



To: City of Toronto Councillors and Mayor Tory
From: Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
Re: **Funding Community Safety**

June 26, 2020

Dear Mayor Tory and City of Toronto Councillors,

Toronto Neighbourhood Centres is a city-wide network of twenty-six non-profit community-based agencies with decades (and some with over 100 years) of experience in enhancing community safety, resilience, youth leadership development, harm reduction, conflict resolution, local economic development, mental health supports, and building/operating supportive and affordable housing. We are committed to leveraging these capacities and working with you to do whatever it takes to realize greater levels of community safety.

We are in support of Black Lives Matter and other groups and community members calling for an end to the systemic Anti-Black, Indigenous and people of colour racism in our policing and criminal justice systems. We are writing to urge you to support motions, as of your June 29/30 council meeting, that clearly signal to all Torontonians your/council's intentions to **re-allocate the City of Toronto's 2021 budget resources to community safety strategies that have a proven capacity to enhance all residents' safety, and reduce the likelihood of negative, and too often fatal interactions with the Toronto Police Service.**

1) We first wish to highlight that a robust range of strategies for supporting community safety and providing alternatives to traditional policing already exist, and our community-based sector has the expertise and desire to work more actively with you/the City to expand them.

Our community-based sector has worked on such strategies actively through the years, and we are ready to step up and collaborate with the City to scale up, adjust or refocus all of these interventions as soon as possible. The following interventions summarized by Black Lives Matter Toronto and supported by many other coalitions and groups have already been developed and implemented by community organizations and groups. **Expanding these practices to provide even greater support and safety in our communities is entirely within reach, if you will allocate adequate funding to scale up these interventions:**

- Crisis Intervention and Mad co-led support teams that respond to mental health crises;
- Police-free, community-led, trauma-informed emergency service for people experiencing mental health or psychiatric distress and other forms of crisis;
- Street outreach services that support homeless and street involved people and connect them to appropriate services;
- Shelters, drop-ins, and after school programming in low-income, Black, and Indigenous neighbourhoods;
- Youth outreach, youth diversion and constructive interventions for youth in conflict with educational institutions and legal systems;
- Restorative services, mental health services, and community-run health centres;
- Harm reduction, including safe supply, safe injection / inhalation sites, and harm reduction outreach workers;

- Community-based and trauma-informed emergency service for people who have experienced gender-based violence;
- Civilian transportation safety service and better / safer road infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit;
- Civilian conflict resolution service to replace policing of minor by-law infractions / noise complaints; and
- Providing permanent secure housing options for all people who need housing.

We urge you to include in your June 29/30 motions some explicit direction to City staff to convene and work with your community partners to plan for the expansion of these approaches to community safety, service provision, conflict resolution and violence prevention/response.

2) As a most immediate concern we urge you to advance motions that will bring about a new arrangement so that rapid response teams co-ordinated by CAMH, hospitals and social agencies can respond to mental health crisis calls, instead of police. Moreover, these teams should be first responders even for crises that include weapons (as mental health crisis events frequently do, with scissors, knives, and so forth). Police should not respond to such calls unless/until those teams assess the situation and ask for police assistance. Use of force is significantly higher in responses to people in mental distress than occurs on average across all calls for service. Repeated inquests, studies and research have shown that de-escalation is challenging in a policing context and that adding de-escalation training does not consistently result in de-escalating behaviours for people primarily trained in control techniques. As estimated by the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, "re-assigning the funds now spent by police for this function will probably cover the cost of these units".

3) Additionally, we would suggest that community conversations and education about policing, community safety and funding need to be expanded, and our community-based sector can work with you to make this happen.

We are committing to working actively with you to provide community forums, popularly accessible information and opportunities for discussion so that more and more community members can become familiar with today's realities of policing and community safety. We are mindful of the fact that persistent and tragic loss of life, and extraordinary organizing efforts have helped to create our current moment - providing you with an opportunity to debate and act on these critical themes. Still, far too many community members across our city, especially those who do not encounter/interact with the police very much, if at all, are working without good information or accurate understandings of the activities of our police force.

For example, as the Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, CAMH and others noted in a recent communication to you:

- In Toronto last year, the number of individuals arrested for Criminal Code and Drug related offences was 26,865. This amounts to six people arrested by each of the 4500 uniformed officers a year, or one every two months. Or, assuming that 25 per cent of the officers are detectives, administrators and so forth and 75 per cent are front line officers, then each front line officer arrests eight people a year.
- Officers attended 416,787 calls for service. Using the 25/75 ratio noted above, front line officers each answered 120 calls for service last year. Assuming each worked about 220 shifts in 2019, that's less than one call every shift.

- The vast majority of people charged in Toronto are not charged with serious violent crimes. For example, Statistics Canada data (“Incident-based crime statistics, by detailed violations, police services in Ontario”) demonstrates that in 2018 a total of 29,887 people were charged with Criminal Code violations by the Toronto Police Service, and among those charged, only less than 2 per cent (542) were charged with the following major offences: homicide, attempted murder, aggravated assault, sexual assault (aggravated), sexual assault (weapon or bodily harm), forcible confinement, kidnapping, and extortion.
- There were 30,689 calls Toronto police responded to last year involving a person in mental health crisis. The last four or five people who have died after interactions with Toronto police have been people in mental health crisis, and they have all been Black, Indigenous or people of colour.

This sort of information, along with the alternatives to policing that are available to address a broad range of social challenges, should be better articulated and discussed publicly. Such efforts would support positive, evidence-based deliberation in our communities about the appropriate roles and funding levels for the police service, and how these may compare in terms of cost and effectiveness with other approaches to ensuring community safety.

4) Finally, given the necessity to prioritize City resources available to advance robust alternatives to maintaining community safety, we would urge you NOT to support any motions to purchase body cameras for the police service. The cost of this plan is \$20 – 30 million a year, and studies have shown body-worn cameras do nothing to address questions of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism nor do they change police behaviour. The Toronto police service undertook a pilot project on body worn cameras in 2016 at a cost of \$432,000. The report on the pilot project states ‘there was no significant incident or situation that arose that would have provided an opportunity for the body-worn cameras and associated video to demonstrate value, or lack thereof, for police accountability and public trust.’

The time to act is now, and we are ready to support you in effective and impactful transitions that will expand all Torontonians’ security, solidarity and well-being. **Achieving these goals will require increased resources. We urge you to make clear commitments as a Council that these essential investments will be prioritized and allocated in the City of Toronto’s 2021 operating budget.**

The safety and security of our communities, and particularly community members who are Black, Indigenous, people with disabilities and people of colour, cannot be put at risk for one more moment. We urge you to adopt motions that will enable us to work with you to advance better solutions.

Thank you for considering these perspectives and opportunities. Please contact our executive director, Rob Howarth, at your earliest convenience so that we can move these proposals forward together.

Sincerely,



Rob Howarth
Executive Director
Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
