**Police board consultation response**

**August 25, 2024**

I write to state that protesting is essential feature of any true democracy All police actions need to be minimized even if a small number of people are disruptive or even violent. I am sure you know MANY Toronto residents believe the police plant a few violent individuals so they have an excuse to kettle, arrest, harass or even injure the peaceful majority of protesting people. And somehow those few always get away, which adds greatly to the suspicion that they have paid by the police and promised immunity. These suspicions may not be true, I acknowledge, but police must ensure that they do not feed the rumours by focussing on whole groups rather than a few lawbreakers. Besides, letting someone torch a police car and get away makes the officers look totally incompetent.

The police presence in most cases should be to stand near in case of safety or criminal issues, and to ensure orderly passage, such as directing traffic while marchers cross a street. Keeping protestors on either side of an issue from physical confrontations is also appropriate, without taking sides.

Permits need to be granted expeditiously since breaking news can quickly result in valid protests, as we saw recently in India when a resident doctor was raped and murdered. And rejection of a permit needs to be made **public with explicit reasons**, and only after exploring options with the applicant, such as a different venue if public events conflict.

With regard to encampments, they would mostly not happen if the institutions involved held respectful consultations and acted on legitimate concerns. As long as the encampment is not impeding essential public access (like to a hospital) or harassing innocent passers-by, they need to last long enough for those consultations to take place. In other words, it's in the hands of the university or other public institution. And having some people "feel unsafe" going past is not sufficient for removal. Public Works, not the police, needs to ensure garbage pick-up and sanitary access. However, it is appropriate for the police to get names and contact information from leaders and organizations and advise them in writing that if the grounds are not left clean, the clean-up cost will be billed to them. Our taxes need not pay for laziness.

Finally, an officer who violates the right to peaceful process needs to be subject to significant discipline, sufficient to harm their careers as they have no credibilty to move to more senior roles.

FYI, I am a white middle class woman and have never been carded, harassed or injured by police. Some have helped me. But I have seen those who don't fit my privileged profile harmed by police just for happening to walk by at a time an officer was looking for a fight or seeking to fill a quota. And officers running away laughing because they could get away with such behaviour. The police culture, and recruitment processes, both need a LOT of work.

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