

From: Sarah Van Berkel
Sent: February 2, 2023 8:38 PM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca; Ward 4 <ward4@hamilton.ca>
Subject: Feb 6 vote on HPS Budget

Dear City Council,

My name is Sarah Van Berkel and I live in Hamilton, Ontario in Ward 4.

I am emailing today to urge you to vote *against* the proposed 6.71% increase to the Hamilton Police Services budget, and to advocate *for* an investment into community-led, harm reduction supports.

It is clear our vulnerable communities are struggling, between lack of adequate housing, food costs increasing and difficult access to required medical and social supports. Criminalising poverty instead of investing in programs that actually build healthier and safer communities is shortsighted and violent to those targeted. We don't need the police to respond to mental health calls. We need the city to fund housing, harm-reduction, community-based and mental healthcare services.

The Hamilton Police Service continues to hog much needed resources that the City of Hamilton could put towards so many much needed priorities. Improving the city infrastructure and addressing our city's contribution to Climate Change for some additional examples.

In 2022, Hamilton Police Services requested a budget increase of **2.98%** when, over the previous five years, calls to HPS only increased by 3.5%. In fact, HPS still has a surplus from last year's budget, so this unprecedented ask of a **6.71%** increase in 2023 is unnecessary and indefensible.

Investing millions of dollars into a police budget with an existing surplus is a waste of our resources. In 2021, there were 171 confirmed – and entirely preventable – deaths related to the opioid overdose crisis in our city. According to [city data](#), Hamilton paramedics responded to 814 incidents related to suspected opioid overdoses in 2022, compared to 430 such incidents in 2017. These growing emergency calls will not be addressed by increased police presence: yet there is often no funding cited as available for safe consumption sites, despite extensive advocacy from experts that safe supply and consumption [saves lives](#). Where life saving supports can be funded - expanding police budgets places value in systems of harm, rather than prioritising life.

Please vote NO to the requested increase of the Hamilton Police Service budget and put those resources towards any number of other essential services such as: housing, community health centers, mental health services, sexual assault services, safe infrastructure, playgrounds, youth centres, food accessibility, harm reduction supports, etc. What we need are people-centred support like: mental health outreach workers, mental health support centres, hotlines, crisis workers, housing centres, safe injection sites, safe drug supply, education/prevention programming, youth programming, recreation centres, access to community-based care, satellite health centres.

Investing in our communities is a step towards addressing the root cause of most “crime”, which is often need-based and a consequence of poverty.

Sincerely,
Sarah Van Berkel
Ward 4