

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Chair and Members of General Issues Committee

From: Robin Hufgard

Sent: June 11, 2020 7:56 AM

To: Office of the Mayor <mayor@hamilton.ca>; Collins, Chad <Chad.Collins@hamilton.ca>

Cc: Wilson, Maureen <Maureen.Wilson@hamilton.ca>

Subject: Service Implications of Cutting HPS Budget

Good morning,

I am writing to voice my opinion re: the police services board being asked to create a report on the "service implications" of cutting \$34m from their \$171m.

Firstly, I do not think requesting the police services board to review their own budget implications is a decision free of conflicts of interest or bias. No employee, regardless of their obligation to the public, is going to advocate for a paycut for their own department or admit to doing a poor job. Letting the police services board review their own budget is a waste of everyone's time and money because we already know what their answer will be. If the police services board has been requesting budget increases on an annual basis, they are going to be able to find plenty of reasons to keep those increases rolling.

Additionally, I worry about the police's continued budget increases used primarily to purchase more expensive equipment and increase militarization of the police force. While other police forces are cutting back on funding (including those in cities with much higher gun and street crime rates than Hamilton, such as Minneapolis and Seattle), our police force is considering spending over \$60k on more guns. Our police force has already shown they use excessive force with the equipment they currently have, and I fear what freely approving increasingly dangerous weapons will do.

In April 2007, Soun Saing was shot and killed during a confrontation with HPS. Saing was described later to be suffering from an episode of mental illness.

February 2011, Andreas Chinnery was fatally shot and killed by HPS in his own apartment after a neighbour called concerned about a commotion he overheard. He was alone, and later was found to be likely suffering from an episode of mental illness.

June 2012, HPS officer Ryan Tocher in plain clothes used his unmarked vehicle to pin Phonesay Chanthachack while driving a stolen vehicle. The citizen attempted to escape and was shot twice, killed. This is Tochter's third excessive force incident, second involving a fatality and all three having South Asian victims. The first one involved Soun Saing, above. The second one was in May 2010, where Po La Hay was severely beaten by HPS when they entered his apartment, wrongly believing it was a drug dealer's apartment (who lived next door). Po La Hay's family sued 16 police officers including Tochter, Chief Glenn De Clair and the HPS board. The lawsuit was dismissed, however the judge stated that the testimonies of officers left him with "the spectre of a coverup". Tochter has been cleared on every incident he has ever had brought before the SUI.

June 2013, Steve Mesic is shot dead by HPS while wandering in traffic after being released from St Joseph's Health Care centre following a psychotic break. He was suicidal but harmless, and was shot at nine times when he attempted to use a shovel to enter his own home.

Sept 2016, Anthony Divers is shot and killed by HPS. He suffering from an episode of mental illness and generally incoherent, possibly intoxicated. He was unarmed.

April 2018, Quinn MacDougall is shot and killed outside of his house by HPS. He had called 911 three times stating that someone with a gun was trying to hurt him. Later it was revealed the "guy with a gun" was a plain clothes officer MacDougall had mistaken for someone who was threatening him. Again, MacDougall appeared to be suffering from an episode of mental illness.

October 2018, Robyn Garlow was shot at four times and killed by HPS after behaving in a suicidal manner.

These are only incidents I was able to easily find that involved fatal results. Many other life-ruining cases have been committed by HPS towards citizens; including breaking into the wrong apartments, racial carding practices, failing to address hate crimes, blaming the black and POC community for the police brutality inflicted on it, and ticketing the homeless population to push them further into poverty.

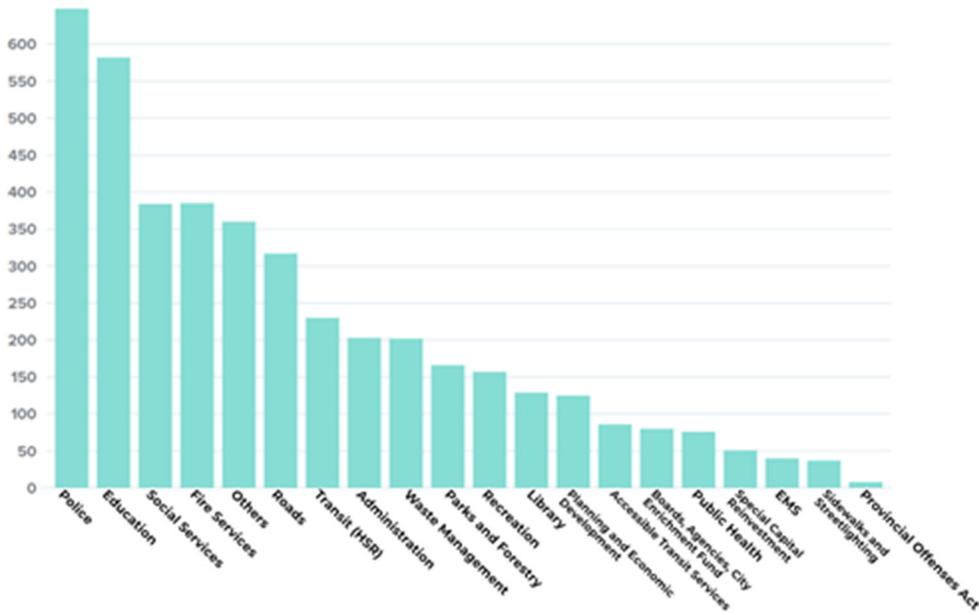
The HPS does not need more weapons and equipment. The citizens of the City of Hamilton do not need the HPS. Many of the above cases went to SUI and/or Ontario court, where SUI repeatedly cleared the HPS of any wrongdoing and families of victims were left without any sort of consolation. These cases have cost both the family's victims and Hamilton taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars, not to mention the regular cost of the actual police response to the original event. This money would have been much better spent investing into mental health services, which many of these fatal cases clearly needed. It is not reasonable to expect suicidal or otherwise mentally unstable citizens to respond politely to an aggressive militarized force pointing weapons and demanding compliance. Some of the above cases appear to have even used the police as their preferred suicide method.

I have been through the mental health system in Ontario. I understand exactly how broken it is and how the police completely fail to address the underlying issues. When you are suicidal and call 911, the best case scenario you can get is paramedics or police bringing you to a hospital waiting room. You will sit here for hours because triage prioritizes mental health issues extremely low. If you are lucky eventually a doctor or medical student will do a short interview with you where afterwards you will be transferred to either an institute not-unlike jail for an indefinite period of time, or allowed to return to your own home on the promise that you won't kill yourself. It's an awful system that leaves you feeling abandoned and useless.

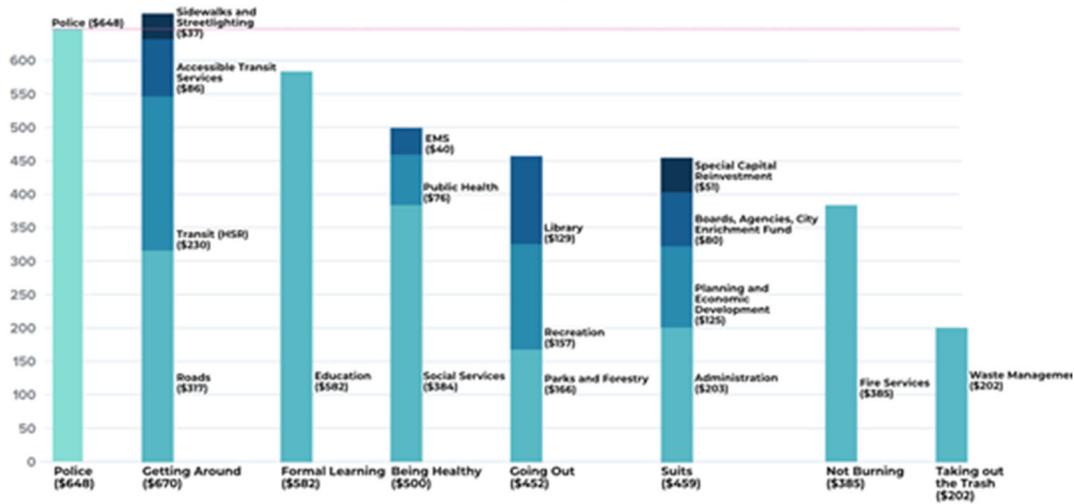
I was able to get to a better place mentally with mostly a lot of luck. I had some support at university that helped me finish my degree, which helped me get a job paying above minimum wage where I could finally afford a private therapist. Even this was shakey, as therapy was always the first thing I had to cut from my budget when finances were tight. Many people do not have this option at all, and this is not something the police provide either. Investing money back into our community rather than the police is ultimately a better use of our finances. Helping people find work, homes, doctors, therapists, and communities will reduce crime and poverty more than buying bigger and better guns/cars for the police.

Finally, because I'm actually more of a graphic designer than a writer, here are two graphs I created to visualize the extent to which police dominate our budget. I hope this helps illustrate the disparity in our budget, and perhaps inspires you to boost the services which clearly need it so much more.

2020 Hamilton Budget (Based on Average Property Tax Bill)



2020 Hamilton Budget (Based on Average Property Tax Bill)



Thank you for reading,
Robin, Ward 1 resident