

From: Caitlyn Priya Ramdharry
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2024 2:54 PM
To: City of London, Mayor <mayor@london.ca>; Stevenson, Susan <sstevenson@london.ca>
Cc: Budget Committee <BudgetCommittee@london.ca>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] London Police Service Budget

Dear Mayor Morgan and Councillor Susan Stevenson,

My name is Caitlyn Ramdharry, I reside in ward 4 and am a King's University student in year 4 of my honors double major in Sociology and Criminology. Additionally, I am a racialized woman from a low-socioeconomic background and am very concerned about the unfettered support of the latest budget proposal by the London Police Service (LPS). This budget requests a \$672 million increase that includes a \$33 million raise in police salaries. In total, this budget demand accounts for a thirty percent increase in the city's police budget over the next four years. The police budget is already significantly higher than other city budget categories at 18%, a full 8% higher than the second-highest category of the city's overall budget. Consistently, the LPS has grounded the need for a budgetary increase in language that promotes fear, with statements such as London is "the third most dangerous city in Ontario," arguing that increased police spending will decrease crime rates, making our city "safer." Furthermore, the LPS argues that a budget increase will permit an increased presence of policing throughout the city and a considerable amount of modernized technology for those officers, creating a more efficient police service.

These claims are lacking important context. For example, according to Statistics Canada (2023), since 2022 London is on a downward trend in overall crime (10%), violent crime (15%), and non-violent crime (7%). In fact, our decreases in crime are outperforming the national average in all categories apart from violent crime, of which we are just shy of the national average. The LPS also roots its claims in rising crime rates on the relative increase in response times to code three, non-emergency calls. However, without context on the nature of these calls we are missing important information about how often these calls do not require a police presence, meaning funding would be better allocated to non-police responses. We also know that policing disproportionately negatively impacts Indigenous, Black, racialized communities, women, girls, and non-binary folx and Queer communities, unhoused and street-involved folx, lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods, disabled folx and the many intersections of these communities. Thus, a consideration of the harmful impact of the extension of over-policing in oppressed communities, coupled with evidence that increased police spending has no consistent correlation with decreased crime, are further considerations in relation to where the city prioritizes spending.

It's also important to note that non-police-based community responses to the underlying social causes of crime (e.g. food and housing precarity, lack of access to healthcare, education, opportunities, etc.), such as the Hubs through the newly implemented *Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness* in London are only just emerging. This system response has not received sufficient time to assess its impact on the types of incidents related to social causes of crime. Lastly, the LPS' proposed purchases—like a second armored vehicle, state-of-the-art training facility with London Fire, and the incorporation of body cameras—are high ticket items and have demonstrated no conclusive evidence for lowering crime rates. This article lists some of these items and their associated costs <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/drones-tasers-body-worn-cameras-what-s-in-the-london-police-budget-ask-1.7100175>, some of which are additional year-over-year additions to an ever-increasing police budget in a time where community-based supports and resources are being cut and/or are continuously underfunded. This budget ask is harmful because it simultaneously expands police officers' powers throughout the city and perpetuates underlying social harms driving poverty and homelessness in London by demanding a huge increase that requires the defunding/underfunding of community-based supports/responses.

FAQs:

Q1: Doesn't hiring more officers result in lower crime rates?

A1: As stated by retired police chief Murray Faulkner, increasing police budgets and hiring more police officers does not correlate with lowering crime rates. Police forces react to the presence of crime, but do not necessarily prevent crime. A new study that looked at the 20 largest municipal police services across Canada (including London) found there is "no consistent correlation" between police spending and crime rates in Canada (<https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/cpp.2022-050?journalCode=cpp>). The police budget is an endless cycle of reactionary response – you can look to Toronto for a stark example. Their police budget is over 1.2 billion dollars a year and yet, this year they are making similar justifications as the LPS for more funding. It is also worth noting that they have also "modernized" with body cameras etc. Policing is not prevention.

Q2: Where should the funding for the LPS be reallocated to, if given the option?

A2: At the LPS' own admission, and consistent with police calls for service across the country, much of their time is spent on complex calls that involve social problems such as people in mental health crisis, unhoused communities, and/or people who use substances. Criminalizing our community members is not the answer, nor is it effective in solving the problem. We have decades of data to support this. Crime rates need to be critically examined through the lens of preventative measures. Instead of increasing the police budget, we should reallocate money to essential services, community-and-grassroot organizations, and community-led responses that meet people's basic needs, connect them to community, and provide a sense of belonging.

Q3: Are there recent examples of communities who have been looking to a more community-based approach?

A3: Yes! For example, in 2021, the City of Toronto introduced the Toronto Community Crisis Service, which works to address mental health crises in the community without police response. Although the program is relatively new, it is showing promising results. In the one-year outcome evaluation report, the program diverted 78% of mental health and substance use calls that came through 9-1-1. Only 4% of calls required a police presence. The London Hubs are a structurally similar initiative facing the same underlying causes; unlike Toronto, these initiatives lack the sufficient time to better understand their impact on reducing police response.

List of Demands for City Council:

It is socially and fiscally irresponsible to approve an unquestioned, underexamined police budget. The LPS has failed to provide context on much of their assertions, the data they provide is limited, and there are many questions that must be addressed. This following list of demands is not exhaustive:

1. SEND BACK THE POLICE BUDGET

Have LPS take another look to identify areas they can reduce their budget. The City of Hamilton's city council just voted in favour of this action in an attempt to reduce the police budget, which makes up less of their overall budget than ours at 16% <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/police-budget-review-1.7099166>. Toronto city council just declined the police ask of an extra \$20 million to \$7.4 million. Mayor Josh Morgan has indicated that the police budget represents more than half of the 2024 budget increase, or 5.0 of the proposed 8.8% tax increase. Part of this budget is for body cameras, new SUVs and another command vehicle, drones, Tasers for all officers, a second armoured vehicle, increased members of the Emergency Response Unit, which means increased weaponry and militarization, and a \$42 million state-of-the-art training facility (the cost for just the first year), totaling a minimum of \$50 million, not including training and ongoing yearly costs. This is socially and fiscally irresponsible at a time in our city where so many are struggling to access basic necessities, community services/supports, a 30% increase in rents, more people using food banks than ever, small businesses struggling after the pandemic, and general economic pressures for many in our city.

2. CONDUCT further research on the following:

- a. Call Times
 - i. Code 3 calls – what are they specifically? Do they necessarily require police attention?
 - ii. What percentage of total calls do the LPS respond to in which other community services are also responding to?
- b. Mental health related calls
 - i. How many calls were mental health related in 2023? How are police resources being used to address these calls effectively?
- c. Housing/homelessness related calls
 - i. How many calls were housing/homelessness related in 2023? How are police resources being used to address these calls effectively?

3. DEFER the vote on the LPS budget-ask for council to proactively assess a community perspective that includes ALL community members, including those who most frequently encounter the police. What are their needs and suggestions? What non-police responses could we pilot that meet these needs in a non-criminalizing, community-based approach? Collect more public input and reflect on what the community is asking for.

- a. Demand more details from the police. For example, have they hired the 52 officers they were already given extra funding for in 2023? They have also recently implemented programs such as alternative reporting, hospital hand offs for mental health calls, COAST and statistically their numbers improved in 2022 – how have these initiatives reduced their calls for service?
- b. Waiting to assess the impacts of newly implemented programs such as the *Whole of Community System Response to Health and Homelessness* should be a priority before agreeing to more mass funding.

4. FUND more grassroots organizations and non-profits that do essential work in our London community to support individuals, especially marginalized and racialized folks, folks who are unhoused and/or folks

with mental illness/addiction. SafeSpace London, Atlohsa, Youth Opportunities Unlimited and more are examples of community-led services/supports that should be resourced appropriately.

I ask you to respond to the above demands and consider the voices of your constituents who deserve to be a part of the decision process of funding allocation. At a minimum, we deserve a response to the questions posed and a thorough explanation of how the proposed decisions offer greater benefit to our city. Now is not the time to provide extra funding to the police, particularly funding for things like new technologies and armored vehicles when a significant amount of community members are unable to access even basic necessities.

Sincerely,

Caitlyn Ramdharry