

**From:** Robyn Deshaies

**Sent:** January 26, 2023 5:57 PM

**To:** Wilson, Maureen <[Maureen.Wilson@hamilton.ca](mailto:Maureen.Wilson@hamilton.ca)>; Ward 1 Office <[ward1@hamilton.ca](mailto:ward1@hamilton.ca)>

**Subject:** Hamilton Police Budget

Dear Councillor Wilson,

My name is Robyn Deshaies and I live in Hamilton, Ontario in Ward 1.

**I am calling upon 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.**

For decades, the Hamilton Police Service budget has been rising; meanwhile housing costs are surging, food is less affordable, and people struggle to access basic medical and social support. Public safety means ensuring that *all* community members have access to the basic necessities, including food, shelter, healthcare, and community. Investing in police does not provide for any of these essentials. Investing in police does not even prevent crime. Police arrive after-the-fact, and coerce, manipulate, and brutalize poor, disabled, Black, Indigenous, racialized, queer and trans people.

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.

Not only does increasing the police budget fail to address the inaccessibility of housing, it brings violence against the most vulnerable members of our communities. Police play an active role in dismantling encampments, they ticket people living on the street for simply existing in public. And when community members require mental health support, rather than de-escalating distress the police tend to escalate it, ultimately causing more harm and sometimes even death, killing those they claim to protect.

We don't need to criminalize encampment residents, or anyone deprived of safe and accessible housing – we need *real* housing solutions. Poverty will not be erased by disappearing people or displacing them from one location to another. We don't need police to respond to sexual assault – we need trauma-informed, gender-based violence services, in a sector that's perpetually underfunded. The municipal police budget has no right to eat into our city budget.

There is extensive documentation linking social determinants of health to experiences of community members in this city stratified by wealth and class. A [CBC study](#) found that of the 460 police murders of civilians from 2000 onwards, 70.3% of them experienced mental health struggles or substance-based disorders. Responding with force to disabled community members is counterintuitive to any narrative of the police's alleged role in "public safety." Police are funded to primarily manage the comfort and *perceived* anxieties of people worried about property – with **real, deadly consequences** and **bodily harm** for others. Think critically about where real harm is occurring. 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. 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 [unilaterally save lives](#). Where life saving supports can be funded - expanding police budgets places value in systems of harm, rather than prioritizing life. I am speaking to you as a concerned constituent you are elected to represent. I am not comfortable funding police in my community at the expense of essential services like housing, community health centers, mental health services, sexual assault services, safer infrastructure, playgrounds, youth centres, food accessibility, harm reduction supports, etc. What we need are people-centred supports 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.** We need to fund and reimagine services that address these root causes and know how to better respond to 911 distress calls. Instead of punishing our neighbours for trying to meet their needs, we can resource people and communities so those needs are met. We *must* reallocate the budget to existing community-led organizations that offer services to vulnerable communities, and create effective alternative services such as crisis intervention, conflict mediation, mental health support, and deeply affordable, accessible housing.

Sincerely,

**Robyn Deshaies**  
**Ward 1**