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Hello. My name is Stephen Mensah and I am the Education Lead with the Toronto Youth Cabinet. Over the last many years we have seen the rise of Gun Violence in the City of Toronto. Last year alone there were 292 victims of gun violence, and the number of shootings skyrocketed to unprecedented numbers, rising to 490 shootings in the city.

Communities and families continue to suffer from this violence, people young and old do not feel safe to work, play or live in their communities and nothing seems to be changing. Whilst all of this is going on, city council has continuously increased the police budget while community programs designed to prevent violence have struggled to secure funding. They have decided that more police officers in our neighbourhoods, and more discriminatory intelligence aimed against Black and Brown youth, is the way to go. Time and time again it has proved to not amount to anything substantial and is frankly ineffective and a waste of our tax dollars.

In August all three levels of government came together to give the TPS \$4.5 million dollars. The police used that funding for a 15 week initiative; Project Community Space aimed at reducing gun violence. However there was rather an extreme rise in shootings. According to Toronto Police data, the 15 week period when the project had commenced, from August 15th to November 28th, saw the highest number of people shot at 111, compared to the same 15 week period in any year since 2004 (WOW!). This is very disappointing and just another example of throwing money at a problem instead of dealing with its root causes.

In the 2019 budget season, Councillor Matlow proposed doubling the number of youth spaces across the city, which was not adopted by council. The cost of Councillor Matlow's proposal was \$3.25 million, for 10 new spaces in 2019 and 10 in 2020, but council decided that there wasn't enough money and it wasn't a proposal worth spending on. The spaces that were supposed to be created in 2019 cost an estimate \$1.45 million, which is less than the amount council put in for the TPS initiative.

It's amazing how when it comes to investing in community based, proactive solutions to curb gun violence, securing funding is always a challenge, but when it comes to giving more money to the TPS there is never a need for a review or more discussion. This is an issue that needs to be taken with extreme urgency. Just because the violence affects some communities more than others, it does not mean this matter should not be taken seriously, because this is a problem that is of importance to the entire City, and is now also affecting neighbourhoods not historically subject to violence.

It would be in the city's best interest to invest rather in youth hubs, access to recreation, eradicating poverty, more access to food and other essential social services. By investing money in preventive measures rather than more boots on the road and salaries, this approach stands to be more effective. In the words of Toronto Police Chief Saunders, who has said multiple times, "we can't arrest our way out of this violence". So I plead with the committee to stop with the constant increase in the police budget, and to commit to taking real measures that

will curb gun violence. We are tired of turning on our TV's and constantly hearing about the loss of young lives, we are tired of constantly attending funerals. It is incumbent upon you individuals around this table to take the right steps and begin serving in the interests of ALL your constituents. I leave you with these two words, TAKE ACTION! We need it more now than ever. Thank you for hearing me!

** that was 14 words but you get me** (I'll say this to maybe get them laughing lol)

