

Budget Committee Deputation

I moved to the southern U.S. when I was a teenager and experienced a culture shock in many ways, but none more so than adjusting to living in a police state. Over the years, I've realized that Toronto has become one.

Torontonians have been involved in an ongoing battle for political will for years now. Like John Tory has said and as I witnessed during the Toronto Police Board meeting, it's the BIA's and some wealthy homeowners NIMBYism that are asking for the overinflated police budget to be increased, not the average Torontonian. The mayor is willing to help himself by expecting a 37.5% increase for his office. Tory only received 18% of votes from Torontonians, he does not speak for us. And that is why we are pushing back because we know council typically votes for the interests of the wealthy and your patterns are predictable. If you don't want to see people dehumanized around the city, then house them, support them by choosing the humane approach.

City councils blame game has continued for years. The lack of federal or provincial funding is cried out, yet there is enough money in the municipal budget to actually take care of people. Then they blame addictions and mental health problems without recognizing that's mainly the consequence of being unhoused. They have blamed refugees and foreigners because of their racism and inability to recognize why people flee their homes in the first place and our neocolonial role within that. These racist and classist ideologies are what has been used to dehumanize people as others throughout history and allows for the justification for murdering them. Stop the excuses and start saving lives.

After the recent violent encampment eviction at Richmond and Simcoe, the mayor uses his predictable go to speech every time this happens, saying it's "not safe, not healthy, not legal...we offer safe indoor housing" All lies. The reality is that: people are being traumatized by an unnecessary massive police presence accompanied by large machinery, it's more safe and healthy for them than being without a tent, it's not legal because the city decided that, and people are told there is indoor space when there is not. They literally have nowhere to go, life saving belongings and shelters are being destroyed.

We also know that people who are targeted by systemic racism are overrepresented when it comes to police violence. If you support police instead of putting money back into community supports, which we know contributes to crime and poverty prevention, then you are funding white supremacy. Stop the excuses and start saving lives.

When we address poverty and properly fund housing, healthcare, schools, infrastructure, safe consumption sites, transportation, food and clothing access, arts funding, after school programming, and so many other community-based systems, crime rates decrease and people thrive. Yet, year after year, this council continues to deny Torontonians any sense of dignity and prefers to criminalize people and keep them in poverty. You can stop upholding this racist and violent system and start helping people by not supporting the police budget. We can end violence and homelessness if you stop making excuses and start saving lives.

-Rayna Slobodian, M.Ed.