
From: Ryan Janssen [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, February 7, 2024 9:40 AM

To: Stevenson, Kirsten <Kirsten.Stevenson@hamilton.ca>

Subject: Feedback Regarding 2024 HPS Budget

To Kirsten Stevenson at Hamilton Police Services,

I want to thank the people at the Hamilton Police Service for their hard work. I am fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to witness frontline policing for several years through employment alongside police in another municipality. My memories of working alongside those uniformed officers are fond ones, and predominantly of good people trying to do good work in the hardest of situations.

These officers, who are friends and family, peer into the world of mental health and addictions on a daily basis. As for myself: I have had the opportunity of working in a wide variety of mental health and addictions settings in Ontario while calling Hamilton home for most of my life. I know the City of Hamilton declared a state of emergency related to mental health, opioid use, and homelessness last year; and I know that so many of these emergencies result in calls that police officers must attend. While healthcare is a provincial mandate and those emergency declarations pertained to requesting additional support from the provincial government, there are nonetheless important municipal social services that bear on mental health and addictions.

Mental health work and policing do not stand in opposition to each other - indeed, they can be synergistic, as I know through firsthand experience - but our funding context is not one where the mental health sector and the police sector are on equal footing; and, indeed, will be increasingly so should the police budget continue to be steadily increased while municipal funding for social services barely keep pace with inflation. Local mental health and addictions services are straining to keep up with the demand for services, and, for a variety of reasons, the quality and efficacy of their services suffers because of their underfunding. Hamilton Public Health's 2022 Annual Performance and Financial Report speaks to there being significant service backlogs in

the community and the resultant priority to ramp up programs and services to address these backlogs. Variants of the words “catching up” were used six times in the 13-page report. Further, the 2022 report notes “a high, stable trend in staff unplanned absences compared to pre-COVID-19 absenteeism levels.” I am sure HPS has not been immune to these difficult realities; however, investment in early detection and prevention of issues that bear simultaneously on both health and policing - in particular, mental illness and substance abuse - is a more sustainable strategy than one that prioritizes reaction.

We cannot replace these social and health services with policing. Given there is only a limited amount of money available in Hamilton’s 2024 budget, I want to strongly advocate for increased investment in proactive and preventative treatment of the root cause instead of reactive policing of emergent crises. I feel strongly these investments need to be made in those municipal social and health services, rather than the policing service. The budget increase requested by HPS represents funds that would be taken away from agencies that are better positioned to address the present reality (in conjunction with, but not replaced by, a robust police service). HPS should be funded to do policing, not social work, health promotion, system navigation, or counselling. Responsible investment ‘upstream’ in mental health treatment and support, research, the implementation of best practices, and public health - especially as this all pertains to the social determinants of health - will in the long term preempt ‘downstream’ police calls for service; however, we need to see these social and health services adequately funded to be able to effectively do their work.

With kindness and thankfulness,
Ryan Janssen

