

Pilon, Janet

Subject: A Concerned Ward 3 Resident about Hamilton Police Services

From: Jyssika Russell

Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2020 7:54 PM

To: Nann, Nrinder; VanderBeek, Arlene; Farr, Jason; clerk@hamilton.ca

Cc: hwdsbkidsneedhelp@gmail.com

Subject: A Concerned Ward 3 Resident about Hamilton Police Services

To the clerk- I wish this email to be added to the agenda for the next possible council meeting.

To Councillor Nann, Councillor Vanderbeek, Councillor Farr, and Hamilton City Council,

My name is Jyssika Russell, and I am a Ward 3 resident, and have been living in Hamilton for ten years. I currently work as the coordinator of a youth program for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, and before that worked serving coffee both downtown and in Dundas.

I'm writing to stand in solidarity with local organizers and their demands, as well as sharing my personal stories of interactions with the Hamilton Police Service.

I have witnessed direct and unwarranted police violence several times while living in Hamilton. As a barista and supervisor at a major coffee chain, I interacted with the Hamilton Police many times at my job. Coffee shops, with their free wifi, shelter, and coffee often serve as a day shelter for Hamilton's most vulnerable, as our shelter and affordable housing options in this city are seriously underfunded.

Originally working in Dundas (Ward 13), I had mostly pleasant interactions with HPS- note here that I am white. The few times I had to interact with Police in my job, they were nonviolent, calm, and did not escalate, including with the few vulnerable folks that lived at shelters and residences in the region.

This contrasts *starkly* with my experience working downtown in Ward 2, when I was transferred to a new store. Working across from a large men's shelter (and within a 2 minute drive from the downtown HPS station), we had many shelter users at our store. This was generally without an issue, aside from occasional drug use in our bathrooms. However, on more than one occasion, I witnessed unwarranted and violent arrests INSIDE the cafe.

While I was the supervisor on duty, we had a situation where a man, assumed to be homeless entered the cafe. Other patrons bought him a coffee, while he sat peacefully at a table. Without clear cause, the Hamilton Police officers entered the cafe, and demanded he come with them, without giving any charge or reason. He refused, continually asking why he was being detained. When he refused to be arrested, the officers grabbed him, threw him on the tiled floor, with both officers physically pushing down on him with their knees.

The man being arrested used a phrase that now resonates across the world- "I can't breathe". He said that he was scared and had medical issues. As he struggled, and was very clearly in the control of the officers, the officers pulled their tasers out, laser sights set point blank on his side. This clear escalation was unwarranted, and this was evidenced by the shock and concern shared by all patron and staff witnesses.

The other cafe patrons were in shock. This was happening on a bright Sunday morning, with no clear reason or sign of danger to others. Shortly, five cars were on the scene, with nearly 10 officers there to deal with a nonviolent man. Fortunately, they arrived before the other officers tased him. He was escorted off the property.

When asked by bystanders why he was arrested, the answer was finger guns. Yes, you read that right. He pointed at them with his index finger, with his thumb in the air. They said this was "uttering threats" and indicating he had a lethal weapon.

THIS is what our tax dollars are spent on. Nearly ten officers, most paid over 100k/year, arresting people because they were offended. When police are offended, they are "justified" in use of force and given discretion to arrest and abuse Hamiltonians. When I am harassed and threatened at a community picnic (Pride 2018), I am afforded no justice or ability to defend myself, my community, or the youth I work with, and the police stand by and do nothing.

Neighbourhoods are policed differently. People, based on race, origin, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, are policed differently. We are "protected" differently, if at all. And for many Hamiltonians, the police not only fail to "protect" them, they actively harm and harass them- in public, at their jobs, in their schools.

My anger and frustration is mild compared to the justified anger, hurt, and injustice experienced by Black, Indigenous, and racialized residents of Hamilton. Friends, colleagues, and leaders in Hamilton have not only shared these frustrations and fears with me, but they have so kindly outlined them, repeatedly, for this council and the public. I thank them for their teachings and labour, and stand in solidarity with their calls for justice.

It is my responsibility, as someone who does not experience systemic racism within the institutions of the police, governments, etc. to name the actions, policies, and effects of the Hamilton Police Service as clear examples of anti-Black, systemic racism.

With that, I want it to be known that I stand in full support of the following demands disseminated by a broad, expert coalition of Black and racialised people in Hamilton.

I echo their calls to defund the police. I call on the city of Hamilton to reinvest the funds allocated to the Hamilton police into initiatives fighting against food insecurity, racism, homo and transphobia, and also towards affordable housing.

I call on the City of Hamilton to ensure that HPS are not ticketing houseless people for existing in public.

I stand in support of the following demands from these organizers- who are noted across the country for their work and expertise in dismantling racism and systemic oppression.

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- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services halt all purchases with tax dollars of weapons (guns, rifles, etc).
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- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services cease the ticketing and surveilling of homeless and
- disabled people in Hamilton, and that there be a moratorium on the hiring of police constables in Hamilton given the documented over-surveilling of homeless people during the pandemic.
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- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services stop surveilling communities, and that they halt the
- expenditure of tax dollars on high tech surveillance equipment.
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- We demand that the Hamilton Police Services stop targeting and criminalizing activists and communities
- pushing back against Yellow Vesters and other forms of white supremacy.
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- We call on McMaster University (President & Board of Governors) to immediately terminate Glenn
- De Caire's contract. De Caire was forced to resign from Hamilton police after he was caught saying incredibly racist things to other police officers. De Caire also has a history of violent policing that targets houseless people as well as Black people.
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- In line with the demands of the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board Kids Need Help Coalition,
- we demand that the HWDSB immediately remove School Resource Officers (SROs) out of all schools and fully fund a public review of police violence that occurred in their schools.
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- We demand that the school board refrain from calling the cops on kids.
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- We demand that the school board collect and release data that documents the disciplinary action
- against students by race and gender.
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- We demand that the school board implement a community run alternative to disciplinary action based
- on the principles of restorative justice.
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- We demand that the provincial police act be rewritten to give municipalities full control over
- police boards. Currently, in Hamilton, the Hamilton Police Services operates as an autonomous body, giving municipalities little to no oversight in terms of what they invest in and the ways that they militarize themselves.
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- We demand that the province of Ontario work with grassroots groups to divest taxpayer money across

- the Province (Hamilton - \$171M, Ottawa - \$319M, Waterloo - \$182M, Halton Region - \$162M, London \$123M, Niagara - \$154M, Sudbury - \$63M) from policing and invest it towards community initiatives with the goal of moving completely toward transformative justice practices.
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- We demand that the Special Investigations Unit, which has a provincial mandate, needs to be 100% composed of people living in the city with which the investigation is being conducted.
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- We demand that the Special Investigations Unit needs to be composed completely of Black, racialized and Indigenous peoples with no current or former ties to the policing sector.
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- The SIU must begin collecting and publicly releasing race-based statistics on all fatalistic encounters between police officers and civilians. No more inquiries-- direct action needs to be taken as a result of the investigation into anti-Black racism that occurred in the 90's and again in 2014 with the establishment and subsequent defunding of the Anti-Racism Directorate.
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- In light of COVID-19, We demand that all prisoners being held and who are awaiting trial at the Barton Jail facility be released immediately, and that the outrageous costs of ankle monitors and other means of surveilling those who are released be waived.
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An increased police presence does not keep us safe, rather it directly threatens the lives of our most vulnerable communities (BIPOC, the LGBTQ2S+ community, unhoused people, street-based sex workers, people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty, etc). Instead of investing in policing, our city must prioritize alternatives like education, increased mental health services, housing initiatives, income security, harm reduction services, accessible rehabilitation, mutual aid, conflict resolution services, transformative justice, and other vital community-based support systems. **These initiatives must support our most vulnerable communities and centre the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in Toronto.**

We should look to and learn from organizations like Black Lives Matter Toronto, Black Legal Action Centre, Toronto Police Accountability Coalition, PASAN, Showing Up for Racial Justice, Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, and so many more.

Our city can lead the way in defining public safety through community not cops, where Black, Indigenous and people of colour are free from police oppression. I am asking you to create a better future for all residents of Hamilton by divesting from harmful policing and investing in life-affirming services.

Further, I hold absolutely no faith in the Hamilton Police Services Board to interrogate defunding measures, as they are currently composed. A Board meant to sustain and support a specific service cannot objectively discuss or research defunding measures and the potential benefit to the broader Hamilton communities. I have witnessed, in person, a complete lack of empathy or engagement of ideas or notions beyond their limited scope. Their lack of self-reflection or self-interrogation is unmatched with any advisory or governance board I have experienced.

I am open to sharing with councillors and representatives how I have arrived at this position, and why I stand in solidarity with these statements. This is not a radical idea, nor is it unfounded or unresearched. I look forward to hearing further support on these issues from councillors around the (virtual) horseshoe.

Finally, thank you Councillor Nann for continuing to uplift the voices of your constituents, and the voices across Hamilton that are so often ignored and denigrated by your colleagues. I am proud to have you as my city councillor, and you have my full support. Sincerely,

Jyssika Russell Ward 3 Resident