

From: Melissa Dowdall

Sent: February 3, 2023 12:25 AM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Cc: Ward 4 <ward4@hamilton.ca>; Hwang, Tammy <Tammy.Hwang@hamilton.ca>

Subject: Written submission for February 6th 2023 Council meeting

Hello,

I would like to request that the following written submission be included in the original published agenda for the February 6th, 2023 Council meeting:

To Mayor Horwath and City Councillors; the Chair and Members of the General Issues Committee; the Audit, Finance and Administration Committee; and the Emergency and Community Services Committee:

My name is Melissa Dowdall and I live in the Parkview West neighbourhood in Ward 4, Hamilton, Ontario. I am a voter, home-owner and tax-paying Canadian citizen.

I understand that the police services board is requesting a 6.71% budget increase this year. As your constituent, I want to express my outrage concerning the proposed increase to the already astronomically high police services budget.

During budget deliberations in February, I am calling upon you to **deny** the proposed 6.71% increase to the Hamilton Police Services budget, and to advocate for an investment into community-led, harm reduction supports.

Instead, I am asking that you invest the tax dollars that would have otherwise gone to police towards initiatives fighting against food insecurity, racism, and towards more affordable housing and other social services.

We need to:

- Reallocate the budget to existing community-led organizations that are offering services to communities made vulnerable by the inaction of governing bodies.
- Create effective alternative services such as crisis intervention, mental health centres, safe consumption sites, and housing.
- Reinvest the tax dollars that would have otherwise gone to the HPS towards initiatives fighting against food insecurity.
- Demilitarize the HPS! Our tax dollars fund their purchase of highly militarized and high tech surveillance equipment. Cease purchases of weapons, high-tech surveillance equipment, and cease surveilling communities
- Stop targeting activists and communities pushing back against white supremacists
- Stop ticketing and surveilling unhoused and disabled people for existing in public

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.

As a tax-payer, I am also asking Hamilton Police Services to release accounting on taxes used to surveil and police Black, Indigenous and racialized communities in our city, so that the public, City Councillors and Committee members can have a clear picture of exactly how our money is being used.

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 (which would amount to an increase of \$12 million) in 2023 is unnecessary and indefensible.

Pledge Needed:

I am asking that you, Councillors and Committee Members, take meaningful action in response to the senseless spending of public dollars on the policing of poor, disabled, Black, Indigenous, racialized, queer and trans people. **Vote against the proposed 6.71% increase to the Hamilton Police Services budget and advocate for the investment of this money into other needed community services.**

As your constituent, you represent me. Refusing to act upon these needs is a failure to represent a concerned community of your constituents — a community evidenced through these calls. 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.

Increased police presence does not keep us safe. It threatens the lives of our most vulnerable communities (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, the LGBTQ2S+ community, unhoused people, street-based sex workers, people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty, etc.) Police continue to discriminately target Black and Indigenous communities through tactics of racial profiling, implicit bias, algorithmic bias, etc. In addition to being extremely racist, policing is an ableist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and classist institution that necessitates these varied oppressions to function.

Investments into policing will not protect community members experiencing mental health distress, address a culture of dismissing sexual assault and missing person inquiries, nor prevent the criminalization of certain identities and need-based acts. Reform is a failed tactic. Reform tactics such as body cameras have had little to no tangible effect on reducing police brutality.

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.

Their argument is that crime rates have increased. This is not true. Police have taken specific data that works for the story they are choosing to tell from the Municipal Benchmarking Network of Canada. According to the Municipal Benchmarking Network of Canada that HPS referenced, Hamilton was actually lower than the median not only with respect to the Violent Crime Severity Index (-11%), but also the overall Crime Severity Index (-25%) in 2021. At the national level, crime has gone down by nearly 40%. Apart from this obvious manipulation in their request, it is important to remember that the police do not prevent crime. HPS policing does not occur in ways that are needed in our community. The HPS agitates, discriminates and escalates instead of resolving issues that arise.

With the residential tax estimated to increase by 5.4% this year, we should not be footing the bill of an already inflated police budget. The City continues to overfund violence while underfunding sectors and organizations crucial to building healthy and supported communities.

A portion of that massive budget should be used to establish non-police alternative to 911 calls involving people with mental illness. These calls can be diverted to a team of mental health first responders instead of police.

Another portion of the budget should also be used to implement policies governing use of force by police in Hamilton. Specifically:

- Require officers to de-escalate situations by communicating with subjects, maintaining distance, and otherwise eliminating the need to use force
- Prohibit officers from being allowed to choke or strangle civilians
- Require officers to intervene and stop excessive force used by other officers and report these incidents immediately to a supervisor
- Restrict officers from shooting at moving vehicles

- Develop a Force Continuum that limits the types of force and/or weapons that can be used to respond to specific types of resistance
- Require officers to exhaust all other reasonable means before resorting to deadly force
- Require officers to give a verbal warning before shooting at a civilian
- Require officers to report each time they use force or threaten to use force against civilians

The safest neighbourhoods are not those with the greatest police presence, but those with the most resources (food security, social services, mental health supports, infrastructure, education). Every 10 additional organizations in a city reduces property crime by 4%.

Investing in our communities better addresses the root cause of most criminalized acts, which are 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. What we really need are robust services that can effectively respond, such as mental health outreach workers, community and housing centres, and accessible educational/prevention programs. We *must* reallocate the HPS 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.

If you truly care about the citizens of Hamilton, then I am urging you to please deny this police budget increase request and reinvest in education, mental health care, affordable housing, community support organizations, and other social services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Melissa Dowdall
Ward 4 Resident
Hamilton, ON

*Thanks to Hamilton Encampment Support Network for providing a good portion of the wording used in this letter.