Deputation to Toronto Police Services Board
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Good afternoon Members of the Board,

I am speaking on behalf of The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGCS). I have worked there for 15 years as a community development worker. I see firsthand the concerns our low income communities have with policing. I encourage you to look to today’s speakers who are sharing ways to reduce the police budget with service transfers and other ideas. In 2017 this Board engaged in a strategy to modernize the police and find cost savings through re-tasking. At that time I supported community members at our agency who live in marginalized communities to speak out. They made concrete suggestions for change. But the Toronto Transformation Task Force was quietly shelved. Instead the police budget once again began to increase. The proposals for modernization were sensible, and would have saved the city money. I urge you to revisit these recommendations.

I was very upset to receive a postcard in the mail last week which asserted that violent crime is up 21 per cent in Toronto, when if we take the long view it shows crime is down sharply. The card from the Toronto Police Association claimed the police need a budget increase. The force’s own data shows that violent crime is actually down in Toronto. Toronto has a much lower crime severity, compared to two other large Canadian cities – Vancouver and Montreal. The number of officers here should be decreasing, not increasing as is proposed. Policing does not deter crime. In fact it can lead to more feelings of distrust when communities are patrolled by police cars.

In my work I see daily the benefits of investing in crime prevention and diversion. These services tackle the root causes of crime and help build healthy and resilient communities. TNGCS has a range of services including conflict resolution, youth engagement programming, housing and homelessness support and congregate dining with a range of social supports for people in our Corner drop in. A number of these services received more investment across Toronto after the 2005 “summer of the gun”. And after these investments, the data shows that crime started to go down.

In a recent survey with 34 drop in members at our agency, a number of people expressed concern that the police budget is so high. Some called for a reduction and others asked that police be available when needed. Some also expressed alarm at their continued experiences of police harassment.

The recent decision to expand non-police community crisis intervention as the fourth emergency service must be lauded, and this service should be funded through a re-investment from the police budget in 2024. The proposal to add more officers flies in the face of evidence from the Toronto pilot project. It showed that non-police crisis response in Toronto has been highly effective. I am not in favour of the police proposal to add $20 million to the budget when such effective community prevention and community led crisis response has been proven to be cheaper and much more cost effective.

Clearly the police are taking on too much non police work. We must stop sending officers to engage in bylaw infractions, noise complaints and nonviolent mental health calls. This would free up at least $250 million worth of police time. Sending mental health workers instead of police for these calls is half as expensive as those taken on by police, and has better outcomes. Let’s do the math and make this happen!

Crime can now be reduced if we make investments in community alternatives and redeploy police to do the important work they are trained for, dealing with violent crime.

Thank you.