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Re: Ottawa Police Budget Increase

Dear Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to add our voice to this important discussion. We are Social Workers who have worked for decades in community organizations and a local school board. As a result, we have some insights and thoughts on this matter.

Previously as social workers, we worked collaboratively with the police during crisis interventions, including mental health and wellness checks. (at school and in their homes) While we have both worked with caring and resourceful Police Officers, our concerns lie with the OPD as an institution. As School Board Social workers, a significant portion of these joint interventions involved BIPOC and other minoritized students and families. The majority of our students and their families lived in poverty and most had a history of overtly negative and oppressive interactions with the police.

We are both white, middle class Social Workers. The Police Officers in attendance were usually white officers. As staff we were mandated to work jointly with the Police and School

Resource Officers. At times, the Police had no previous involvement with the family. This meant there was no constructive or organic connection to the student and their families. The interventions were sometimes helpful and effective, but most of the time, they caused more harm, and a higher level of mistrust by the clients. There was a lot of repair work to do afterwards. Most of the time the trust we previously had with students/families was broken.

In comparison, when we did joint interventions with agencies (eg. Community House workers) who had connections to our clients and their communities, interventions were far more effective and sustaining. That is why it is imperative that the monies that are going to increase the police budget, instead need to go to agencies that already work in these communities. There should also be additional funds allocated to create a new model of crisis and mental health intervention. What is needed is the creation of multi disciplinary response teams with diversified staff. Unless this process begins, outdated and harmful militarized responses to crisis situations will only continue.

In conclusion, the enormous OPS budget does not require any more increases. Instead, there needs to be an re-organizing of different priorities that do not require a militarized response to mental health interventions and wellness checks. The police need to be in the background, instead of leading these types of intervention. There are other communities that have shown the courage to go into a

**different direction. This committee needs to do the same.
Thank you.**

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