

January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Attention: Council members of the Executive Committee: Mayor John Tory, Paul Ainslie, Ana Bailão, Gary Crawford, Jennifer McKelvie, Denzil Minnan-Wong, James Pasternak, Michael Thompson

Dear Councillors,

We are writing to urge the City of Toronto to adopt alternatives to police when responding to a variety of urgent calls for assistance.

Policing people experiencing homelessness currently costs the City approximately \$100 million per year. Some cities in the United States as well as Darwin, Australia have had great success by connecting people without housing to social supports rather than police. Toronto has similar programs, but they need to be greatly expanded.

In Toronto, responses for assisting people experiencing a mental health crisis make up just 3% of police calls but 11% of the use of force and 40% of Taser use. Cities that use civilian-led teams such as the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, Oregon have had much better success at a lower cost than sending police to these situations. Toronto has several civilian-led mental health response teams including the Gerstein Centre and the Distress Centres of Greater Toronto but they have long waiting lists.

Another opportunity for change is in responses to situations involving youth. Studies show that Black and Indigenous youth are overpoliced. These interactions have negative impacts throughout the lives of these young people even when they are not convicted of any offence. Toronto has community youth programs that have diverted youth away from crime and towards services they need. However, these programs are limited in their availability and need to be expanded.

Responses to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) also need to be changed. The current response usually involves police arresting the perpetrator. This often puts victims more at risk and deters reporting of these crimes. Alternatively, victim support-oriented interventions that include peer support, counselling and providing resources have had more positive results.

In all of these situations, the City could make these changes while staying within the current financial constraints by reallocating the cost of police responses to community-based services.

Another way to further increase service-based responses is by initiating the steps to reassign 911 services away from police to an independent service provider that can determine the most appropriate team to dispatch.

The statistics cited in this letter are from the summary report *Rethinking Community Safety: A Step Forward for Toronto* (Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, et al.). You can find the full report here: <https://neighbourhoodcentres.ca/sites/default/files/2021-01/Rethinking%20Community%20Safety%20-%20A%20Step%20Forward%20For%20Toronto%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>. This report includes three recommendations to help the City achieve these changes.

Please make the transition to community-based responses wherever possible and reserve police services for situations where their special skills are needed.

Thank you.

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Cc: Councillor Mike Colle, Ward 8