

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Delegation to City Council re: defunding the police and Councillor Collins's motion

From: Avril McMeekin

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To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Subject: Delegation to City Council re: defunding the police and Councillor Collins's motion

Dear Mayor Eisenberger and members of Hamilton City Council,

I am writing both as a private citizen and on behalf of the community coalition HWDSB Kids Need Help, with whom I am not affiliated, to offer my perspectives first on Councillor Chad Collins's motion requesting a review by the HPS about what a 20% budget reduction would like look like, and second on the responsive motion and demands compiled by this group, which I unequivocally support.

While any reduction to the HPS budget will undoubtedly provide positive community effects, 20% seems to me an arbitrary figure, suggesting that this motion is not in good faith. Although I don't believe a 20% reduction would solve the systemic problems of policing, either locally or structurally, a commitment to work towards that reduction would show that Hamilton City Council in conjunction with the Police Services Board are committed to moving forward from the mess we are in – the mess that growing police budgets, the criminalization of poverty, the militarization of our institutions, and the unchecked power of the police have led us to.

But rather than use the city's time and resources to swiftly address the crisis of justice we are in, Councillor Collins's motion does not address the demands of the community but instead only distracts from them, not just wasting time and resources but funneling them directly to the very institution we demand you meaningfully divest from. I am not interested in the Hamilton Police Services Board's input on how money should be divested and reallocated; I want my community to determine where this money should go.

During the Police Services Board of June 11, Mr. Collins spoke condescendingly of the demands that more than 3,000 community members have already signed on to (a number that will continue to grow), suggesting that defunding the police was a radical, fringe belief that his Ward 5 constituents were wholly uninterested in. Frankly, I find this difficult to believe. I have been doing the work of having conversations around defunding the police with people from all walks of life, from my parents to old high school friends to friends of friends on Facebook, and it's been my experience that after thirty seconds of explaining what this could look like, people are immediately on board.

I think you will find, Mayor Eisenberger, that as the Hamilton community continues to coalesce around the global movement for racial justice and progresses in its organizing at the local level (I'm excited to see this happening all around me as we speak!), that more and more people will speak out about the need to defund the police and finally wrest back control of our community from an overmilitarized municipal police force that has a long record of police brutality and human rights complaints. In my view, Mr. Collins's assertion that his constituents demand *more* policing is unfounded, and I encourage you and the rest of council to not waste any more time with meaningless studies and delays, particularly in light of the the events of Pride 2019 and subsequently HPS's internal Pride report, which have already deeply eroded trust with Hamilton's marginalized communities with

respect to the police (to assume that this trust ever existed is generous, but certainly things have taken a steep downturn recently). I encourage you, rather, to have the courage to act swiftly and decisively in response to the unprecedented and global movement against police brutality and for racial justice, and to immediately work towards defunding the police.

At this point I would like to reiterate the demands compiled by the community, which are as follows:

- We call on the city of Hamilton to defund the Hamilton police.
- We call on the city of Hamilton to invest the tax dollars that would have otherwise gone to the police towards initiatives fighting against food insecurity, racism and towards more affordable housing.
- We call on the City of Hamilton to ensure that HPS are not ticketing houseless people for existing in public.
- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services halt all purchases with tax dollars of weapons (guns, rifles, etc).
- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services cease the ticketing and surveilling of homeless and disabled people in Hamilton, and that there be a moratorium on the hiring of police constables in Hamilton given the documented over-surveilling of homeless people during the pandemic.
- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services stop surveilling communities, and that they halt the expenditure of tax dollars on high tech surveillance equipment.
- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services stop targeting and criminalizing activists and communities pushing back against Yellow Vesters and other forms of white supremacy.
- We call on McMaster University (President & Board of Governors) to immediately terminate Glenn De Caire's contract. De Caire was forced to resign from Hamilton police after he was caught saying incredibly racist things to other police officers. De Caire also has a history of violent policing that targets houseless people as well as Black people.
- In line with the demands of the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board Kids Need Help Coalition, we demand that the HWDSB immediately remove School Resource Officers (SROs) out of all schools and fully fund a public review of police violence that occurred in their schools.
- We demand that the school board refrain from calling the cops on kids.
- We demand that the school board collect and release data that documents the disciplinary action against students by race and gender.
- We demand that the school board implement a community run alternative to disciplinary action based on the principles of restorative justice.

- We demand that the provincial police act be rewritten to give municipalities full control over police boards. Currently, in Hamilton, the Hamilton Police Services operates as an autonomous body, giving municipalities little to no oversight in terms of what they invest in and the ways that they militarize themselves.
- We demand that the province of Ontario work with grassroots groups to divest taxpayer money across the Province (Hamilton - \$171M, Ottawa - \$319M, Waterloo - \$182M, Halton Region - \$162M, London \$123M, Niagara - \$154M, Sudbury - \$63M) from policing and invest it towards community initiatives with the goal of moving completely toward transformative justice practices.
- We demand that the Special Investigations Unit, which has a provincial mandate, needs to be 100% composed of people living in the city with which the investigation is being conducted.
- We demand that the Special Investigations Unit needs to be composed completely of Black, racialized and Indigenous peoples with no current or former ties to the policing sector.
- The SIU must begin collecting and publicly releasing race-based statistics on all fatalistic encounters between police officers and civilians. No more inquiries-- direct action needs to be taken as a result of the investigation into anti-Black racism that occurred in the 90's and again in 2014 with the establishment and subsequent defunding of the Anti-Racism Directorate.
- In light of COVID-19, We demand that all prisoners being held and who are awaiting trial at the Barton Jail facility be released immediately, and that the outrageous costs of ankle monitors and other means of surveilling those who are released be waived.

Mr. Mayor, I am sure I am not the only person who watched the Police Services Board meeting for the first time ever today, and although I found Councillor Collins's tone dismissive and downright mocking at times, I want to thank him for inspiring myself and others to get more educated on the (unfortunately structurally opaque) police budget in Hamilton and do whatever we can to defund the police and take back the power that has so long resided with a brutal and corrupt regime at the expense of our city's most vulnerable communities.

Sincerely,

Avril McMeekin