

Toronto Police Accountability Coalition
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To Toronto Police Service Board

December 14, 2023.

Subject: 2024 Operating budget, Board meeting December 19

Please list this as a deputation for December 19.

The chief's report claims that the budget increase requested for 2024 is 1.7 per cent more than 2023, but that is misleading, since the budget for 2024 as presented does not include the pay increases which will result from the 2024 collective agreement negotiations. If we assume the collective agreement will provide a pay increase of 2.5 per cent for 2024, that will add \$25 million to the 2024 budget. (Compensation for 2023 was \$908 million; benefits were a further \$125 million; a 2.5 per cent increase of this amount of just over \$1 billion would cost \$25 million.)

In reality, the police service is asking for an increase of at least 4.2 per cent – or some \$45 million more than in 2023.

The chief is asking for an additional 307 officers and an additional 100 civilians, for a total of 407 additional staff – a very substantial increase. He states this increase is needed because of the a 22 per cent increase in major crime, but the data he presents does not support his conclusion. The chart on page 11 of his report shows that major crime varies from year to year, sometimes up and sometimes down, and with the exception of auto theft, major crime in 2023 was no higher than it was over the last five years and lower than in 2015. (The Toronto Police Association made the same erroneous claim in the flier it distributed to many households in the last few days.)

The chief says he needs more officers because the population of the city has grown so quickly. Yes, the population has grown but serious crime has not. And while he might lament that Toronto has fewer officers per capita than many other cities - comparisons are made with Montreal and Vancouver, as well as with American cities – he never mentions that Toronto has the lowest Crime Severity Index, according to Statistics Canada, of any city in Canada save Quebec City. The number of police officers per capita has no relation to the level of crime or the feeling of safety in a community.

The chief also states that the number of emergency calls have increased so much that police now take an average of 22 minutes to respond to Priority One Calls. But the reason police are not responding more quickly is that they are spending time dealing with matters which are not priorities, and perhaps are not even policing matters at all, matters which should be dealt with by other community agencies, not by the police.

Our analysis below points out a number of areas where police resources are being squandered rather than dealing with serious issues of safety, violence and serious crime. The chief is proposing more of the same rather than looking seriously about what we need police officers for, and how to best spend scarce resources. We discuss the data on crime at the end of this letter.

The Board must find ways to reduce the 2024 police service budget. It must reject the argument that Toronto is a violent city and that only the police can resolve these issues. We propose a serious look at what police do and how we can provide more safety and service to our city while reducing police expenditures.

2. As many have argued, hiring more police officers, as this budget requests, is not a smart strategy. A recent article in *The Conversation* notes: "The continued over-investment in policing is a limited and contradictory approach to safety. For one thing, police forces don't address the root

causes of violence and other harms. Research has shown the “deterrence effect” of policing to be weak, while aggressive policing often impairs the social relations and institutions that normally keep violence and conflict in check.

“Too often, however, city leaders equate safety with policing, and throw public money at an institution that actually creates unsafety for many people while failing to prevent violence and other harms.

The article concludes, “The broad imperative is to significantly reduce police budgets for 2024, while reallocating funding to some of the many services and programs that give people more safety and police less work to do.” See <https://theconversation.com/canadian-cities-continue-to-over-invest-in-policing-217344>

3. The police service must get out of trying to do everything related to how society and communities function, and instead focus on addressing violent threats and crime. This is a necessary change which the Police Board must make.

Here are issues the Police Board must address:

3. a) Mental crisis calls.

Finally a system has been created to divert some of these calls to the Toronto Community Crisis Centre primarily run by the Gerstein Centre. But only 1000 calls were diverted, and 12,000 were handled by police. Many more calls must be diverted so that they can be effectively dealt with by community agencies which can respond better at much lower cost. There is a growing body of evidence from jurisdictions in the United States that community agencies can deal with almost all such calls, and that police do not need to attend to those that they consider violent – community agencies know how to resolve most of these situations without involving police.

The ratio of calls diverted should change, so that 12,000 calls are diverted to the Crisis Centre and 1000 are handled by police. This will create significant savings in the number of officers needed for these tasks. The public will be better served at less public expense, and the police force can shrink.

There are two implications of such a change: funds should be shifted from the police service to community agencies to change this ratio – perhaps \$20 million in 2024 – and the number of police officers required will shrink.

The Police Board should make both these changes in the 2024 budget.

3. b) Youth and neighbourhood policing

The police service states that there were 129 instances of youth pre-charge diversions, or one every third day for all 5000 officers. This is an astonishing low number. Clearly youth diversion is not a priority for the police service.

Keeping youth out of the criminal justice system should be a priority: evidence shows clearly that once a youth is caught in the criminal justice system, life chances deteriorate significantly, at great cost to society and to the individual. The best way to ensure pre-charge diversion is to increase support for community youth services and get police out of this activity.

The ineffectiveness of current police practise can be seen in the Neighbourhood Policing data. Some 246 uniformed officers are assigned to neighbourhood policing, and they made a total of 288 referrals to social agencies during the first nine months of 2023 – just over one per officer during a period of 300 days. This is hardly an efficient use of resources. The police presentation states that many people like neighbourhood policing, but it clearly is more of a public relations exercise than a service which addresses violent crime or makes anyone safer.

Continuing to place so much emphasis on neighborhood policing is not a good use of limited public money. The Police Board should scale back community policing and take some of the funds in the police budget devoted to this purpose - \$20 million represents about half the cost in 2024 – and ensure it is used for youth and community services, while reducing the number of officers by about 125.

3. c) Homelessness and drug overdoses

The police service presentation does not address the number of officers and the time spent on these kinds of calls. One suspects both are significant. Again, these calls are much better handled by non-police personnel, and the public funds provided to these community agencies than to the police.

The Police Board should address this issue by securing more information from the police service, then make the appropriate adjustments in reducing the number of officers and relinquishing the funds involved, perhaps some \$30 million a year, to agencies best qualified to address these issues.

3. d) Public events – parades, demonstrations, etc.

The police service states it dealt with about 3600 such events in 2023. The cost was \$30 million, assigning 103 uniformed staff and 40 civilians. These events clearly need to be staffed, but it is a significant waste of resources to require so many armed police officers at these events. Surely most staff at these events could be those who are not uniformed officers, at significantly less cost, probably \$20 per hour less per staff member. Some events may require more officers than other staff, but most will require only a few officers to manage other trained non-professional staff.

The Police Board should immediately change the ratio at these events to be 40 officers and 103 civilians, thus reducing the number of uniformed

officers required, and saving significant amount of money – perhaps \$10 million in 2024, as well as freeing up 63 officers.

3. e) Police patrol

The chief reports that about half the budget - \$511 million – is spent on patrol and 911 responses, involving 1600 uniformed officers and 885 civilians. Random patrol, driving around the city to see what is going on, is a great waste of time, money and police resources. Fire departments stopped doing random patrols more than a century ago. Studies show that patrol work does nothing to reduce crime, and it does not make people feel any safer. (Some people feel more unsafe with police patrol.)

The Board should indicate it wishes to stop random patrols, with significant savings in staff and public money. Instead, police should be available for priority responses, and in all likelihood, fewer officers than 1600 would be required for this purpose.

3. f) Traffic and ticketing

Do we really need armed officers to be ticketing parked cars (as shown in the photo accompanying the police service presentation at the budget sub-committee meeting on November 27)? The chief reports that \$63 million is spent in on traffic and parking – 319 uniformed officers and 80 civilians, and he proposes hiring an additional 10 officers to deal with traffic congestion.

Do we really need officers with a gun, a taser, a baton and body armour to be doing this work? **The Board should start by reversing this ratio to 80 uniformed officers and 319 civilians, and refuse the request to expand the number of officers. Toronto parking officers can do most of this work just as effectively for much less money.**

The police should concentrate on violent crime and community safety, not on traffic management.

3. g) Body cameras

The police service report that 100 hours of video is produced by Toronto police every hour of every day. Astounding. The chief is now proposing that 10 more officers be added to process this data. One can hardly believe that this is a useful way to spend public money, often just to show that the officer has not done something which is contrary to regulations or the law.

No cost is given for the taping, storage, or analysis. **The Board should secure a cost figure for this and then determine how it can be reduced.**

3. h) Premium pay

Since the police force expanded by 200 officers in 2023, the amount spent for premium pay in 2023 was \$59 million budgeted but another \$30 was spent, for a total of \$89 million. It seems the more the police force expands, the more is spent on premium pay. The chief budgets \$59 million for 2024, but surely that is unrealistic given past experience. It is clear that a major rethink is required of how police spend their time. Business as usual is not a good strategy.

The above recommendations in this section propose reducing the number of officers by 400 – 500, and not expanding the police force by 300. It calls for hiring some civilians, but generally it proposes transferring work now done by police officers to community services, at much lower cost and much more effectiveness.

These are the changes the Board must make to provide better policing and better community safety in Toronto.

4. Other comments on police spending

The following issues should also be addressed by the Board:

4.1) Suspensions without pay

The current practise of suspending officers facing criminal charges or disciplinary offenses only if they are fully paid must be ended. Instead the chief should be authorized to suspend officers without pay, as now occurs in Alberta. The Association of Chiefs of Police in Ontario has made this demand for several years, but the provincial government has always refused to make this change. The Board and the service should press for this change, at least for Toronto.

The police service probably has a firm figure of what suspension with pay cost in 2023. The annual savings in Toronto would probably be in the order of \$12 million. As well, suspension without pay will help to curtail the drawn-out process of resolving suspension disputes, now often involving years of delays and appeals since the officer is being fully paid during this process. This should add another \$1 million to the savings.

4. 2) Dispense with two officers in a car after dark

In 2019, agreement was reached with the Police Association to loosen the rule requiring two officers in a car after dark. The agreement stated 'Where the parties agree that officer and public safety will not be compromised, they may mutually agree to modify or waive the application of the two officer patrol car requirement in order to improve the capacity of the Service to more flexibly meet operational demands.' Nevertheless, the general practice remains that there will be two officers in a car after dark.

It is really unfortunate the chief never mentions this issue in his budget report.

Some 97 per cent of calls for police service do not involve violence, and for those calls the police response should not involve two officers in a car. Using this approach, some 200 officers could be freed up with only one officer in a car during nighttime shifts for these calls. **The savings in 2024 if dispensing with the rule of two officers in a car after dark were implemented immediately would be considerable since 200 fewer officers would be needed on the force – in the order of \$35 million a year.**

4. 3) Disband the mounted unit

The mounted unit is a service which is not necessary in today's police service. It serves mostly a public relations role, and any policing functions it provides such as searching rough terrain can be provided in other ways, such as by drones. As well, putting horses in danger when these functions are better served by a human or machine is unreasonable.

The annual cost of the mounted unit is \$6 million. The unit should be disbanded.

5. A comment on crime rates.

The police service report to the budget committee tries to argue that the Violent Crime Index is a serious problem for Toronto, but yet it does not provide an appropriate context. Statscan produces the Crime Severity Index, which looks at criminal charges that result in imprisonment, basing the index on the number of such crimes per 100,000 people.

The Violent Crime Severity Index shows a small increase from 2018 to 2022: 83, 90, 88, 93, 97. But it is not evenly distributed across the country. In Ontario, for instance, the severe violent crime index is 60, 61, 55, 56, 58 – substantially lower than the rest of the country, and lower in 2022 in Ontario than in 2018 and 2019.

The Ontario picture is mirrored in Toronto where Violent Crime Severity Index is 79, 78, 66, 65, 75, showing a large increase from 2021 to 2022, but down from 2018 and 2019. Kingston, on the other hand, shows a higher violent crime index: 73, 67, 74, 77, 84. Toronto has the lowest Violent Crime Severity Index of any city in Canada, except for Quebec City. And this is the case even though Toronto has fewer officers per capita than most other cities. As many commentators have noted – although the Toronto police service does not – the rate of crime and the number of officers have little relationship to each other.

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This budget cycle gives the Police Board the opportunity to look closely at what police currently do, and make changes to have police begin to concentrate on violent threats and crime, leaving other activities to other agencies and services which can provide better community security and safety for much less money and much better results.

We challenge the Police Board to begin making these necessary changes, particularly in these times of financial restraint.

Yours very truly,

John Sewell
for Toronto Police Accountability Coalition