I am speaking to you today to express my outrage regarding the Toronto Police Service budget of **$1.076 billion from the total $13.5 billion 2020 operational budget** for the City of Toronto (an increase of 4% since 2019). This astronomical police budget costs the taxpayer more than firefighters, paramedics, libraries and public housing combined. **I request that we start divesting from the systematically violent Toronto Police Service immediately**.

In doing so, we would be able to invest in our communities and eradicate the reasons why most nonviolent, and even some violent, crimes are committed - people steal because they have to, people do and possess drugs because they are not provided with adequate care and support. Our current public services all fail to do enough due to lack of funding. It is unacceptable that we spend more on salaries for police officers than what we spend investing in our own communities. Our schools are suffering, our public housing is completely inadequate... The inequalities in Toronto are astounding. The police get billions of dollars and yet we have people sleeping in the street. It makes no sense. Our public school teachers went on strike because they are drastically underpaid and overworked, which means thousands of students got an incredibly subpar education this year when you consider COVID as well. They do some of the most important work there is, and yet police officers who are rarely utilized by the general public get the largest chunk of the budget - most people will go their entire lives without calling the police. I am not one of those people and I still think we would all be better off divesting from them. I used to volunteer at a youth shelter, and they received so little funding that it was genuinely shocking. To know that there are at-risk youths with no place to go and they receive little to no support when they could get access to money already being spent on the TPS is disheartening, to say the least.

I propose and implement a TPS budget cut of, at the absolute minimum, **$276 million or just 10% of Mayor John Tory’s estimate of a $2.76 billion budget shortfall** – what he called  [“one of the greatest financial challenges the city has ever faced”](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-pandemic-could-push-torontos-budget-shortfall-to-nearly-28-billion/%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1591194174865000&sa=D&ust=1591194174916000&usg=AFQjCNG_OrxZvHYy810FoGlcQCXB1hQyuA) – as we struggle to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, we should prioritize the expansion of **community-led health and safety initiatives** over future financial investment into the Toronto Police Service.

In the face of cyclical police violence happening throughout North America right now, there is no better time to commit ourselves to change. We have seen that investing in body cameras, civilian reviews or de-escalation and implicit bias training [*doesn’t work.*](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/31/the-answer-to-police-violence-is-not-reform-its-defunding-heres-why%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1591194174866000&sa=D&ust=1591194174917000&usg=AFQjCNESeLb0ohs6oMFaeuMfhbgphDb7yg) The problems with the police force are deeply embedded within it and cannot be trained out in a few sessions, just like sexual harassment training sessions have not actually reduced sexual harassment or violence. I also ask that you withhold pensions and don’t rehire cops involved in excessive force cases, require cops to be liable for misconduct settlements, reduce, the size of the police force, and **ABSOLUTELY** stop sending armed/uniformed cops on mental health-related calls.

**An** **increased police presence, which includes TTC inspectors and enforcement officers, does not keep us safe**, rather it directly threatens the lives of our most vulnerable communities (BIPOC, the LGBTQ2S+ community, unhoused people, street-based sex workers, people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty, etc). Instead of investing in policing, our city must prioritize alternatives like education, increased mental health services, housing initiatives, income security, harm reduction services, accessible rehabilitation, mutual aid, social workers, conflict resolution services, transformative justice, and other vital community-based support systems. **These initiatives must support our most vulnerable communities and center the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in Toronto, who have been targeted, ignored, and oppressed for far too long.**

Thank you for your time,

Lana Hafez