

To all Members of the Board,

In response to the ongoing protests across the city against anti-Black racism and police brutality, City Council voted last week against defunding the police, in favour of **increasing** the police budget by \$50 million dollars for the implementation of body-worn cameras.

To implement this program within the Toronto Police Service is to publicly acknowledge that you are **not listening** to the majority of people behind this movement.

As [Phillip Dwight Morgan wrote for *The Toronto Star*](#), protestors have been chanting “Justice for Regis,’ ‘Black Lives Matter,’ and ‘Defund the Police’...There were not, to the best of my knowledge, any crescendos of ‘Body cameras now!’”

Time and time again elected leaders push for [band-aid reforms like this](#) to ignore the systemic problem: that [policing has never, and can never serve Black and Indigenous communities more than it harms them](#).

Body-worn cameras do not work. [After piloting in many of Canada’s largest cities, all except Toronto chose not to invest in them](#). In today’s TPSB Town Hall, Mayor Tory noted that during pilot programs of the BWCs, Torontonians reportedly “felt better” about policing. I’m not here to say feelings don’t matter, but what we are talking about is saving lives– and there is virtually [no evidence](#) to suggest that body-cameras do that. Not to mention the legitimate concerns about [the dangers of increasing police surveillance](#) of racialized individuals within highly-policed communities.

[Black, Indigenous, and other POC leaders have been speaking and writing for decades about what their communities actually need to be safer](#). Unfortunately, in the absence of any real change, [they must continue to write about it now](#).

The demand is absolutely clear: **defund the police** and directly transfer those funds into community-led health and safety programs. The police are exorbitantly funded to respond to mental health crisis calls, people struggling with addiction issues, people experiencing houselessness and many other tasks for which they are ill-suited. We ask for that funding to be transferred to the budgets of organizations who can properly and safely do that work.

This is no longer a radical idea. The budgets for myriad other community services have been dramatically defunded over decades in Toronto, including those relating to education, public health, affordable housing, arts and after-school programs and more– many of which (unlike BWCs) have *actually* been proven to [increase public safety](#).

Many cities across the U.S. are rising to this moment and taking concrete action to defund their police forces in favour of other community-led health and safety initiatives. Just a few days ago

[Edmonton City Council acted to cut \\$11 million dollars from their police budget.](#) Organizations, institutions, unions, and governments across Canada are [calling for significant defunding of police.](#)

To take action on this issue in any other direction is to openly admit that the voices of so many Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in Canada fall on deaf ears.

The communities leading these marches and this movement are **literally** fighting for their lives. They are telling you how their lives can be protected.

I'm listening, and I hope you are too.

Sierra Weiner
9 July, 2020