Dear Toronto Police Board,

I am grateful for this opportunity and appreciate the way your board members are showing up in the conversation thus far, and I hope you will have the courage to listen deeply and act radically and decisively moving forward.

I write to you today feeling flustered, angry, and frustrated by your response to what we are now calling, and has always been, a national crisis of police violence fueled by systemic racism and other structures of oppression. The incremental reforms put forward by TPS and by Mayor John Tory are deeply disappointing and will do nothing to ameliorate the distrust that has been engendered in Toronto residents.

It is time for a paradigm shift.

I want to echo local Black and Indigenous leaders including Desmond Cole, Robyn Maynard, Black Lives Matter Toronto, the Afro-Indigenous Rising Collective, and Not Another Black life in Toronto calling for defunding and abolition. Policing is, at its roots, a system of racial control on behalf of our colonial state. Police exist to protect capital, the wealthy elite, and themselves. They do not protect and serve our communities. Policing has and will always be a white supremacist capitalist institution. This cannot be undone with reform, we need a radical solution, and that solution is defunding, disbanding, the full abolition of the carceral state, and the reallocation of the TPS’s billion-dollar budget to community services.

We know that reforms fail. Before the callous murder of George Floyd, Minnesota was a beacon for advocates of police reform, and yet he still died. I am appalled by the $50 million budget increase allocated to TPS over 10 years for body-worn cameras, which have been shown to be grossly ineffective at curbing police violence across North America. Body cameras can be tampered with, turned off, the footage can be “lost” or edited. Even if body-worn cameras were 100% tamper-proof, police have shown time and time again that even when they are aware they are being filmed, they are still willing to commit violence against residents. Body-worn cameras ultimately are a purely optical move to feign accountability without actually preventing harm.

TPS according to its own data responds to over 30,000 calls per year, and they are exactly the wrong people to respond. As a peer worker and aspiring social worker who has served marginalized communities and people with mental health experiences, I echo many frontline community workers in saying that police, by their very presence, escalate mental health crises. They only add fear, threat, and trauma to an already overwhelming experience of distress for those experiencing crisis as well as their loved ones. And somehow, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour keep ending up dead during wellness checks across the nation.

There will be no “restoring trust with communities”. It’s done, it’s too far gone. Too many people have died, been injured, traumatized, and incarcerated. Listen to us. We’re saying it’s over. I have empathy and compassion for the challenge of facing such an enormous change, but I implore you to have courage. Many Toronto residents have faced job loss and an unexpected career change, so too can the TPS. It’s time to share your resources and work with us to re-imagine how communities can be safe, resourced, and thrive together.

I demand that you to immediately and totally disarm your force, destroy or surrender your militarized equipment including surveillance tools, and dedicate your budget to dignified housing for all, free transit, Black and Indigenous-led community supports and anti-violence initiatives, and comprehensive mental health and addiction services, including the Reach Out Mobile Crisis unit proposed by my friends and former colleagues Rachel Bromberg and Asante Haughton. If you are brave and accept this sea change, you can help to end the cycles of violence and systemic oppression that you as an institution are participating and perpetuating with policing and incarceration. COVID-19 has shown us that it is possible to rapidly mobilize wide-reaching change and new programs and services. Abolition is possible, and now is the moment.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

-Liz Beeforth