To: Toronto Police Services Board

RE: Submission to Virtual Town Hall Meeting

July 9, 2020

Show me your budget and I'll tell you what you value.

The TPS budget has ballooned to $1.076 billion of the total $13.5 billion 2020 operating budget (an increase of 4% since 2019). In 2019, approximately 23% of property taxes went to fund the TPS. Despite these budgetary increases, the TPS has failed to make members of marginalized communities, especially Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, safer. A black person in Toronto is nearly 20 times more likely than a white person to be shot and killed by police, according to the 2018 Ontario Human Rights Commission report on race and policing.

It's time for Toronto and its police services to value non-violence, anti-racism, and rich lives for all Torontonians. It’s time not just to espouse these values in public statements, but to live them every day through choices and actions and funding. **I'm tired of being part of a city that apparently values fear-based, punitive and inhumane approaches to poverty and racial inequality.**

In his 2014 report on policing people living with mental illness, former Supreme Court of Canada Justice Frank Iacobucci emphasized that the police are left to serve as the response of last resort in many situations that could be avoided or greatly reduced in frequency if we funded housing, and mental health and addiction treatment, adequately.

Since April of this year, four racialized people in Ontario – D’Andre Campbell, Caleb Njoko, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, and Ejaz Ahmed Choudry – have all lost their lives after experiencing mental health crises and having police arrive to their homes.

Let’s build a city where this never happens again.

This will require significant changes – to policing, but also to the broader criminal justice system and to social services. Sensitivity training and body cameras will not solve this problem. What’s needed are bigger and more fundamental changes such as those demanded by Black Lives Matter Toronto and supported by hundreds of healthcare and social service providers. Those changes include:

* Funding alternatives to sending armed officers to mental-health related calls.
* Diverting funding from the "band-aid" approach of police enforcement towards root-cause solutions such as increased affordable and supportive housing, mental health and mediation supports, drug and alcohol supports, community building, etc.
* Reducing the scope of police work by transferring some functions to more appropriate civilian staff and organizations. (eg: policing of minor bylaw infractions and noise complaints, cops in schools, traffic direction, officers for hire by developers, street festivals, etc.),
* Demilitarize the Police by ensuring that most police are not armed and that force is used only in extraordinary circumstances.
* End carding and the more general practice of routine surveillance and harassment of Black, Indigenous, and marginalized communities.
* Document Police Violence by mandating the public collection of data involving police killing and incidents of police violence disaggregated by race, gender, age and citizenship status. Ensure police officer accountability in cases of undue use of force, public complaints, etc.
* Pressure the City of Toronto, the province, and the federal government to decriminalize Poverty, Drugs, HIV, & Sex Work and to expunge records for all poverty-related charges (including bylaw infractions, solicitation, sleeping outside, public urination, loitering, etc). Treat drug use as a health problem rather than as a crime.

Thank you for considering my comments. I look forward to your response in the form of concrete actions.

-Marisa Burton