

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Request to review and support requests of Defund the Police advocacy group

From: Verhovsek, Madeleine

Sent: June 12, 2020 12:04 AM

To: Wilson, Maureen <Maureen.Wilson@hamilton.ca>; Office of the Mayor <mayor@hamilton.ca>

Cc: Kojo Dampitey <kdampitey@hcci.ca>

Subject: Request to review and support requests of Defund the Police advocacy group

Dear Mayor Eisenberger and Councillor Wilson,

As a concerned resident in Ward 1, I am writing to amplify and support the message I have heard loud and clear from my Black friends and colleagues, and from anti-racism advocates in Hamilton - the call to Defund the Police.

As you know, members of our Hamilton community who are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) are more likely to have negative experiences with the Hamilton Police Service (HPS) than are White Hamiltonians. A number of experiences have been documented in local media in recent years, and several show frightening similarities to recent tragic, high-profile police killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Chantel Moore in Edmundston, New Brunswick.

In response to decades of discriminatory treatment at the hands of police services of people who are BIPOC, homeless, LGBTQ2S+ and/or living with disability, a group of young, engaged citizens have put forth a call to Defund the Police in the City of Hamilton, outlining a number of carefully considered demands, including a call to reduce the HPS budget and direct funds into "initiatives fighting against food insecurity, racism and towards more affordable housing & other social services."

While, as a physician and educator, I do not claim to have expertise in policing practices or budgets, I know from careful personal study and consideration of this issue, along with numerous conversations with racialized friends, colleagues and patients, that there is universally a "double-standard" experienced by racialized individuals in their experiences with the police. As such, as a White woman in Hamilton, I know that I am living in a privileged and parallel universe with regards to my experiences with and perceptions of (and by) HPS. I have never been carded. I have never been stopped for minor vehicle infractions (although I most certainly have forgotten to signal a lane change on occasion, and I have inadvertently driven around in a car with burnt out brake light). I have never been approached or questioned when hanging around in public spaces with other White people. None of these things have happened to me, nor have they ever happened to other members of my immediate family who are also White. However, these experiences – and sometimes worse – occur far too regularly for racialized members of our community, and police discrimination is just one of many forms of racial injustice that needs to be immediately addressed in our city.

I would respectfully ask that you review and support the requests of the Defund the Police advocacy group. Ideally these actions would come as part of a comprehensive City of Hamilton anti-racism action plan, spanning all city services and departments. In our diverse city, we cannot afford to let systemic racism hold back the gleaming potential of our racialized community members.

Sincerely,

Dr. Madeleine Verhovsek, BSc, MD, FRCPC