



To the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the City of New York:

In conjunction with the student governments of [list of NYC colleges], the United Student Government of Fordham University at Rose Hill calls upon the City of New York to improve mental health and suicide prevention resources in and around the commuter rail stations that serve our respective campuses. We believe these are pressing, current needs: the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a report in 2020 recommending “increase[d] intervention and prevention efforts to address associated mental health conditions” that exponentially rose during the COVID outbreak.<sup>1</sup>**With this in mind, we urge The Metropolitan Transit Authority and City of New York to invest in the expansion and enhancement of this vital part of the city's social infrastructure.**

While the Metro North and Long Island Railroads do use their 'TRACKS' Programs to educate the Greater New York City communities about safety around trains, these programs are narrow in scope and, for the most part, neglect to address the prevalent issue of suicide on MTA- operated properties. Despite lower subway ridership, statistics from 2020 show that there was a drastic increase of track incidents that were linked to mounting “mental health and housing crises”<sup>2</sup>; this must change. In addition to making crisis prevention resources more accessible to MTA customers, it is imperative that the transit authority continues to expand track safety measures in the stations that serve our student bodies and our broader New York City community.

The necessity for change is clear. Suicide hit home at Fordham in 2016, when two students at Fordham Preparatory School tragically ended their lives at Metro-North stations over the course of just two weeks.<sup>3</sup> And these were not isolated incidents: violence and mental health crises in MTA stations still occur to this day, relatively unchecked by the city and transit authority. We, the students of Fordham University and the aforementioned colleges and universities, remind the MTA that suicide is not only devastating, but highly preventable through the expansion of safety measures around trains and accessibility to mental health resources.

We implore that the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and City of New York thoroughly review and consider the following provisions to keep New Yorkers safe:

- The installation of **permanent mental health signage** in the Metro North, LIRR, and Subway stations that serve our campuses. Such signage must be highly visible, provide adequate resources to those in crisis (i.e. 1800-273-8255), and remind New Yorkers that they're never alone. This improvement would be

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<sup>1</sup> *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (August 14, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Jose Martinez, *Subway Ridership Down, But Incidents of People on Tracks on Pace to Top Last Year*, The City (November 2020), <https://www.thecity.nyc/2020/11/22/21589693/subway-people-on-tracks-rising-new-york-city>

<sup>3</sup> Kate Taylor, *Fordham Prep Rattled by 2 Students' Suicides*, The New York Times (Feb 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/04/nyregion/fordham-prep-rattled-by-2-students-suicides.html>



immeasurably beneficial in preventing suicide on the tracks and developing the social relationship between the MTA and the 3 million+ riders it serves daily.

- The **expansion and improvement of emergency assistance 'Help Points'** in all MTA stations.<sup>4</sup>We firmly believe such help points can be improved to meet a wider variety of customer needs: notably, the addition of a '311' or non-emergency crisis button. This would be invaluable in aiding New Yorkers in their day-to-day crises which cannot be adequately addressed by the emergency button or a police response.
- The **reconsideration of protective platform barriers** in MTA stations.<sup>5</sup> With exponential increases in suicides and violence across the system over the past few years,<sup>6</sup> it is irrefutable that the MTA must continue to explore such provisions, especially in the stations that serve our campuses and the surrounding communities.

Ultimately, we issue this letter with a shared passion for serving our New York City community by recognizing and caring for the needs of our peers. We look forward to future partnership with our fellow colleges and the MTA on these critical matters.

Thank you for your consideration,

**The United Student Government at Rose Hill**

*(NYC Student Government Alliance)*

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<sup>4</sup> Since 2018, the MTA has used kiosks known as 'Help Points' in select subway stations to offer commuters service information and emergency assistance at just the press of a button.

<sup>5</sup> In 2017, the MTA began testing such barriers at the Third Avenue subway station in Manhattan. Ultimately, budgetary restraints prevented the city from moving forward with the project, but the necessity for such a measure is nonetheless abundantly clear.

<sup>6</sup> Emma Fitzsimmons, Yet Another Worrisome Subway Statistic: More People Are Going on the Tracks, The New York Times (September 2018), <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/17/nyregion/nyc-subway-tracks-delays.html>>