



A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN



City of Toronto Councillors and the Mayor

Re: Funding Community Safety

June 26, 2020

Dear Mayor Tory and City Councillors,

We are writing you to support the motions of your June 29/30 Council meetings that clearly signal to all residents of Toronto your intentions to re-allocate the City of Toronto's 2021 Budget resources to community safety strategies that have proven capacity to enhance all resident's safety and reduce fatal interactions with Toronto Police Services (TPS).

As you may know, YWCA Toronto is the city's largest multi-service women's organization. We help families escape violence, move out of poverty, and access safe, affordable housing. We work tenaciously to break down barriers that prevent women, girls, and gender-diverse communities from achieving equality. Annually, our Association serves over 13,000 people, including trans and non-binary community members.

We are writing to re-iterate our concerns expressed in a [correspondence sent to you on June 15](#) by almost 50 community-based organizations urging action around gun violence and highlighting the need for greater investment in community-solutions to violence and disinvestment from TPS. We are still looking forward to your response to this letter.

We are also writing in support of the issues raised by Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC) in their June 26 correspondence to you that outlines some of the reasons why greater funding for community safety programs is so urgently needed.

As mentioned by TNC and others in our sector, many strategies that support community safety and provide alternatives to traditional policing models already exist. Our sector has the expertise and desire to work more actively with the City to expand them. Many community organizations are ready to step up and collaborate with the City to scale up, adjust and refocus proven strategies and interventions as soon as possible.

The following interventions summarized by Black Lives Matter Toronto, and supported by many other coalitions and groups, have already been developed and implemented by community-based organizations. Expanding these practices to provide even greater support and safety in our communities is entirely within reach, if you allocate adequate funding to scale up these interventions:

- Crisis Intervention and Mad co-led support teams that respond to mental health crises;
- Police-free, community-led, trauma-informed emergency service for people experiencing mental health or psychiatric distress and other forms of crisis;
- Street outreach services that support homeless and street involved people and connect them to appropriate services;
- Shelters, drop-ins, and after school programming in low-income, Black, and Indigenous neighbourhoods;

- Youth outreach, youth diversion and constructive interventions for youth in conflict with educational institutions and legal systems;
- Restorative services, mental health services, and community-run health centres;
- Harm reduction, including safe supply, safe injection / inhalation sites, and harm reduction outreach workers;
- Community-based and trauma-informed emergency service for people who have experienced gender-based violence;
- Civilian transportation safety service and better / safer road infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit;
- Civilian conflict resolution service to replace policing of minor by-law infractions / noise complaints; and,
- Providing permanent secure housing options for all people who need housing.

We urge you to advance motions that will bring about a new arrangement so that rapid response teams co-ordinated by CAMH, hospitals and social agencies can respond to mental health crisis calls, instead of TPS.

Given the necessity to prioritize City resources available to advance robust alternatives to maintaining community safety, we also urge you not to support any motions to purchase body cameras for TPS. The cost of this plan is \$20-30 million a year, and studies have shown body-worn cameras fail to address questions of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and rarely result in changing police behaviour. TPS undertook a pilot project on body worn cameras in 2016 at a cost of \$432,000. The report on the pilot project states “there was no significant incident or situation that arose that would have provided an opportunity for the body-worn cameras and associated video to demonstrate value, or lack thereof, for police accountability and public trust.”

Community-driven, evidenced-based strategies and programs should be explored first and foremost in addressing community safety concerns and persistent anti-Black racism. We urge you to adopt motions that will enable our sector to work with you to advance better solutions and promote safety for all residents of Toronto.

Sincerely,



Heather McGregor
Chief Executive Officer