Hi Toronto Police Services Board,

I am writing to you as a Black woman living in Toronto who is hoping you will read the below with an open mind on the concerns and suggestions on restructuring the Toronto Police budget.

Black residents make up less than ~10% of the city’s populations but are accounted for ~61% of all cases where police use force that result in death and ~70% of police shootings that result in death. Unfortunately, these numbers are not a surprise to the Black community and I’m sure not to you. Black people are more likely to be stopped, carded, and are given unnecessary charges or arrests. These numbers alone tell me and all Black people that we are not safe and are to fear the police. If we are “The True North strong and free,” then we are greatly mistaken because Black people have never felt free in a country that claims to have equal rights for all.

Over the last couple of months, we’ve seen the deaths of Ejaz Choudry, Chantel Moore, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, and many more that have not been given the media attention they deserve, who were shot and killed by the police. These calls were made because of mental health episodes and instead of coming to their rescue, they were punished and their cry for help fell on deaf ears. The police are not trained properly or have the proper tools to deescalate people with mental health issues. It takes 8 to 10 years to become a professional psychiatrist, but only 24 weeks to become a police officer. Over a 6-month period of training courses covered include: defensive tactics, driving firearms, neighbourhood policing, and investigative training – every single one of these training tactics instill and highlight violence as a resolution to all situations. Not one of these courses cover “how-to” handle a mental health call or unbiases training.

The Toronto city council has voted in favour for a non-police response team for mental health calls by 2021, but these changes do not include a targeted reduction of the policing budget. How do we protect the most vulnerable in our city when you are funding police officers to be based on violence? How do we rewire police officers that violence is not always the answer when they are not punished for unruly and unjust acts against Black people? We need officers to be trained properly and we need them to be educated on the neighbourhoods they are patrolling. How does someone come from a neighbourhood where systematic racism is not an issue, but is expected to go into underdeveloped areas in the city and understand the everyday struggles they face? They need to study and understand what the people and area has undergone to address issues in the proper manner.

Toronto has the biggest police budget in Canada, $1.22 billion, about 9 per cent of the city’s $13.53 billion operational budget for 2020. Only ~$3 billion is distributed for various social support and development programs (employment, social assistance, childcare, long-term care services, helping under-resourced neighbourhoods, housing and shelter support). The council rejected a 10 per cent cut, about $107 million, and instead passed a motion for body cameras and overhauling the way the police force responds to people in crisis. People in crisis need support from our city so they are not fighting to protect themselves and harm from the people who should do their job and do better. How are we expected as Black people to contribute to a city that won’t contribute to us? We can’t expect the police to be it all. Yes, we need an overhaul of how they are trained, but they are not the professionals that should receive the funding – the people who have put in the work and have received the education, like medical professionals, should receive an increase in budget to help people in crisis, as you would put it.

Cities need to rethink the notion of public safety, focusing more on safe and affordable housing instead of increasing police presence in low-income neighbourhoods, which increases the chances of violent interactions with police. We need our policy makers to solve this, we need the city council to take over this police budget, so they can make changes and requests. Investing in our communities and people saves live and cost less. Black people are not just statics, we are brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, doctors, and more.