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Let's Take Another Look at Allocating New York's Police Forces

To the Editor:

New York City abides by a 7-2-1 formula that has, though not a city regulation, for the most part determined allocation of police officers assigned to the city police forces. As we begin the new year and preparations for the city's fiscal year 1987 (which starts next July 1), this old formula ought to be reconsidered.

The 7-2-1 formula dictates that, for every 10 police officers budgeted by the city, one must be assigned to the New York City Housing Authority force, two to the Transit Authority force and the other seven to the city's Police Department.

As a result, over the last eight fiscal years, the Transit Police are 34 percent and the Housing Police 24 percent above pre-fiscal-crisis force levels. The New York Police Department, which responds to nearly 50 percent of the complaints on the transit system, is still 8 percent below its pre-fiscal-crisis level.

If the formula continues to be applied in police budgeting and hiring, this will significantly restrict Police Commissioner Benjamin A. Ward's stated plans to return police officers to foot patrol.

The formula has also hurt those city neighborhoods, for example, the northeastern Queens communities where my family and I reside, that do not have Housing Authority projects or subways. The T.A. police have a modest surface unit and generally rely on the city police to deter crime and respond to complaints on buses and bus routes.

Clearly, Commissioner Ward's call for a merger of the three police forces would end the formula's use. While there may be compelling reasons to maintain separate police forces, the New York Police Department ought to have sufficient personnel not only to respond to complaints, but also to meet citywide police needs.

Pilot "C-POP" (community patrol officer program) foot-patrol beats have been well received in those precincts where they have been implemented. Both residents and merchants have voiced satisfaction at the general perception that security -even in so-called quiet neighborhoods - is improved.

If the formula for police-force allocations is not modified, it appears that many city neighborhoods and their residents will continue to be shortchanged on police services. In 1986, when additional police hiring is envisaged, their best allocation among the three departments -housing, transit and New York Police Department - should be reconsidered.

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