Dear Members of the Toronto Police Service Board,

I’m writing as a concerned citizen from Trinity Spadina, to urge members to move TPS towards defunding, and instead invest that money into transit, housing, mental health and other community services. I watched some of the virtual town meetings and was disheartened by much of what I saw. At times, it felt as though members were defensive about their own perspectives instead of actively listening to input from community members. I wanted to address two of the instances that I found frustrating.

The first is when Councilor Nunziata said that members of the community were calling for more police presence because they felt unsafe. But it seemed to me like the community members who took time to address the TPS board were calling for *less* police presence and for funds to be put towards community services that would, in effect, make communities safer and lessen the need for police presence. I am wondering why the TPS board continues to cite voices calling for more police presence? It seems to me that we default to the idea that more police will make us safer, even when the majority of voices are calling for less police. This assumption is a problem. Further, Black and Indigenous activists who have spent years of their lives thinking about, researching, and writing about this concept are the most qualified to be giving advice and directives about how to make communities safer, particularly racialized communities. So why are we not listening to them?

The second instance was when Councillor Nunziata suggested that instead of directing funds away from police and towards community services, police should just partner with those services to improve and reform. Again, that’s not what community members are asking for. Again, that’s not what Black and Indigenous activists are asking for. Again, why do we always default to police? Why do we feel like police always need to be involved? The fact that Regis Korchinski-Paquet died during a wellness check is really the only tragic evidence we need that police should not be present during a mental health emergency.

I understand that this issue is overwhelming. Thankfully, we have experts in our community who have spent years doing a great deal of the work and research needed to make responsible decisions, and changes in how police and community services operate. I’m excited about what those changes will enable our city to do. If Edmonton, Minneapolis and New York can begin the process to defund the police, then Toronto can as well.

I’m exceedingly grateful for the Black and Indigenous experts and activists who have spoken up. I’m hoping that members of the board will value their expertise.

Thanks for reading,

Emily Mani

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