

To the Finance and Audit Committee of the Ottawa Police Services Board,

I'm writing ahead of the budget and finance meeting on November 9, 2020 to share my thoughts on policing in Ottawa and what the future could and should hold for our city's police.

The institution of policing has evolved significantly over the last 30 or 40 years. Putting aside the particularly problematic origins of policing in Canada, in our more recent past, we asked police officers to help keep the peace. As populations grew, become more diverse, and economic, racial and other divides become more obvious and our communities struggled, we have asked the police to expand their role. Yes, keep the peace, but also prevent crime. Engage the community. Go into schools and prevent crime there. Engage with the most vulnerable, mentally ill and unhoused populations. Be peacekeepers, investigators, crime fighters, crime preventers, social workers, harm reduction workers and security guards.

As citizens, we are asked every year to permit more of our taxes to fund the expansion of policing. Even as we've seen problematic behaviours from individual police (in Ottawa and elsewhere) and from the institution of policing itself, we are asked to trust that positive change and reform will happen from within, and that simply more training is needed. More equipment. More officers. More cars. More community police offices. These things will help keep us safe.

I do not feel safer, and we pay a lot of money for our police service today. We are asking too much of the policing function. More police and policing does not reduce crime. Less poverty, more opportunities, greater social and economic equality, and more community support reduces crime. We have asked the police to do too much and be too much, and we have seen too many examples of our own communities not only unserved by police but hurt or killed. When your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. It's time to shift some of that funding to the other tools in our kit.

I would like to see a funding reduction from the OPS and a reallocation of funds. The City of Ottawa recently declared a housing and homelessness emergency; reallocate to public housing. Ottawa Public Health has faced a crisis year with the pandemic and need 24M for next year's budget; reallocate to OPH. In this pandemic, overdose rates have risen drastically, and the population is experiencing an increase in mental illness and mental health struggles as we continue to isolate to reduce transmission; reinvest in mental health services. Every year we ask our schools to do more with less; reinvest in youth programming.

All these investments are going to contribute to a healthier, more stable population, and a reduction in crime. We do not have to pay police to be social workers and mental health crisis workers when we have professionals to perform these roles. And the police do not need to be a cornerstone in every initiative related to crime or public safety. The police do not equal safety for all citizens, there are other ways to build safe communities, and it's time we consider where else to invest our funds to get the outcomes we are seeking.

Thank you,

Caitlin Hawkes-Frost