

Hi, my name is Dan Zaitzow. I am a Toronto resident, educator and volunteer tutor who was teaching literacy at Toronto South Detention Centre prior to the COVID pandemic. I urge the Toronto Police Services and the city of Toronto to listen to the voices not only in their city but across North America and the world, pushing for a move to fully defund and abolish the police system as we know it.

Out of the nearly one million phone calls Toronto police receive every year, about 30,000 are mental health related, according to your statistics. Across Canada, from 2000 to 2017, a CBC News investigation found 70 per cent of the people who died in police encounters struggled with mental health issues, substance abuse or both. How can you still think that police are qualified to support people with mental health issues if they make up 70% of who police kill in this country? Canada's largest mental health hospital, CAMH is calling for the defunding of police. They have stated, "Mental Health is health. This means that people experiencing a mental health crisis need health care." and that "Police should not be first responders. Police are not trained in crisis care and should not be expected to lead this important work." It's insulting for the TPS to think they can better intervene than mental health care professionals and it's insulting that you are not listening to the statements of professionals who know better than you.

Let's think about how investing funds into community supports and programs can reduce crime and ultimately, the need for police. Because isn't that the goal? To stop crime? And it won't take a massive restructuring, either. These organizations and supports already exists - they are just massively underfunded and starved for resources. If we look at one of these organizations, Street Health's Overdose Prevention Site supports drug users. According to their annual report, they reversed 50 overdoses in one year. That's 50 deaths avoided. This is possible because the people working at the OPS are trained professionals with the tools to work with that specific population. They have those specific skills and know how to not only support drug users but also provide them with a safe space in which their behaviour is not criminalized. The outcome? People aren't dying. Imagine how much crime related to drug use could be reduced if this OPS and others were properly funded.

We must fund mental health services, shelters, childcare centres, after-school programming, support services for gender-based violence, civilian-run conflict-resolution. Stop sending militarize police to deal with traffic issues, bylaw issues and offenses that aren't even violent crimes.

I am demanding a minimum of a 50% decrease to the TPS budget and for those funds to be reallocated to community organizations and services to support the communities that are being harassed and brutalized by police.