective because they are reactive, not proactive.** We must study the patterns of criminal activity and the responses that have proven most effective, and deploy our law enforcement resources accordingly with an eye towards prevention. This kind of policing is the key to keeping our communities safe and our leaders accountable.

Targeting High-Crime “Hot Spots” with Dedicated Patrols

Foot patrols are the bread-and-butter of policing, but too often neighbors feel that they do not make the neighborhood feel more secure. **Data-informed policing strategies can ensure that beat cops have the greatest impact, breaking up naturally occurring centers of criminal activity before crimes occur and making the public feel safe.** By far the worst “hot spot” affecting the 4th Council District is on East 14th Street, where incidents of violent crime at the entrances to the L train, high rates of street harassment, and the re-sale of stolen goods have plagued my community in Stuyvesant-Town and Peter Cooper Village for years.

Improving Coordination Between Precincts

Too often, neighbors complain that patrols are not in the right place to deter crime or overreact to minor incidents that pull officers away from their beats. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many high-crime areas in the 4th District are split between multiple patrols—East 14th Street is split between the 9th and 13th Precincts, and East 86th Street, though wholly within the 19th Precinct, is divided between multiple precinct sectors. **If elected, I will work with the relevant precinct commanders to rationalize these patrols and to adopt more data-driven prevention methods.**

Mobile Command Center for East 14th Street

The Adams Administration, after multiple tragic incidents of violent crime at the 14th and 1st subway station and the intervention of our local Council Member, adopted a version of this

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data-driven approach when he committed to station a NYPD mobile command center on East 14th Street. Unfortunately, to date, the command center has not been put into place, despite the appropriation of \$1 million from the Council to purchase the relevant equipment, and the crime and disorder on those blocks has remained intolerable. **If elected, I commit to seeing the command center put into place and deploying similar resources to other identified “hot spots” across the district before they get out of hand.**

2. Addressing Hate Crimes and Gun Violence

Crimes Targeting Religious, Racial, and LGBT Communities

One of the most concerning trends in the crime data over the last four years has been the significant and sustained spike in hate crimes throughout the city, particularly targeting Jews, Asian Americans, and the LGBT community. **I remember growing up on the Upper East Side and seeing the significant increase in security around my synagogue that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and have been alarmed as the same pattern has emerged in recent years.** Between 2019 and 2023, the number of reported hate crime incidents in NYC increased by nearly 60%, with almost two-thirds of all incidents targeting Jewish New Yorkers. More than 90% of all incidents of hate-motivated aggravated harassment were against Jews, and nearly half of all hate-motivated assaults were committed against Jews or gay men. People cannot live their lives and feel safe in their communities if they feel they will be targeted with unprovoked violence, harassment, or vandalism simply due to their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Enforcement of Hate Crime Laws Through Dedicated Staff

In 2023, at the urging of district attorneys from around the State, the State Legislature closed loopholes in the “bias motivated” crime statute that had made these cases difficult to prosecute. **If elected to the City Council, I will work with the NYPD and the Manhattan District Attorney’s office to ensure a dedicated team of detectives and prosecutors are assigned to these cases** and will create a “one-stop” process for reporting and pressing charges when there are incidents of harassment or violence against threatened communities in our neighborhood.

Protecting Communities from Gun Violence

In 2024, for the first time ever recorded in NYC, more than 10% of shooting victims were aged 17 or younger. NYC’s common-sense rules on gun safety have been chipped away by court decisions and federal policy driven by politicians without our commitment to ending the violence. If elected, I will take a zero-tolerance policy towards guns on the streets, in public spaces, and near our schools, using every legal and administrative tool available to keep them away from our district. It is, simply put, too easy to get a gun and use it, and until that ends, the violence will continue. If elected, I would advocate for **the addition of a NYPD-DA task force on gun violence.** The creation of a special task force would ensure that experts are constantly working to reduce gun violence and violent crime city-wide.

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3. Addressing Shoplifting and E-Commerce Crime

Accountability for Companies That Facilitate Shoplifting

As I talk to store managers and business owners in the 4th District, the most common concern I hear is about the resale of stolen goods. When stolen merchandise is resold, the retailer loses twice—once from the loss of the product, and again through the loss of a sale. The largest culprit of these sales is “third party” e-commerce on large tech platforms. The majority of stolen goods are sold through online platforms like Amazon, Craigslist, eBay, and Facebook Marketplace/Meta each year, roughly 10% of all goods sold online. **Large technology companies that profit off the sale of stolen goods are an existential threat to our local stores and must be held accountable.**

Advocate for State Law to Combat Organized Retail Theft

In 2022, Congress enacted new requirements for e-commerce companies to collect data on their high-volume sellers and share that data with the relevant law enforcement authorities. However, these requirements do not go far enough, and the penalties are limited to civil actions against the platforms. **If elected to the City Council, I will work to enact data-sharing requirements on e-commerce platforms with a physical presence in NYC that target the sellers themselves, so that local law enforcement can more easily detect and prosecute theft rings.** If they refuse to crack down on the use of their platforms by shoplifters, I will work with my State colleagues to rescind lucrative tax breaks that these companies benefit from when they open distribution centers in the city.

4. Taking Mental Healthcare Seriously

I have crafted data-driven policy for NYS to reduce housing costs and end the epidemic of homelessness in our city and state. About half of our neighbors experiencing homelessness have no drug or mental health issues at all; they are simply living the worst possible manifestation of the broader housing crisis. But for the ones that do, the failures of our behavioral health system have created an intolerable public safety threat, one that harms both the homeless population and the public at large, and which has been ignored for too long. **We need a commitment to mental health care that is evidence-based, compassionate, at a scale commensurate with the problem, and aggressive enough to make everyday New Yorkers feel safe on our sidewalks and subways once again.**

Effective Outreach to People in Need

The most difficult issue in addressing our mental health crisis is actually reaching people in crisis and bringing them in for treatment. People with behavioral health issues are often resistant to getting care or are not being reached by the services that would be most effective for them. **The City should expand the number of outreach teams operating in our borough to**

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ensure that New Yorkers struggling with behavioral health conditions do not languish on our streets, compromising public safety and their own health.

Investing in Long-Term Solutions and Care

For too long, our mental health system has adopted a short-term approach to care and crisis response. Right now, the average stay in a NYC public mental health hospital (such as Bellevue Hospital's psychiatric center, just six blocks from where I live) is just over two weeks. This is enough time for a doctor to observe a patient, stabilize them, make or amend a diagnosis, and send them on their way, but not enough to ensure lasting recovery. Without a long-term plan for consistent monitoring, rehabilitation, case management, and housing solutions, patients fall out of treatment and the cycle continues.

To ensure sustained access to treatment, patients need to be given time to recover in a clinical setting under the supervision of a qualified professional, not immediately sent back onto the street. If elected to the City Council, I will push for more trained clinical staff at our public mental health hospitals and outpatient treatment centers, and will work with the State to reopen the shuttered wings of the Manhattan Psychiatric Center—the largest inpatient facility in the borough, on Randall's Island—reducing the number of patients being turned out before they are on the path to recovery.

5. Enforcement & Accountability for Traffic Injuries & Deaths

The biggest public safety threat in our district is not assault or theft: it is the lack of enforcement and accountability in our traffic laws. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly exacerbated the problem; I have seen more cars plow through red lights in the last 5 years than I had in the previous 30 combined, and the recklessness with which people operate scooters, e-bikes, and other vehicles has hurt the quality of life for the entire neighborhood. **If elected, I will work to adopt effective strategies for holding all road users—regardless of the type of vehicle they operate—accountable for reckless and dangerous behavior.**

Using Technology to Track Recklessness on the Road

While car traffic remains the most significant driver of road injuries, we have seen rapid increases in recent years in accidents and injuries related to e-bikes, mopeds, and scooters operated as part of corporate-owned fleets, including bike rentals such as Citibike and app-based delivery riders. These riders are connected through technology networks owned by a single company making them easier to track and create a more straightforward avenue for enforcement than independent, recreational riders. Every Citibike in NYC is numbered, labeled, and tracked with a GPS sensor, as are most app-based delivery company riders. **If elected, I will author legislation to require this data to be shared with the City Department of Transportation, the State Department of Motor Vehicles, and insurers, allowing the City to hold these companies accountable and accurately enforce traffic and road safety laws without the need for potentially dangerous and biased ticketing of individual users.**

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Additionally, I will push to expand the use of automated enforcement techniques such as red-light cameras, and to give the New York City Department of Transportation overlapping jurisdiction to write tickets for traffic infractions. These tools will allow the NYPD to reassign officers away from traffic enforcement and towards more mission-critical responsibilities related to violent crime prevention, while improving the predictability of traffic enforcement.

Crack Down on Defaced License Plates

We cannot have effective traffic and safety enforcement until we aggressively tackle the scourge of “ghost plates”—cars that use deceptive or illegal tactics to disguise their license plates from the police to avoid tolls, tickets, and traffic enforcement. This practice costs taxpayers an estimated \$200 million per year in evaded tolls and unpaid fines and makes it more difficult for the NYPD to identify criminals wanted for other crimes. Additionally, ghost plates create opportunities for public corruption when done with impunity by public employees. **If elected, I will work with the DMV and the NYPD to dedicate enforcement efforts towards this flagrant lawbreaking to improve safety, fairness, and reducing traffic jams.**

Keeping Unsafe Vehicles Out of Parks

Our parks are sanctuaries in an otherwise bustling urban environment, and they should stay that way. This means regulating through-traffic so that only road users operating at appropriate speeds are permitted within the parks. **If elected, I will support efforts to eliminate vehicles that exceed the park system’s statutory 20 miles per hour speed limit—mopeds, scooters, and e-bikes that use high-speed throttles without limiters—from city parks.** Many of these vehicles have motors and technology that is much more powerful than what is reasonable for recreational riders to safely enjoy the park, and I will work with community members and parks officials to ensure everyone obeys the speed limit.

Additionally, there has been a significant rise in commercial e-bike traffic in Central Park in recent years, driven by delivery riders taking advantage of the traverses to go crosstown. This is an inappropriate use of the park infrastructure that endangers other road users and pedestrians. **Instead, this traffic should be re-routed to dedicated lanes along the streets surrounding the park,** creating a safer environment for both delivery riders and the park-going public while providing minimal disruption to local businesses.

Crack Down on Illegal Truck Traffic

New York City’s traffic laws restrict commercial traffic along Park Avenue, in recognition of the potentially catastrophic damage that could occur if the train tunnels below were to buckle under the weight of heavy trucks. In recent years, operators have become increasingly bold in flouting these regulations—not just on Park, but throughout the city, with oversized trucks becoming increasingly common across Manhattan. This disregard for the rules compromises

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safety and quality of life of the surrounding community. **If elected, I will push for automated traffic enforcement targeting commercial traffic along Park Avenue and other highly trafficked corridors, with cameras and sensors tracking the use of dangerous overweight and oversized vehicles and stiff penalties for repeat violators.**