

Wendy [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Hamilton, ON,
Ph: [REDACTED]

Mayor Fred Eisenberger, Chair &
Members,
Hamilton Police Services Board
115 King William Street,
Hamilton, ON
L8N 4C1

c/o kirsten.stevenson@hamilton.ca

September 14, 2020

Re: Defunding Police Services

Please accept this submission as a contribution to discussions about defunding Police Services. I am of the opinion that Police perform essential, valuable services to keep our communities safe and should not be defunded.

Defunding Police Services may result in firing good people, and that would not address systemic issues, because systemic intolerance is a societal phenomenon. It is complex, uncomfortable, cumbersome and larger than Police Services. It is rooted in you and me and the daily acceptance of our small intolerances. When we are rude to service and wait staff, impatient with the elderly woman in the grocery store who blocks the aisle and moves too slowly. When we raise our voices angrily at the person on the telephone whose first language is not English. When we are outraged by drivers "who obviously can't drive", so we honk our horns and thrust our middle fingers self righteously.

Human nature being what it is, we forget about our daily, small transgressions while raising our collective voice if a story is bad. And so we should. But we also seem to forget to say "thank you, well done", if an experience ends well. For every bad story there are countless good ones. I have a story about the Police Services that ended well. I have debated about sharing this story because it exposes me, but not speaking up on behalf of good people would be unconscionable.

This is my story about the Police. It is about compassion and grace, efficiency, professionalism and human kindness.

My long time partner has dementia. He can neither remember if he ate or bathed. And sometime during the day of [REDACTED], he forgot that he cannot drive a car. None the less, sometime after 9:15 am, after I had left for work, he took the keys to the other car – I had left

them in plain sight – and he drove away. All the way from [REDACTED], where he was found many hours later.

Recounting the events of the day and evening cause me a great deal of pain. Not because of the Police, but because of my own feelings, overrun by pride. Let me list them: fear, guilt, embarrassment, and yes, the worst of them, shame. Shame for my partner's behaviour, shame for my own neglect, shame for feeling ashamed. Guilty for not doing more. Embarrassed because this is no longer our secret. Fear of being exposed. Fear of paralysis. Fear of tragic endings.

I deceived myself by thinking my partner was just around the corner, that he would walk in the door at any minute. After an hour and 30 minutes, 5:00 pm, the better part of my pride realized that it wasn't about us. Others could be in danger. Controlling dementia, like other diseases of the mind, is like holding the wind. You think you've looked after things, and then you realize you haven't. I needed help.

The Police responded immediately. They searched my house and yard, twice. Two different teams. They asked questions about our friends and family, about our relationship, whether my partner was depressed or suicidal. They canvassed the neighbourhood, they searched locally, in all the places we had been recently, or where he may have gone because he remembered them from the past. The Police checked his banking records, they sent out a bulletin to all of the police, all over the province. They gathered pictures of my partner to prepare a release to the papers, in the event that he was not found soon. The Police did everything possible to find my partner before harm came to him or others.

I have no idea how long my partner was on the road, and neither does he. Around 11:00 pm, tow truck drivers found him driving the wrong way on a highway in [REDACTED].

Tow trucks boxed him in, and called the OPP. The OPP called [REDACTED] Police, who called [REDACTED] Police. And then it was arranged for me to be driven by a [REDACTED] Police Officer to [REDACTED] and back, to bring my partner safely home.

Here's the part that impacts me the most, makes me feel humble, grateful. I did not feel judged. I felt the caring, the concern, from all of the officers who assisted that night. The Police could have behaved officiously or authoritatively, but instead, they used discretion, wisdom and empathy.

There is more: the "what ifs". What if the Police had not taken me seriously? What if they hadn't sent out a missing person's alert all over the province? What if there had not been enough Police to find my partner?

The Police kept him safe, bought him food, and knew they were dealing with a person unable to think rationally. What if they had arrested him, locked him up?

The worst part. What if my partner had killed you, or someone you love?

There are individual Police Officers I have no names for but I hope they will be recognized

based on the day and time of service. I embrace and praise the unknown officers as well as the following people I do know, for helping us:

From the [REDACTED] / [REDACTED]; [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who arrived at my home after my call; [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who took over throughout that night and morning of [REDACTED]. Thank you. [REDACTED] was the Officer who drove me to [REDACTED] and back. He knows that the art of making one feel at ease is by sharing something of himself. Thank you, [REDACTED].

From [REDACTED]: Police [REDACTED] and his patrol partner, and other regional officers who may have assisted. Thank you.

From the [REDACTED]: I never met you, but you knew my partner was missing, shouldn't be driving and confiscated the car. Thank you.

And [REDACTED], of [REDACTED]: Your drivers kept my partner safe until the OPP arrived. You didn't charge me for the towing or the storage. Thank you.

These people dealt with us with compassion and grace. The Police did their jobs and they did them well.

They saved lives. That matters, and so do they.

Thank you.

Wendy