

Street Health

Dear Toronto City Council and Executive Committee,

I am a Housing Support Worker at Street Health. I am writing to you to support and act on defunding the police.

Rates of crime have been going down for roughly the past 20 years in Canada¹, yet our funding towards policing has increased per-capita in Toronto over the past decade². Additionally, most police interactions with the public are non-criminal matters³, and yet the police are disproportionately funded by the City of Toronto to be our frontline responders. The police do not have the resources or means to address what are a variety of complex social issues, like homelessness. Alternatively, they contribute to worsening conditions as they are city employees that specialize in the use of force, which often escalates versus deescalates conflict, and execution of the law, which is rooted in our criminal justice system that focuses on punishment as a primary form of intervention⁴. Punishing people for poverty, however, only further entrenches people in poverty.

With about 16,000 tickets issued to people experiencing homeless in a year, the result is \$2 million in court and police costs for the City of Toronto⁵. Of these tickets issued, 90% will not be paid because it is obviously an ineffective measure to address poverty with fines⁶. This is just one example of how our city wastes resources each year to punish people experiencing homelessness through investing more in our police as first responders.

Redirecting our funds to actually house and support people experiencing homelessness would be far more of a constructive response, as we know that affordable housing is more cost effective and humane than under-housing our community members on the streets and in shelters⁷. Additionally, when other cities have taken the steps necessary towards other non-violent interventions, we see far stronger outcomes for the wellbeing of the community. In cities where they employ social service supports to intervention calls with people experiencing homelessness, arrests dropped by 80%, incarceration by 90%⁸, and time spent in emergency hospital rooms reduced by 60%⁹.

Black Lives Matter has called for 50% of police funding to be redirected towards community resources and until the police disclose in greater detail their expenses, or the city acquires that budget in full, I see no reason to undervalue our community's need for supportive funding over law enforcement. I stress this point particularly so as we know those who are disproportionately impacted by violent interaction with the police are Black and racialized community members¹⁰.

¹ Statistics Canada, "Canada's Crime Rate: Two Decade of Decline," Federal Government of Canada, 2018: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015001-eng.htm>

² Warzecha, M., "Is the Toronto Police Budget Really 'Untouchable?'" TVO, 15 December 2020: <https://www.tvo.org/article/is-the-toronto-police-budget-really-untouchable>

³ Statistics Canada, "Police Resources in Canada, 2018," 3 October 2019: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00015-eng.htm>

⁴ Canadian Civil Liberties Association, "Rethinking Community Safety: A Step Forward For Toronto," Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, 2020: <https://ccla.org/cclanewsites/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rethinking-Community-Safety-A-Step-Forward-For-Toronto-Full-Report-12.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0ZBc9ghJfk3m3jASxq1vFRDWj3hTC-EHpDGLLHABx7xiQV1SvvFamSek1>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pomeroy in Homeless Hub, "Cost Analysis of Homelessness," 2005: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/cost-analysis-homelessness>

⁸ Thomas M. L., et al., "Moore Place Permanent Supportive Housing Evaluation Study: Final Report," University of North Carolina, 2016: http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Moore-Place-Evaluation-Project_Final-Report_4-28-15.pdf

⁹ Cheryl, F., Richardson, J., and Atyeo, H., "Addressing Homelessness Among Canadian Veterans," edited by Nichols, N. and Doberstein, C., (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016):

https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/3.8%20Forchuk%2C%20Richardson%2C%20Atyedo_0.pdf

¹⁰ Ontario Human Rights Commission, "A Disparate Impact: Second Interim Report: Inquiry on Racial Profiling and Racial Discrimination of Black Persons by the Toronto Police Service" (Toronto, ON: Ontario Human Rights Commission,

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Growing rates of income inequality¹¹ and centuries of race discrimination will not be addressed by law enforcement that targets the people most impacted by these issues, with a disproportionate amount of our Black and Indigenous community members experiencing homelessness. A culture shift is needed in how we respond to distress in our community, which privileges care towards the most marginalized members of our community through growing a stronger network of support, which will ultimately benefit our community as a whole.

Sincerely,

Marion Roberts
Housing Support Worker
Street Health

2020), <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/A%20Disparate%20Impact%20Second%20interim%20report%20on%20the%20TPS%20inquiry%20executive%20summary.pdf#overlay-context=en/disparate-impact-second-interim-report-inquiry-ra-cial-profiling-and-racial-discrimination-black>.

¹¹ Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada: <https://www.cpacanada.ca/en/the-cpa-profession/about-cpa-canada/key-activities/public-policy-government-relations/economic-policy-research/income-inequality-canada>

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