

## **Written Submission re: Public Presentations on the 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets**

My name is Kathleen Smith, and I am an administrator and frontline worker at a church that works with people who are homeless and poor.

The budget being presented today is, essentially, a status quo budget, with some modest investments. As someone who has been working with folks on the streets during the pandemic, I believe that this status quo budget fails to recognize the state of affairs in our city. COVID-19 itself has created a state of emergency, but it has also exacerbated the crises that were present in Toronto long before March 2020, particularly the housing crisis.

There are currently thousands of Torontonians without a home, and thousands of others who are barely holding onto their housing. This is an emergency, and we need a budget that treats it as such. There have been some positive steps this year, like the new modular housing initiative. But these investments have been modest, and we need much more aggressive investment to ensure that everyone in Toronto has access to safe, dignified, and affordable housing.

As an administrator, I am sympathetic to the challenge of developing a budget in the context of resource constraints. But, in fact, there is one area of the proposed budget where there is a troubling and significant surplus. The police budget has been held stable in this proposed budget, despite the fact that there have been unprecedented calls from Torontonians to redirect funds from policing into other programs that can more effectively and justly promote community safety.

A recent Toronto Neighbourhood Centres report has shown that reducing the role of police in things like mental health calls or calls related to homelessness is both more effective and, significantly for today's purposes, cost saving. This data has been supported by my own experience. I have recently witnessed a number of incidents that suggest that the Toronto Police Service either has an over-abundance of resources, or they aren't able to use their resources efficiently.

On November 22, there was a man yelling on Yonge street. My colleagues and I know him fairly well, and we know that he struggles to regulate and express his emotions. Someone in the area must have been frightened or worried about him, so they called 911. Around 8 officers arrived, and the man was understandably rattled and continued to yell. The more the police engaged with him, the more agitated the man became. He was yelling about coffee, and so my colleague decided to go buy him one. He calmed down as soon as she handed him the coffee, and the officers left shortly afterwards. The most effective solution was a woman with a double-double, but the Toronto taxpayer footed the bill for all those officers and their essentially wasted time.

More recently, I had to call 911 for an overdose. In addition to two paramedics, six police officers also arrived and crowded around the area where our medical team and the paramedics were working. Between the paramedics and our medical staff, we were able to revive and support the person who overdosed. But the Toronto Police Services had sufficient funding from Toronto tax payers to send 8 officers to stand around unhelpfully.

Toronto has a homelessness and affordable housing crisis. In a time of crisis, there is no excuse for a publicly funded service like the police to have a glut of resources. I implore my city council to redirect funds from the Toronto Police Service to fund desperately needed investments in affordable housing.

Thank you.