

Thursday, August 5, 2020

Written Submission to:

General Issues Committee – August 10, 2020  
City of Hamilton  
Hamilton, Ontario

**c/o Office of the City Clerk: [clerk@hamilton.ca](mailto:clerk@hamilton.ca)**

Dear GIC Members:

Regarding: Defunding the Hamilton Police Services

My name is Vilma Rossi and I am a resident of Ward One. This letter is submitted in support of the calls to defund the Hamilton Police Services.

My concerns regarding police services' ballooning budgets and expanding powers intensified during Premier Michael Harris's government. And year after year since then, police budgets have expanded – vacuuming up resources from increasingly precarious social and health services.

The history of policing is indisputable: police have always existed to protect colonial settlers and their/our property. Police services were established to facilitate the colonization of Indigenous peoples, the theft of their land and their forced relocation onto reserves. With time, police powers were expanded to include 'slave patrols' when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (formerly known as the North West Mounted Police) was established in the 1800s.

This history is very clearly present in today's policing and results in the criminalization of Black and Indigenous people rather than adhering to the policing motto of 'to serve and to protect'. Instead of ensuring the safety of Indigenous and Black community members, these communities are the targets of racial profiling and of extreme violence that has resulted in death. The deaths of D'Andre Campbell and Regis Korchinski-Paquet are two tragedies in and amongst many others that have resulted from interactions with members of various police services.

Police reform has not worked. We have seen decades of special inquiries, taskforces, commissions and reports. And still violence against members of the community continue at the hands of police officers while many politicians voice 100% support for police rather than doing their due diligence to hold police services and individual police officers accountable when violence is enacted against community members.

Policing has not resulted in safer communities; in fact, the opposite is true. Poverty has been criminalized. Structural and systemic inequities have been ignored while police are given more and more power, weapons and resources which, all too frequently, are used against people who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, poor, unhoused, living with abusive partners, or simply engaged in peaceful dissent.

It is unconscionable that the City of Hamilton will spend \$171 million on the HPS budget but only \$44.3 million on housing services at a time when year-long waitlists for affordable housing exist.

It is unconscionable that the City of Hamilton will spend \$171 million on the HPS budget but only \$4.8 million on unhoused people while people are living in tents in encampments that are being threatened with removal.

It is unconscionable that while people are forced to live in unsafe or inadequate housing – or live in tents on the street – the HPS provides better housing to horses in their mounted unit than to some members of the Hamilton community.

It is unconscionable that the City funds the HPS ACTION team, which engages in ticketing poor people and carding, surveilling and harassing young, Black, Indigenous and racialized people in Hamilton's downtown core. The purpose of the ACTION team is to ensure that the downtown core is palatable to white affluent suburban restaurant and theatre goers (pre-Covid) at the expense of poorer members of the Hamilton community.

Policing will not result in a safer more equitable community no matter how huge their budget.

What will result in safer, more equitable, more caring and compassionate livable communities is well-funded anti-racism services such as the HARRC, sexual assault centres and shelters, a wide array of affordable and accessible recreational programs for youth and for members of various marginalized (including newcomer) communities, a safe space or community hub for historically marginalized communities; including, the 2S-LGBTQ+ communities, safe injection sites, affordable housing and healthy food options for every child and every adult living in Hamilton. These are the activities and services that help community members feel included and engaged and improve their/our quality of life. Currently, many of these services are simply surviving on shoestring budgets while police budgets balloon.

How does the misplaced priority of increased funding for the HPS and precarious funding for social and health services make sense at a time when the Covid pandemic lays bare the social inequities that exist?

As a resident of Hamilton, I join with others in demanding:

- An immediate 20% reduction in the Hamilton Police Service budget.
- Reallocation of these funds to social and health services including sexual assault centres, shelters and appropriate housing for people who are currently unsheltered.
- Full transparency and accounting of the line-by-line police budget.

The above demands are entirely do-able and practical and will demonstrate a commitment to addressing long-standing, unaddressed social and health issues that impact the quality of life for Hamilton residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Vilma Rossi  
Ward One Resident