

Toronto Police Accountability Coalition

www.tpac.ca, info@tpac.ca

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To: City of Toronto Budget Sub-committee

We wish to be listed as a deputation at the sub-committee's meeting on the Toronto Police 2022 Operating Budget.

As members of the sub-committee may be aware, the Toronto Police Services Board permitted only three business days to respond to its budgets, such a tight time frame that our group could not consider the budget, meet to discuss it, or formulate a response within those three days. We believe the Board acted unreasonably in attempting to prevent public debate about its budget. It means the Board has never seen the ideas set out in this letter.

We believe the 2022 operating budget should not be larger than 2021, and it should also address three sets of issues:

1. It should create efficiencies, doing a better job at less cost.
2. It should address the major issues created by police culture: racism, sexism, and violence.
3. It should start to resolve the questions of appropriate police functions and propose ways to transfer some functions now carried out by police to more appropriate community agencies.

Some proposals will save money, some will cost money. Some will require provincial legislation, some can be done by the police board and police service. Some can be done relatively quickly, some are complex and will take some time to accomplish. The objective with all changes is to ensure the police provide better service to the community.

We believe community safety and security is secured through a wide web of community players, of which the police are but one element. Too many people over-emphasize the police role in creating safe and secure communities when it is clear that police are not effective in preventing crime, and are not particularly efficient in responding to crime when it has occurred simply because it is not always easy to determine who the criminals actually are. As well, we are aware that too often police create a sense of fear and insecurity in communities, rather than increasing a sense of safety and security.

Accordingly, we believe the 2022 police service operating budget should include the following changes:

(1) Ending suspension with full pay

Legislation to end the current practise of suspending officers facing criminal charges or disciplinary offenses only if they are fully paid must be ended. Instead the chief should be authorized to suspend officers without pay, as now occurs in Alberta. The Association of Chiefs of Police in Ontario has made this demand for several years, but the provincial government has always refused to make this change. With a provincial election set for June, it makes sense for the Board and the service to press for this change, at least for Toronto.

The police service probably has a firm figure of what suspension with pay cost in 2021, as well as an estimate of its cost in 2021. While these costs have not been made public, the annual savings in Toronto would probably be in the order of \$12 million. As well, suspension with pay will help to curtail the drawn out process of resolving suspension disputes, now often involving years of delays and appeals since the officer is being fully paid during this process. This should add another \$1 million to the savings.

The Board should make the application for legislation to the provincial government, and then approach all political parties at Queens Park asking

them to commit to this change in the election scheduled for early June. The Board should undertake a modest public campaign to seek public support for this change, using media announcements, as well as asking City Council, which funds almost all of police expenditures, to get behind this initiative.

Assuming the change in legislation could be in place by September of this year, some \$4.5 million would be saved in 2022. Much more will be saved in 2023 and in future years.

(2) Dispense with two officers in a car after dark

In 2019 agreement was reached with the Police Association to loosen the rule requiring two officers in a car after dark. The agreement stated 'Where the parties agree that officer and public safety will not be compromised, they may mutually agree to modify or waive the application of the two officer patrol car requirement in order to improve the capacity of the Service to more flexibly meet operational demands.'

Some 97 per cent of calls for police service do not involve violence, and for those calls the police response should not involve two officers in a car. Using this approach, some 200 officers could be freed up with only one officer in a car during nighttime shifts: this would mean there is no need to hire 200 new officers at a cost of \$16 million to replace those retiring. The savings in 2022 would be gradual throughout the year, and would total about half that amount - \$8 million.

(3) Institute pre-charge screening

The Board should seek permission from the province to institute pre-charge screening in Toronto so that instead of police laying charges, they will be laid only by crown attorneys. This practise is now in place in British Columbia, Quebec and New Brunswick.

In Toronto, according to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, 68 per cent of the charges laid by Toronto police last year were dismissed by the courts or withdrawn. In Quebec, about 10 per cent of criminal charges are withdrawn or dismissed by the court; in British Columbia, about 20 per cent.

The cost savings in Toronto if pre-charge screening were in place would be enormous: much less pressure on the judicial system, much less work for police including court preparation and court time, and much less harassment and expense for those unnecessarily charged. And if a racial lens were added to consideration by the crown attorneys, charging Black and Indigenous persons, now about five times more often than whites, could be reduced. Racial profiling by police could be partially addressed with this change.

The savings to the Board will be in the resources spent by officers in processing unnecessary charges, including the time spent in or preparing for court. In all likelihood, those savings would amount to \$30 million a year.

The Board should make the application to the provincial government to have the crown lay charges rather than police officers, and then approach all political parties at Queens Park asking them to commit to this change in the election scheduled for early June. The Board should undertake a modest public campaign to get the public to support this change, using media announcements, as well as asking City Council, which funds almost all of police expenditures, to get behind this initiative.

Assuming this change could be in place by September of this year, some \$9 million would be saved in 2022.

(4) Begin a program to disarm rank and file officers.

As reported to the Board in September 2021, in the first four months of 2021, Toronto police received 300,000 calls for service. Of those, 10,000

were 'calls involving violence'. The overwhelming number of calls, 97 per cent, did not involve violence. But each officer who attended a call for service had a gun, a conducted energy weapon and body armour.

An effective response to these 97 per cent of calls is an officer with a cell phone and a paper and pen, or indeed a community response that does not involve police as noted in the de-tasking comments which follow. Calls involving violence can be handled by the Emergency Response Team.

The police service should begin de-escalating its response by getting rid of this expensive hardware for most of the calls most of the time. Only a limited number of officers need this equipment. Police relations with community members will improve, and there will be significant cost savings in armour, guns, ammunition, and tasers. The amount in the 2022 budget for guns and ammunition is \$1.7 million.

Making this change will include considerable negotiations with officers and the Police Association. Strategies will be needed to determine in which divisions the changes should first be made, as well as training officers. Funds required to retain outside assistance if needed, should be found within the existing budget. As well, permission will be required from the provincial government, and again the political parties at Queens Park should be alerted to the Board's initiative to seek their agreement.

While it is possible change could be made in 2022, it is probably not likely, so no reduction in the budget should be included in the 2022 budget at this time, although there will be a significant reduction in 2023.

(5) Begin de-tasking

The Board should institute the changes needed to de-task police of many calls involving the homeless, drug overdoses, youth, and gender-based violence. The changes here are similar to those underway to de-task police

of mental health crisis calls. The change will take time, but the savings are considerable.

The report Rethinking Community Safety estimates the saving in the police operating budget from de-tasking will amount to more than \$300 million a year.

The Board should embark on an initiative to begin making these changes. This will not be something which the police service can do on its own. It can only be done with the assistance of independent experts to help negotiate changes with appropriate social service agencies and their interface with the police service. In all likelihood these negotiations will take the better part of 2022, so that no financial changes can be expected in this budget year: they will be implemented, and the savings will occur, in future years.

City Council should be requested to support this initiative – as it has indicated it wishes to see occur - by providing the funding and support for the retention of the necessary negotiators.

(6) Disband the mounted unit

The mounted unit is a service which is not necessary in today's police service. It serves mostly a public relations role, and any policing functions it provides such as searching rough terrain can be provided in other ways, such as by drones.

The annual cost of the mounted unit is \$5.9 million. If the decision is made now to disband the unit, about half that amount - \$3 million - can be saved in 2022 as the unit is phased out.

The total savings from all these changes in 2022 will be \$24 million. This would mean the operating budget would be no larger than in 2021.

Recommendation:

The Budget Sub-committee should agree to these changes and request the Police Services Board agree to these changes.

John Sewell for
Toronto Police Accountability Coalition