Dear Toronto Police Board, Toronto City Councillors, and Mayor John Tory,

I wanted to take this opportunity to write you, as I have by email as well, and once again state how imperative defunding the police is to the people of Toronto. I have watched and listened to the multiple days of meetings, as Toronto constituents share their experiences of police neglect, brutality, profiling, and overall oppressive actions. After hearing all of this, there is no way to pretend that you are doing what is being asked of you. Your reforms, your band-aids on these deep, deep wounds, do not work, and we see them for what they are.

There are many different ways to begin to defund our police and de-colonize our city, government, and judicial system. This knowledge and information is all accessible in theoretical literature, studies, and actively unfolding in parts of the United States and Canada right now. Moreover, it is being discussed in these virtual town halls, as various social workers and community leaders call in with suggestions, with actions they are already putting into place, but that desperately need the funding the police force is overflowing with.

As an upper-middle class, white woman, I hold a lot of privilege and have not had experiences with police. However, my mother has been a librarian for the TPL for three decades, and her stories and experiences are something I have grown up with. Working in a free, indoor, public space means constantly being in contact with the homeless, the mentally ill, people who struggle with substance abuse, and people who hold generally lower socio-economic positions than she. The darkness of the things she has witnessed and experienced have always been a strong image for me of the people we let down in our city, and it has only been getting worse in the last few years.

When situations would arise that warranted police calls, they were often not helpful. Really, they warranted a call to a social worker or a crisis response service, but not the police. Unfortunately, “9-1-1” was and still is often the only accessible option due to issues of funding and the high volume of crises in the city. These people would simply be kicked out and roam in other areas, or would be arrested, sometimes violently, and continually go around and around in the revolving door that is the prison system.

This not only puts these ostracized community members at risk, but everyone involved, including library patrons, staff, and police. The library, an incredibly important public tool for free education and pleasure (two things everyone deserves), becomes a space taken up by people who have nowhere else they can go, who are getting little to no support from our government and the police. Employees, must either become hardened to these individuals, to think of them as the police do, as a nuisance, a social problem, or, like my mother, become pseudo-social workers. Either way, patrons lose out on the full ability of TPL workers who must negotiate this fraught work environment.

My mother has no professional training, but has learned from her many years of work how to do her best to de-escalate scenarios that are wildly unsafe including physical fights, drug sales, and sexually inappropriate behaviour, amongst any other situation you could imagine. Still, my 5”1 lovely, dedicated mother was punched in the face by a man who went on to punch two other librarians on different occasions. This could have been avoided if we properly funded and took care of people going through crises. Clearly, calling the police on this man and getting him briefly jailed or moved to a different area would not stop this type of aggressive behaviour, but we cannot blame the people that we fail to support properly.

I really implore you to defund the police. This example is one of many, and proves how quickly things fall apart without proper government attention and care, and how complexly this web works. If the library and other safe, educational public spaces had more funding people might have better upbringings, better outlets. If services for mental health and drug addiction, become more accessible and poor neighbourhoods and homelessness are treated as an issue of creating better lives, not a social problem that must be pushed aside or stamped out, everyone would be safer.

By defunding the police and spreading that money to all these other services we could uplift our city; we could better our communities. You have the opportunity here to support those that we have marginalized and pushed to sell drugs between the aisles of picture books. The Black, Indigenous, poor, LGBTQ and Two Spirit, mentally ill, homeless, and drug addicted people of our city need us white folks and those who hold power to make a real change. This could be the start of that change, but it must go hand in hand with you all confronting your inner bias, your inner white supremacist, the ways in which we have been taught that law and order must be maintained as truth, rather than choice.

Sincerely,

Sophie Fagan

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