



Written Deposition from the Social Planning Council of Ottawa to the Police Services Board

November 9, 2020

Thank you to everyone present for sharing this conversation on unceded Anishinaabe and Algonquin lands. We represent the [Social Planning Council of Ottawa](#), and our request for you today is to vote to freeze the Ottawa Police budget at 2020 levels, and redirect the projected increase in funds to mental health and social services for indigenous and Black communities in Ottawa.

The SPCO is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, charitable community development organization created in 1928 in order to respond to acute socio-economic problems. It has incubated many important institutions in our City, including ParaTranspo, The United Way, The Ottawa Volunteer Centre, The Community Information Centre, and Ottawa's Council on Aging. Today, the SPC uses modern research and communication methods and works with Ottawa's social agencies, concerned residents and decision-makers to understand and advocate for addressing the social needs of our City

Stated in full, we request that the City of Ottawa, and the Ottawa Police Services Board, immediately move to implement the following demands from the [Justice for Abdirahman Abdi Coalition](#):

- i. **Freeze Police Budget Now:** We demand that the OPS Board freeze the police budget at today's meeting. This would mean capping the budget at the same amount it was for 2020, and that if any increase to the police budget by the OPS Board be presented to the City Council, that Council would vote against the increase on December 9th.
- ii. **Reallocate Funds to Indigenous and Black Communities:** We demand the re-allocation of money from the projected police budget increase to public health initiatives and social services for Indigenous and Black communities in Ottawa.
- iii. **Non-Police Mental Health Intervention:** We demand immediate non-police alternatives for mental health crisis intervention, and that public hearings be held on alternative non-police led models to emergency response.

On this third item, we are cautiously encouraged by the steps taken both by City Council and the OPS to consider alternatives for mental health calls. We in particular look forward to attending the meetings called recently by Council, where we will be advocating for an immediate alternative to police in crisis interventions. However, we believe that the actions proposed by both parties do not go nearly far enough, nor are the changes required being made nearly fast enough.

Freezing the budget and re-allocating the \$13.2M in projected funds towards social services is a simple and painless first step to address the urgent concerns of our community. Both [Calgary](#) and [Toronto](#) have embarked on similar efforts, and Mayor Watson followed a similar approach in the 2019 budget process. We have seen the OPS plan for a mental health strategy, but we are concerned that it is still being presented as an OPS-led initiative with “community consultations”, instead of a community-led process with OPS input. More than 6000 OPS calls each year are regarding mental health crises - handing this key segment over to community organizations will relieve an enormous amount of pressure on both the City and the OPS, which will allow them to refocus their efforts on the internal reforms that are sorely needed.

While we are not one of the **18 organizations** who co-created the [Ottawa Coalition for a People's Budget](#), we would like to take a moment to applaud their efforts at crafting an inspirational and bold document that should guide our budget discussions for years to come. It is necessary for all of us to think big and consider fundamental questions about our priorities. Policing itself does nothing to address the underlying cause of crime, and in fact serves to exacerbate those causes time and again. But free public transportation and free childcare create immediate improvements in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Ottawa, which will in turn relieve pressure on the police force.

As you have heard and will hear dozens of times today, the police have not held up their end of the social contract. Communities do not feel respected, and people do not feel safe. If Chief Sloy wishes to address the underlying causes of crime as he has said he does, then he should be willing to redirect his own funding to initiatives that will positively address them. Freezing the budget this year is a step that can be taken on this very call to rebuild ties with the community, with no outside force required. It is an easy and clear way for the individuals on this council to show that they are listening to and hearing the people of Ottawa.

Please listen to us.

- *Social Planning Council of Ottawa*

Building Blocks:

[Justice for Abdirahman - 5 Demands for Our City](#)
[Ottawa Coalition for a People's Budget](#)
[Ottawa Police propose “change budget” - CBC](#)
[Calgary](#) and [Toronto](#)

Possible Questions:

- What will the SPCO do to support this? Data collection/analysis, coordinating orgs
- Next steps we plan to take? Contact Diane Deans, attend mental health meetings

