

My name is Karlie Rogerson and I am a Beasley resident in Ward 2 as well as a professional working in ward 3 and 4 communities. I am sending a pre-recorded video in support of the call to defund the Hamilton Police.

I am speaking today to express that I support Councillor Nann and Wilson's call to defund the police and prioritize investment in community safety and wellbeing. I will also be including a brief outline of my reasoning for the support by highlighting my concerns about our current structure as well as some suggestions as to where here in Hamilton we can reallocate funds.

Concern #1: Wellness Checks

I am concerned about the amount of fatal encounters that have been happening in our very own country when it comes to law enforcement doing wellness checks. More specifically here in Hamilton I am worried about our systems currently in place for wellness checks.

Causes for Concern:

I am someone who has been in crisis before and have experienced first hand how relevant services have been overloaded with calls and do not have the capacity to provide essential care.

I am someone who works with vulnerable people in our communities, I am aware of relevant services to access if someone is in crisis and upon attempting to access those services on their behalf I was directed to call 911 where police were dispatched.

Suggestions:

First, Reallocate funds into services such as COAST and Barrett centre so that they are able to provide relevant care to our populations that are in crisis or in need of a wellness check.

Second, Reallocate funds into our mental health services such as St.Joesph's West Fifth campus as well as the Youth Wellness Centre. Allowing them to continue to provide preventative care resulting in less people being in crisis

And Third to Reallocate funds into community services that can provide front line workers in ALL relevant fields training on how to safely connect a person in crisis to appropriate crisis service that are not law enforcement such as COAST or Barrett Centre.

Concern #2: The state of our Neighbourhood Action Strategy (NAS)

Our priority neighbourhood hubs outlined in the NAS have been in limbo with no concrete plan or guidance as neighbourhoods have been stripped of their community development workers. These community hubs were put in place for a variety of reasons, one of them being to ultimately lower crime (lowering need for law enforcement) by engaging communities in meaningful ways and allowing their residents to feel connected.

Causes for Concern:

Many communities under the NAS developed concrete strategies for crime reduction within their communities. These hubs were not provided enough resources to fulfill all of these identified strategies.

The NAS has been in limbo with little guidance. The last report was published in 2017 and residents are still unsure about the state of these hubs limiting their abilities to develop their communities.

Suggestions:

First to Reallocate funds back into community hubs allowing them to hire community developers with a focus on community safety and wellbeing.

And second to Reallocate funds into hubs allowing them to engage with their residents in conversations and events focused on community safety and wellbeing. Especially amongst our community residents who have experienced systemic racism. Empowering resident led approaches and enabling their voices to be heard.

Concern #3:

While working in both McQuesten and Keith communities I have heard stories first hand from many youth between the ages of 12-24, these stories involved their experiences with law enforcement, municipal services, and other publicly funded services.

Cause for Concern:

One, Youth who were sharing these experiences were sharing experiences that highlighted examples of structural racism and other forms of discriminations based on their identities. I would especially like to highlight that many discriminations were toward our LGBTQ+ populations.

Two, Youth did not feel safe sharing these experiences with individuals who were part of other systems including the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board as they have also faced similar structural racism and discrimination based on their identities within other services here in Hamilton.

Three, Youth felt comfortable sharing their experiences in community based programs but many of these programs are severely underfunded and struggle to maintain the capacity to offer these spaces.

Suggestions:

If and when reallocating funds we need to involve the community in evaluating where we are sending funds to ensure that we are not funding alternative systems with systemic racism and other forms of discrimination.

Communities should be consulted to identify priority service providers and organizations they feel confident can help ensure safety and wellbeing of their communities

Funds should be reallocated to grassroots organizations and service providers who are providing meaningful spaces for vulnerable people impacted by systemic racism and other forms of discrimination

A motion to evaluate our municipal government, our municipal services as well as other major service providers that are publicly funded to identify systemic racism and other forms of discrimination with a commitment to develop an action plan to eliminate systemic racism and other forms of discrimination from our city.

In conclusion I believe I have showcased some concerns as well as some suggestions to help guide discussions on and explain what I mean when I say I am for defunding the police. In saying that I would also like to express that when saying I am for defunding the police I am not saying I am for eliminating law enforcement. Mental health and wellness checks and community engagement to reduce crime should be reallocated to professionals in our city who are already doing that work. A major concern is that police are offering too many services, and many of those services are overlapping. In terms of systemic racism it is an issue facing multiple sectors within our city including but not limited to Hamilton Police Services and we as a city need to commit to fixing our systems to eliminate it.

Thank you,

Karlie Rogerson