Written Deputation

My name is Dallas Jokic, and I am a resident of Toronto. Like so many people, I have been horrified to witness the epidemic of police brutality in Canada in the U.S. recently, and moved by the work of Black and Indigenous organizers who are demanding systemic changes – it is important to appreciate that we would not be having this discussion if it weren’t for the work of Black and Indigenous people and organizations.

The main point I want to make is that we cannot end police violence and brutality by expanding police forces and programs. The refusal of the city council to vote for even a moderate (10%) reduction to the police budget a couple weeks back – and their opening the door to a potential expansion of the police budget through body cameras – shows they are not serious about defunding the police. In the absence of leadership there, I am asking the TPSB to take the first steps towards ending the murder and harassment of BIPOC communities by immediately disarming and defunding the police, with the abolition of police and prisons as the end goal. The ballooning of police budgets over the past few decades has corresponded with austerity and the systematic defunding of essential services like health care, anti-poverty initiatives, child care, and education. Police have been called on to fill in the gaps left by this perpetual underfunding – with frequently violent, and even fatal results, especially among Black and Indigenous communities.

The expansion of the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team by City Council is another reform that appears to address the concerns of the community – having nurses and health care professionals present when someone is having a mental health crisis – but it does this with the involvement of police officers, and within the confines of the Toronto Police Service. We are demanding the funding of services *external* to policing that can help people in crisis, as well as deep and sustained investments that can help people *before* they get to the point of crisis. The expansion of a team within the police fails on both fronts.

The reforms of police departments over the past decade have not made us safer, nor have they ended police violence and brutality. Too often, they have instead cynically exploited the crisis of Black and Indigenous people being slaughtered by police, and the crisis of credibility resulting from it, in order to pass reforms that expand police scope, budget, and inevitably, violence. Unfortunately, that cynical exploitation of crisis seems to be precisely what is happening right now. Unless the police budget, and the broader role of police in society, is immediately reduced, and resources redirected where they are so urgently needed, we cannot solve the problems of policing that the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Rayshard Brooks, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Chantel Moore, D’Andre Campbell, and so many others, have illuminated for many of us.

Ultimately, the point I want to impart is that we cannot solve the problems of policing with more training, more committees, more body cameras: we cannot solve these problems with more policing. Black and Indigenous communities want less contact with the police. This is why defunding the Toronto Police Service budget and making real investments in areas that need it is the only way forward. The people of Toronto will not be fooled by the reforms of Mayor Tory, the City Council, and this board. We are demanding better. We are demanding you disarm, defund, dismantle, and abolish Toronto Police Services.