

Dear Members of the Finance and Audit Committee,

I would like to express my concern with the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) budget for 2021. I disagree with the proposed 3% budget increase. First, this increase is out of touch with the economic realities and hardships our community is facing under a pandemic. The budget that is funded by the taxpayer, should reflect that many community members have lost their jobs, and many more will be facing severe financial strains. An increase in budget in the face of everyone else's budget cuts and employment loss erodes the trust the community has in the OPS and frankly speaks to entitlement and not to the OPS values of Honour, Courage, and Service.

Secondly, the OPS needs to reduce the costs of policing overall. The challenge to balance resources and services with community needs is formidable, but options need to be considered for long-term fiscal sustainability. Although I am supportive of increased mental health training for OPS members, the addition of mental health professionals to the OPS seems duplicative to the work of our struggling Community Service sector who have had to respond to the amplified pressures of this pandemic with limited resources. The OPS should be focused on community safety and security, where it is more likely to spend money effectively. And this increase in funds should be directed to the mental health experts within the community service sector who are likely in turn, to spend this money effectively.

The last decade has shown that using police services to address the wellness and mental health of our communities has been unsuccessful and that it may instead only broaden gaps in poverty, privilege, and wellness. In these challenging times, it is my sincere hope that we find ways to better use our even more limited community dollars to ensure our overall community wellness.

Sincerely,

Shannon Watt

Ottawa Resident