



Friday, June 26, 2020.

RE: Item MM22.5

Dear members of the Toronto City Council,

As the Executive Committee of the University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU), representing over 38,000 full-time undergraduate students at the University of Toronto - St. George campus, we are writing to you today in support of Item MM22.5. City Council must commit to putting in the work to divest from and dismantle colonial systems of oppression within our City and our society, including the Toronto Police Service. We appreciate the shared understanding that police reform is necessary, however we firmly believe that anything short of redistributing a portion of the police budget to community resources and supports is not enough.

The 2020 Toronto Police Service budget is the second largest budget expenditure for the City of Toronto, at \$1.076 billion.¹ We are concerned about the immense size of the TPS budget, particularly at a time when the City of Toronto is struggling to accommodate a \$2.76 billion shortfall as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.² It's crucial that the City take the time to reconsider the most effective use of these funds, and what the role of policing in Toronto should be. As Item MM22.5 proposes, reinvesting these funds into childcare, affordable housing, mental health and addictions support, food security, and community-led alternatives to policing would help to eliminate the root causes of crime and poverty, thereby reducing the scope of policing in Toronto and better supporting marginalized Torontonians.³

The City of Toronto must ensure that moves to reform the Toronto Police Service reduce the scale and scope of policing by reinvesting funding into community supports, and challenge the notion that police increase community safety. The reality is that for many communities within Toronto, including BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ Torontonians, police do not contribute to safety, and in both historical and contemporary contexts, the Toronto Police Service perpetuates violence towards these marginalized communities. Piecemeal reforms do not address the root problems; body cameras do not reduce the scale of policing, and further

¹ "2020 Program Summary Toronto Police Service," toronto.ca (City of Toronto, 2020), <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/9789-TPS-2020-Public-Book-V1.pdf>.

² Oliver Moore, "Pandemic Could Push Toronto's Budget Shortfall to Nearly \$2.8-Billion, Mayor Says," The Globe and Mail, April 18, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-pandemic-could-push-torontos-budget-shortfall-to-nearly-28-billion/>.

³ Miller, Jason, and Jennifer Pagliaro. "Why Healthy Neighbourhoods Are the Antidote to Gun Crime." thestar.com. Toronto Star, October 30, 2019. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2019/10/30/why-healthy-neighbourhoods-not-police-are-the-antidote-to-gun-crime.html>.



training, as Premier Doug Ford has suggested, does not address the systemic issues of policing in our City.⁴

It's important to note that this motion does not immediately defund the Toronto Police Service; if adopted, City Council would ask the TPS Board to propose a 2021 budget that is 10% lower than the current budget, while the City explores strategically reinvesting these funds into community-based models of support and prevention. The City of Toronto has already begun to actively explore and adopt strategies for these community supports, such as both the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy and the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy outlined in the motion summary, however many of these strategies remain unfunded. If the City Council would truly like to prioritize preventative and effective community supports over relying on the Toronto Police Service as a stopgap solution, a shift in the City's funding priorities must also follow.

Police reform in the City of Toronto is a necessary and crucial component of dismantling systemic racism and oppression, but it is only one component. We ask that City Council listen to the voices and experiences of Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, people of colour, and historically marginalized communities in our City. In order to live up to its motto "Diversity Our Strength," the City of Toronto must ensure that these diverse communities are safe and supported at all times, and ensuring this means following up on commitments to prioritize preventative community supports over policing with accompanying shifts in our City's budget priorities. Therefore, we strongly urge the Toronto City Council to adopt Item MM22.5.

Yours,

The UTSU Executive | executives@utsu.ca | 416-978-4911

⁴ Gollom, Mark. "Calls to Defund the Police Gain Traction with Some Canadian Policymakers. But What Does It Mean? | CBC News." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada, June 10, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/defund-the-police-canada-1.5605430>.