

To the Council, the Mayor and Councillors, of the City of Hamilton, Ontario:

I hope this finds you well. I write as a non-Native, a life-long resident on Anishinaabeg land in Hamilton, Ontario. I write as a parent of four children. I write as a person who loves Jesus and sees in His life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection a way to love neighbours as one's self and so I write this letter to you, as an attempt to do so, however I falter.

I write in regards to the complete abolition of the Hamilton Police Services (HPS) and request that the Council of the City of Hamilton submit an application to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission (OCPC) to abolish the HPS. Under section 40 (1) of the *Police Services Act* (PSA), 'A board may terminate the employment of a member of the police force for the purpose of abolishing the police force or reducing its size if the Commission consents and if the abolition or reduction does not contravene this Act'. Such a process begins with an application to the OCPC by the municipality; both the OCPC Registrar, which I have contacted to clarify whether the municipality or the police-services board makes the application, to which their office has replied that the municipality has the authority, and the 2008 law-suit between the Kenora Police Services Board and the OCPC (2008 CanLII 51772 [ON SC]) make clear that the municipality, and not the police-services Board, has the authority to abolish policing services. A request for an application to the OCPC from the council of the city of Hamilton is neither frivolous nor vexatious as, under s. 4 (2) of the PSA,

'Adequate and effective police services must include, at a minimum, all of the following police services:

1. Crime prevention.
2. Law enforcement.
3. Assistance to victims of crime.
4. Public order maintenance.
5. Emergency response'

and, for greater clarity, 'with the Commission's approval, the council may adopt a different method of providing police services' (5 [1], ss. 6).

The mis-use of municipal taxes, the examples of precedent, the amplification of such a call for police abolition by Hamilton activists and the Black Lives Matter, Toronto Chapter, and the betterment of public-health are all reasons why this abolition must occur.

Currently, the HPS swallows the largest percentage of municipal tax levies, 14.8 cents of every municipal tax dollar, and is, as of 2019, sitting on a tax surplus of approximately \$1.7 million. In 2009, the HPS' projected actual budget was \$1,237,930 and its 2010 base budget was \$921,740, a decrease of 21.2%, but in 2011 that budget increased by 0.4%, a budget which has continued to increase. By 2020, the city-approved policing budget was \$171,000,000 as the HPS was asking for \$24,000,000 for a new investigative-services division/forensic facility and, in 2025, is projected to request another \$25,000,000 for a new building for Division 4 (Police Station 40). Instead of spending 14.8 cents per municipal-tax dollar on policing, that money ought to be spent on education, public health, and public housing or spent in accordance with the decisions of those who are most affected by policing. One possible approach, about which I have written to my ward councillor, John-Paul Danko, is the creation of a municipal peace-tax fund, similar to what Conscience Canada has created for federal tax re-direction from national defence, into which those municipal taxes could be re-directed from policing toward community care and public-health supports and he is awaiting a response in its regard from the city's finance department; this fund, were it to be created, ought to be overseen by representatives who are consulted about and most affected by the changes that the abolition of policing would bring to their communities. These costs and their increases, in sum, are fundamentally an unjust use of taxes and do not provide any protection whatsoever for the very communities whom the police are sworn to protect. A report from the police-services board to be received at a later date in regards to the impact of a 20% budget cut, some \$34,296,070.00, is not at all equivalent to the complete re-direction of the 2020 HPS' budget of \$171,000,000.00 toward public-health and community care and it is the latter amount that matters much more than a symbolic action and a budget cut. To paraphrase Desmond Cole, a 20% reduction in the police budget is only a 20% reduction in suffering.

Also, requests made to the OCPC to abolish police services are not at all unusual. In 2020, Orangeville, Ontario made a request. In 2018, West Nipissing, Wingham, Amherstberg (whose policing was assumed by Windsor's) and Espanola did, preceded by Midland, in 2015, and Dryden, in 2014. The earliest record of these requests is from Port Hope in 2013, according to the Canadian Legal Information Institute, accessible online at canlii.org. Though these requests for policing have been assumed mostly by the Ontario Provincial Police, under s. 5 (1) of the PSA, noted above, a different method of providing police services may be used. This different method of caring for communities may and should not require the presence of any policing whatsoever and this different method should be constructed in conversation with those Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in Hamilton who are most affected by daily and constant surveillance by the Hamilton Police Services. In response to the calls of some Hamiltonians for more police presence as the risk to their private properties, whether dwelling-place or automobile, through break-and-enters increases or to their perception of public property's sanctity besmirched by the vandalism of parks, I would offer only this statistic: in 2014, the weighted clearance rate by Hamilton Police Services was 33.66 and, by 2018, the latest year available on Statistics Canada, that rate had dropped to 32.53; over that same period of time, the violent crime severity index increased from 69.17 to 81.05. In short, fewer crimes have been solved by the Hamilton Police Services and more violent crimes are being committed; with these statistics in hand, it is clear that policing, in whatever manifestation it is being offered, is not and has never been a solution. In personal correspondence on Wednesday, May 20, 2020, with Police-Constable Patrick Mitchell (Badge # 985) of the Hamilton Police Services, a reduction in community policing is not an option, I was told, unless it is a concern shared by a majority of the ward and brought to the police services' attention by way of ward councillors. Though, as P.-C. Mitchell opines, 'it would be almost impossible to adjust policing needs based on a small consensus, or individual constituent basis', it is more than clear that these demands stem from much more than a small consensus or an individual constituent.

Moreover, Hamilton activists and the Black Lives Matter movement have already called for the abolition of, and not merely the de-funding of, the Hamilton Police Services, so this letter serves only as an amplification of that call. In that regard, I would repudiate the comments of Councillor Collins, as noted in Samantha Craggs' 11 Jun 2020 C.B.C. article, that abolishing police is 'nonsensical'. To comment in that way on the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized people at the hands of Hamilton Police Services is to minimize their experiences and dismiss their stories completely. There is a long history of struggle in regards to the abolition of police and it would serve Councillor Collins and the council-at-large well to become more aware and conversant with the history of that struggle in particular, as it is a struggle that addresses many of Councillor Nann's questions in regards to the kind of humane, social, and care-centred society for which I and others struggle for the sake of our and others' children and for our and others' lives. It is a struggle that includes the complete replacement of the Hamilton Police Services with, as Black Lives Matter activists and others from time immemorial have demanded, a demilitarized and community-based method that doesn't put Black, Indigenous, or racialized residents in Hamilton at risk.

Finally, the experiences of people in mental-health crises and otherwise at the hands of the Hamilton Police Services must not be forgotten. The shooting of Robyn Garlow, who wielded a knife; the shooting of Tony Divers, who was unarmed, as well as of Quinn Macdougall; the shooting of Steve Mesic, who held a shovel; the shooting of Kenneth Lyon, of Andreas Chinnery, of James Kiteley, and of Phonesay Chanthachak: all of these people, these stories, these lives did not require nor seek an end at the hands of police but all needed care and love and communities that supported them and the resources to create for themselves and their communities lives worth living. At the root of the demand to abolish policing is precisely that: access to resources and care for one's self and others so that suffering is eased and lives are again made worth living, freely and joyfully.

To conclude, I look forward to your action in these regards: Abolish policing by submitting an application to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission to abolish the Hamilton Police Services completely.

Thank you,

Joshua Weresch
Anishinaabeg land (Hamilton, Ontario)

12 June 2020