

Hi,

My name is Ethan Sabourin and I am a recent graduate from the University of Waterloo, where I studied design thinking in the faculty of environment.

I want to preface my comments by calling back to the last time I spoke publicly about an issue of municipal politics. Just a few short weeks ago, I was presenting a public comment to the planning committee, along with many community organizations, in opposition to Urban Boundary Expansion. While this might seem unrelated to the Police Services Board, I want to quote from my speaking notes at that meeting.

I then asked councillors then to “consider simple and sometimes radical ideas that can bloom under legislative constraints.” I suggested possibilities like:

1. “City-backed food production and distribution plans that put the means of food production into the hands of regular citizens ranging from the planting and harvesting of fruit trees across the city, to helping establish front yard gardens and suburban farms.”
2. “The expansion, electrification, and delivery of free public transport for all, in order to drastically reduce our dependence on cars.”
3. The development of social housing, from public and community land trust, to co-op, which fits into neighbourhoods and helps flatten growing land prices. It also fights gentrification and puts tenants first.
4. Finally, I urged the committee to consider “A sharp reduction in the Ottawa Police Service’s budget in order to help the city support the construction and maintenance of social housing.”

These demands are not new, they are not only in response to the killing of George Floyd, or Regis Korchinski Paquet, Chantel Moore, D’Andre Campbell, Ejaz Choudry, Rodney Levi. They are in response to this list of names itself, which has been growing since the advent of policing in Canada when the North Western Mounted Police were founded to clear indigenous peoples off of their lands to allow for colonization.

Back at that urban boundary meeting I begged the committee to “imagine a radically just, open, and utopian city which works for all.” Today, I ask you members of the Police Services Board to join me in the same act of imagining. We are seeing the power of a global uprising against policing, calling on cities to reconsider their priorities and to heavily invest in the kinds of services that really keep their citizens safe. That means divesting from our police service and reinvesting that money, and more, into those earlier points, from public housing, to free public transport.

It also means rethinking our emergency response units! We do not need to bring armed officers to situations where people are in mental health crises, and even if they are not armed, we do not need to bring police officers at all. In the case of Abdirahman Abdi (who deserves some semblance of justice in the immediate firing of Mr. Montsion who has managed to make more than \$500 thousand dollars since he brutally beat a resident of our city to death), we can see that even without the use of firearms or tasers, or even batons, the police in our city will use their license to kill. And they defend that license, even when it is so obviously and blatantly used against the vulnerable, as we can see by the disgusting campaign to support Mr. Montsion with ‘thin blue line’ style bracelets sold by members of the OPS to each other, and to other police forces across the country. Instead of bringing the police to health crises, we should be bringing only trained, unarmed deescalation professionals, mental and physical health experts, and others who may be needed to assist in addressing the cause of the crisis.

In several cases in Canada, as outlined in Desmond Cole’s book *The Skin We’re In*, police are responding to residents who are in crisis as they are in the process of being evicted from their homes. In multiple such situations, including the killings of Pierre Coriolan and Machuar Madut, police have killed the person in distress. I think this shows that it would be worthwhile to ban the practice of evictions. At the very least, we should be providing housing, and housing support workers to these people in crisis, not cops.

I hope, though I do not assume, that members of the board have had a chance to look over the demands of Black Lives Matter Toronto around policing. I will repeat a few of them that are imperative to take action on immediately.

- 6.** Remove police and school resource officers (SROs) in all schools, at all levels, across Canada.
- 7.** End all special constable programs and all policing on campuses.
- 8.** End the policing of public transportation.
- 11.** End police collaboration with the CBSA.
- 12.** Eliminate all stealth police cars and plainclothes operations.
- 21.** Invest in community support for shelters, drop-ins, after-school programming in low-income, Black, and Indigenous neighbourhoods.
- 24.** Establish a community-based and trauma-informed emergency service for people who have experienced gender-based violence.
- 25.** Implement of civilian transportation safety service and better/safer road infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and public transit
- 27.** Provide permanent, secure housing options for all people who need housing.

All 27 are all available at [BlackLivesMatter.ca](https://BlackLivesMatter.ca)

It is time to build a healthier, safer, and more caring city. I believe that that might be what your job is asking of you. It is definitely what your city is asking of you. I was at the Regis Korchinski Paquet vigil, the protest at parliament hill, and the protest on Saturday outside of the police station and city hall. It is time to act. I direct the board to commit to implementing the relevant changes from BLMTO including defunding the police.

I also suggest that you all read or listen to interviews about the work of Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. The latter is easily accessible in the latest two episodes of the Intercepted Podcast. We can actually do this.

## Sourcing:

1. *Defund the Police – Demands – BLM – Canada*. *blacklivesmatter.ca*, <https://blacklivesmatter.ca/defund-the-police/>. Accessed 23 June 2020.

Please use these demands as a framework for Ottawa, at least until you are presented with new demands from Ottawa organizations.

2. Wilson Gilmore, Ruth. “Intercepted Podcast: Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition.” *The Intercept*, 10 June 2020. *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/>.

This is necessary listening for anyone unfamiliar with abolitionist frameworks. Please get acquainted before we move to fundamentally change things and defund the police.

3. Cole, Desmond. *The Skin We’re in: A Year of Black Resistance and Power*. Doubleday Canada, 2020.

This book, along with Robyn Maynard’s *Policing Black Lives* are incredibly important for people in your position as Police Services Board members. Please do the required reading about the history and present of our racist policing institutions in Canada.

4. Kaba, Mariame. “Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police.” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>.

Mariame Kaba is one of the most important voices of this moment. Read her work and let her guide your imaginations toward a better world.