



Joint Statement to support the call to defund police and prioritize investment in community safety and wellbeing.

HAMILTON, ON (June 17, 2020)--Over the last three weeks, we have watched brutal acts of racism play out on our screens, we have listened with empathy to the growing chorus of voices bravely sharing their experiences of racism and injustice, we have examined data, read journals and consulted with community.

Indigenous and Black communities have worked tirelessly to shine a light on the impact of systemic racism in Canada and to call for justice and transformation of all institutions including the police service.

Hamiltonians have heard the call and are responding.

To date, 4000 Hamilton citizens have signed on to a petition pleading with City Council to defund the Hamilton Police Service (HPS). And, in the middle of a pandemic, thousands of Hamiltonians have safely gathered to protest anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism that takes place across the world and here locally.

Defining “Defunding”

What does it mean to “defund” the police? Does it mean there will be no one to enforce laws and traffic violations? No one to respond to property theft? No one to investigate violent crime?

No. This is not what is meant by “defunding”.

“Defunding” is about re-allocating money from policing towards community-centred supports.

Defunding means prioritizing investments into health, housing, education and social development to address our code red crisis in Hamilton.

There have been nine instances of fatal encounters with the HPS between 2003 and 2018. A CBC investigative report, *Deadly Force: Fatal encounters with police in Canada*, documents six of these, while two have occurred since the report’s conclusion. Forty-four per cent of those killed were Black or racialized people – yet account for only 18.6% of the population of Hamilton.

Hamiltonians who had deadly encounters with police:

2003 - **Chevranna Abdi**

2007 - **Soun Saing**

2011- **Andreas Chinnery**

2011 - **James Kiteley**

2012 - **Phonesay Chanthachack**

2013 - **Steve Mesic**

2016 - **Anthony Divers**

2018 - **Robyn Garlow**

2018 - **Quinn MacDougall**

And across Canada, since April, we have seen the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Pacquet, D'Andre Campbell, Chantel Moore, and Rodney Levi, Jason Collins, Eishia Hudson and Stewart Andrews - All of whom were Black and/or Indigenous.

Most Canadians killed in police encounters since 2000 had mental health or addiction issues.

We believe it is possible to deeply invest in crisis prevention and intervention without criminalizing mental health and addictions.

The Importance of Oversight

Last week, the Police Services Board approved having HPS report back on what a 20% funding cut to the police budget would look like. The motion did not call for a service assessment of what types of calls police respond to, how and with what impact. There was no call for statistics on excessive-use of force nor percentage of calls involving mental health crises. This kind of information could have assisted the board in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities, and, by extension, assisted the public in determining whether a response from a different kind of service agency might have been more appropriate.

The Independent Review into the Events Surrounding Hamilton Pride 2019 underscored the importance of oversight. And its findings are a reminder that this is not a time for performative politics and empty gestures. It's never the time.

Since 2005, Hamilton's Police Services budget has increased by 68% while crime rates have trended downward, and our population has risen by less than 12%. The current annual police budget is \$171 million.

At the same time, our communities have become overwhelmed with addictions, mental health issues and a critical lack of access to affordable housing. In the ten years since Code Red was declared, we have failed to improve the severe health disparities in Hamilton.

Communities are safer and healthier when we invest in them. Data shows that crime rates go down when neighbourhoods have better schools, parks and green space to gather and play, access to well-paying jobs along every commercial corridor, transit options, robust social support services and housing in place.

Investing With Purpose

It is our responsibility as municipally elected officials to demonstrate fiscal leadership by investing with purpose with the expectation of positive returns.

It is our responsibility as municipally elected officials to advocate for solutions that will better serve all Hamiltonians and the future of our city.

It is our role as Board of Health members to acknowledge persistent inequities in health outcomes.

It is our role as Board members of CityHousing Hamilton to underscore the supply crisis in safe, affordable inclusive housing and bring every solution to the table.

It is our role and responsibility to publicly acknowledge that systemic racism exists and to insist on a just city in order to build a better city.

Call to Transform

It is our role and responsibility to listen and take seriously calls for change, to be open-minded in the examination of what change might look like and involve community in these conversations.

In this historical moment, and while contending with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear there is no going back to “normal”. We must build a better way forward.

Sincerely,

Maureen Wilson, Ward 1 Councillor

Nrinder Nann, Ward 3 Councillor

