

Premier's Office
Room 281
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

CC: Hon. Sylvia Jones, Mr. Kevin Yarde, Dr. Laura Mae Lindo

Dear Premier Ford,

On August 6, the provincial government announced a six-million-dollar investment into the institution of policing, despite the calls from marginalized communities and allies to reallocate funding into community-led, trauma-informed emergency services.¹ This is a deadly decision, that reinforces existing systemic barriers for Ontario's Black and Indigenous youth, contributing to their inability to access opportunities like post-secondary education. Black and Indigenous Canadians are more likely to be killed in police encounters than white Canadians.² As student representatives, we believe safety for all students should be a key government priority. We are concerned about the government's strategy for allocating additional funding to police, which deprioritizes and ignores funding for community-led public safety measures.^{3,4} As the Premier previously declared, systemic racism is a problem in Ontario.⁵ It is irresponsible to allocate additional funding without assessing how systemic racism affects policing and contributes to the marginalization of racialized citizens.

Historically, police have disproportionately harmed marginalized communities. This is evident in the ratio of carding and stops that have been perpetrated against Black and Indigenous peoples, the physical violence enacted against people with mental illness during 'Wellness Checks' and the ongoing surveillance of Black and Indigenous communities.^{6,7} In a report compiled by CBC, during a 17-year period there was an average of 25 fatal police interactions per year and 70% of these victims had mental health and/or a history of substance use.⁸ Although 43% of victims are white, Black and Indigenous people are overrepresented in fatalities at 9% and 15% despite only comprising 3.4% and 4.8% of the Canadian population.² Systemic inequities make situations of police force far more likely to occur involving Black and Indigenous individuals. Simply put, policing plays a key role in the oppression of racialized peoples.

¹ Black Lives Matter – Canada, "Defund the Police – Demands," n.d. <https://blacklivesmatter.ca/defund-the-police/>

² Singh, Inayat, "2020 already a particularly deadly year for people killed in police encounters, CBC research shows," *CBC News*, July 23, 2020. <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/fatalpoliceencounters/>

³ Statistics Canada, "Police resources in Canada, 2018," October 3, 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00015-eng.htm>

⁴ Statistics Canada, "Canadian Classification of Functions of Government, 2017," November 28, 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128b-eng.htm>

⁵ Xing, Lisa, "Doug Ford has admitted systemic racism exists here, but what's he done to tackle it?" *CBC News*, June 7, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/doug-ford-government-racism-george-floyd-1.5600867>

⁶ Britneff, Beatrice, "Police wellness checks: Why they're ending violently and what experts say needs to change," *Global News*, June 26, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7092621/police-wellness-checks-experts-change/>

⁷ Cole, Desmond, "The Skin I'm In: I've been interrogated by police more than 50 times—all because I'm black," April 21, 2015. <https://torontolife.com/city/life/skin-im-ive-interrogated-police-50-times-im-black/>

⁸ Marcoux, Jacques and Katie Nicholson, "Deadly force Fatal encounters with police in Canada: 2000-2017," *CBC News*, n.d. <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-custom/deadly-force>

According to Statistics Canada, 50 to 80% of police work involves responding to non-criminal activity related to public safety and well-being.³ Police are not appropriately positioned to respond to incidents such as overdoses, mental health concerns, disturbances and other non-criminal incidents.^{6,9} Such work can be better undertaken using a trauma-informed, community-led approach, by those with training and education suited for the job, and who can operate without the fear that police instill in many of our students' hearts and minds.

We call on the government to allocate funding to community-led public safety measures to make non-criminal incident response the default to non-violent community calls in Ontario.

Upstream programs have proven effective in reducing crime, and improving socio-economic status, creating positive health outcomes.¹⁰ Investments in education, healthcare and housing begin to address the driving factors of crime for all people. The added benefits in addressing the societal inequities and improving outcomes for marginalized peoples, are healthier, safer, more prosperous communities in Ontario.

We call on the government to fund upstream, community-driven programs to reduce the need for incident response services and build healthier, safer communities in the first place.

As many across the province and nation call for the reallocation of funding to community-led and developed response to public safety, it is the Premier's, and all elected officials', responsibility to address and respond to these calls. As today's youth, we stand with our community members across Canada in their calls to invest in community-driven solutions that are developed with healing and accountability in mind.

Sincerely,



Megan Town

On behalf of the,
Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association
McMaster Students Union
University of Toronto Students' Union
Laurentian University Students' General Association
The University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU) Executive
Indigenization Working Group, Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo
ACB Network Waterloo Region

⁹ Institute for the Prevention of Crime, "Homelessness, Victimization and Crime: Knowledge and Actionable Recommendation," n.d. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/cnmcs-plcng/cn35305-eng.pdf>

¹⁰ Williams, David, Manuela Costa, Adebola Odunlami and Selina Mohammed, "Moving Upstream: How Interventions That Address the Social Determinants of Health Can Improve Health and Reduce Disparities," *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, November, 2008, doi:[10.1097/01.PHH.0000338382.36695.42](https://doi.org/10.1097/01.PHH.0000338382.36695.42).

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