

# Fund our lives to create public safety

*West Side Community Organization calls for funding what we need to thrive and divesting from the Saint Paul Police Department*

## #FundOurLives

No matter what we look like or where we live, we want our families to be well and our communities vibrant. But the people entrusted to serve and protect us continue to target, detain, and kill Black, brown, and Indigenous people in our communities.

Rather than pouring millions into a police force that is undermining our safety, our city must invest in the programs and systems that affirm our lives including accessible, safe, and affordable housing; public schools; healthcare; job creation; and other community initiatives that protect our health and enable us to make ends meet. **We know mental, physical, and economic wellbeing are fundamental to safety in our communities.**

Year after year, the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD) exerts immense pressure on elected officials to ensure police get a giant, outsized portion of the budget, leveraging racialized fears about crime to distract us, divide us, and divert money from the community programs and investments that actually promote safety.

While some people advocate for reform, the murder of George Floyd – and too many others – at the hands of police underscores the fact that the institution of policing is steeped in racism and white supremacy. It's beyond reform. **Therefore, the Board of Directors of the West Side Community Organization calls for ongoing divestment from SPPD.**

Divestment from SPPD is not immediate abolition. It's long-term, well-thought-out, systematic planning to fund our lives and implement public safety strategies developed by and for the community.

For years, WSCO has created spaces for community members to speak out on issues of community safety. Because we value and prioritize community knowledge and expertise to share concerns, create solutions, and build capacity for care-based interventions to crisis, **we're committed to continue hosting community conversations where we envision public safety strategies that affirm our lives, our families, our communities, and our dreams.**

**We ask you, the community, how should we invest our resources to affirm lives on the West Side and across Saint Paul? Share your ideas and join our movement for life-affirming public safety.** Reach out to us at [info@wsco.org](mailto:info@wsco.org) or 651-293-1708.



**West Side Community Organization (WSCO) believes public safety means affirming lives – not taking them.** To affirm lives – especially those of Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities (BIPOC) most affected by racism, economic injustice, and police violence – our city must redirect resources from the Saint Paul Police Department (SPPD) to increase funding for accessible, safe, affordable, and public housing; community services; public education; healthcare; jobs; and other programs that enable us to be well, make ends meet, and create a vibrant community.

Despite the best efforts of reform advocates, the institution of policing remains rooted in white supremacy and racism. Police continue to target, detain, and kill BIPOC community members, making it clear that police reform is ineffective. **Therefore, the West Side Community Organization (WSCO) Board of Directors believes that we can only achieve public safety by investing in the programs and systems that affirm our lives while divesting from SPPD.** Divestment is not immediate abolition. It's long-term, well-thought-out, systematic planning to implement public safety strategies developed by and for the community.

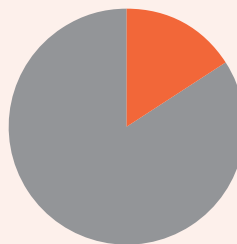
**Right now, we're pouring millions into an institution that's undermining our safety.** Year after year, SPPD's leadership and union exert immense pressure on elected officials and in our communities to ensure they get a giant, out-sized portion of the budget. Take the City of Saint Paul's 2020 budget, for example. The total budget is approximately \$715 million. Of that, \$126 million – or nearly 18 percent – goes to SPPD. Between 2015 and 2020, SPPD's budget ballooned by \$23 million – while funding for other community programs increased only marginally each year.

For decades, at all levels of government, people with power have exploited racialized fears about crime to divide us and divert funding from the community programs that keep us safe to police departments that threaten the

## Police detain and hurt Black youth and youth of color at higher rates than white youth

**While the SPPD claims it's trying to address systemic racism within the department, data indicates a clear history of racial discrimination.**

Below are some data points from research conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). This research is from a draft report based on raw data from the SPPD obtained by court order.



**Black people** – juveniles and adults – make up just **16 percent of Saint Paul's total population.\***

But from 2016 to 2017,

**80%**

**of juveniles arrested by SPPD were Black**



5.6% were Asian, 5.6% were white, and 3.4% were Latino (out of the 179 arrests for which the ALCU received race data).

**In 2019, 56% of use of force victims ages 18 or 19 were Black.** 22% were Asian and only 8% were white.

**100%**

**of those who left a use of force encounter with an injury were Black.**



lives of BIPOC community members. Instead of funding programs that create wealth and wellbeing in BIPOC communities, **people with power continue to prioritize investments in sports stadiums, luxury development, and corporate tax breaks over programs that enable working people to build wealth and achieve their dreams.**

**These choices have consequences, and racist policies like redlining and racial covenants ensure BIPOC communities contend with the most challenging ones** – from under-resourced public schools, chronic health issues, and economic distress, to homelessness and mental health crises. Rather than addressing the root cause of these issues, elected leaders deploy police officers who are not adequately trained nor emotionally equipped to provide the care-based, life-affirming crisis response our communities need.

**We can and must do better.**

Rather than neglecting and criminalizing emergency mental health situations, homelessness, and other non-violent crises, **it's time to create infrastructure for prevention, community care, and situation-specific crisis response.** Let's invest in social workers, medics, youth mentors, crisis counselors, and other solutions that foster safety and wellbeing instead of violence and harm.

**At the same time, we must address the root causes of challenges that face our communities.** By diverting funding from SPPD, we can invest in life-affirming programs that enable us to make ends meet and create a vibrant community. We know mental, physical, and economic wellbeing are fundamental to safety in our communities.

As we grapple with the murders of George Floyd and too many other Black, brown, and Indigenous people at the hands of the police, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has wrought the most harm in BIPOC communities, **we must reckon with the fact that white supremacy, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination threaten lives.** WSCO is committed to racial justice and life-affirming

public safety. **We're determined to use our resources and relationships to reach out to neighbors and develop solutions of, by, and for the community.** We're capable of sharing concerns and creating solutions together.

For decades, WSCO has been a trusted messenger in the community, including regarding issues of safety and policing. In 2007, we hosted community forums on the "Cradle to Prison Pipeline" and a legislative report card grading the racial impacts of policies. We have hosted several community forums since then, where we have discussed police reform, and re-imagined public safety in ways that are rooted in the community. **Going forward, WSCO will create more spaces to envision public safety strategies that affirm our lives, our families, our communities, and our dreams.**

We ask you all, the community, how should we invest our resources to affirm the lives of West Siders and the City of Saint Paul as a whole?

**Interested in getting involved with WSCO and your neighbors to envision life-affirming public safety?** Reach out to us at [info@wsco.org](mailto:info@wsco.org) or 651-293-1708