

Val Yu
Member Advocacy Committee
C/o The Neighbourhood Group Community Services
260 Augusta Avenue
Toronto, ON
M5T 2L9

July 31, 2024

Re: Interim Update - Toronto Police Service's Multi-Year Staffing Plan

Hello Members of the Toronto Police Services Board,

I am speaking to you today as an advocate with the Member Advocacy Committee. We are a group of people with lived experience of poverty, homelessness, disability and mental health issues. We operate as an independent group out of the Neighbourhood Group Community Services in Kensington Market. We have first hand knowledge of policing and will share our ideas for how to more effectively engage with people from our communities.

We endorse the recommendations from Change Lab and others you will hear from today on how to find real savings in the police budget. We do not favour expanding police work by hiring more officers. Instead a number of police tasks can be eliminated. Also many can be handed off to the civilian workforce at much less cost. These cost savings can be redirected into community building work.

Our number one concern is the policing of homeless people. We personally have experienced and know people who have been subjected to this inappropriate form of policing. The Change Lab estimates that interactions between police and homeless people range from three to 40 times a year per person with about seven times per year on average. This adds up to 70,000 calls, many of which are inappropriate. At our Corner Drop In at The Neighbourhood Group we often hear from clients who have racked up to thousands of dollars in tickets, mostly for just trying to solicit funds on the sidewalk. One client was given \$700 in tickets in one day by police and was justifiably very upset! People feel harassed by police and cannot pay these fines. We urge you tackle this aggressive policing and dramatically scale it back.

We also want to see an end to random police patrol as it is not proven to be cost effective. Instead replace these patrols by sending police to where actual crimes are occurring. Research shows that this change would result in a cost savings of between 14 and forty per cent.

We strongly urge you to use police budget savings to fully fund and prioritize Toronto Community Crisis Response teams for mental health crises. In their first year, these teams were highly successful. The city wide expansion should result in huge savings, with 16,000 diversions from police expected. This will mean less need for officer time. Our personal experience is that mental health crisis response teams, using the model employed by the Gerstein Centre, are much safer and more satisfying than calling police who use tasers and can put people in danger.

We are activists and frequently will exercise our rights by taking part in demonstrations. We find there are far too many police at these events. This deployment must be rethought and scaled back. Further, we do not support the continued use of the police mounted unit. Using horses to police people is an intimidating and outdated model. This form of policing must be eliminated.

Our members have watched with dismay as officers who are suspended for inappropriate behaviour typically still receive pay for many months, sometimes years. The Chief can use new powers to ensure this form of pay is eliminated. Currently there are 31 officers who are paid for multiple years, and this must end.

We also support other calls to reassign bylaw enforcement work to civilian city staff. This was recommended by the Auditor General and can save over five years of police work! Further savings can be found by redirecting parking enforcement and traffic enforcement to the city workforce, to save about 25 per cent in salary costs.

With savings from the police budget we can spend more to build up and strengthen our communities. These dollars can go towards community services, affordable housing, TTC improvements, youth services with a focus on youth employment, drop in services and more. We also support expansion of shelters for women and others, modular housing, and full funding of safe injection sites. The overdose prevention site at The Neighbourhood Group currently must run 100 per cent on community donations and really needs city funding. All these services can be funded at a much lower cost than policing and can greatly reduce crime rates through helping build strong and resilient communities.

Thank you.