



HAMILTON POLICE SERVICE

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Hamilton Police Service Board Members
Mayor Horwath
City of Hamilton Councillors

On August 12, Superintendent Dave Hennick and I attended the General Issues Committee (GIC) meeting at City Hall. As you know, the focus of the agenda was encampments and safety in the City's core. During the meeting we listened to personal stories from both private citizens and commercial taxpayers. From these delegations, we heard a common theme emerge – what is in place is not working.

The protocol is a “human-centered, housing first, health-focused, rights-based approach,” with the City of Hamilton’s Municipal Law Enforcement taking the lead. The protocol is housing-focused and not enforcement-based. However, as compassion fatigue takes hold with residents and businesses, we heard many voices express a desire to make a shift to enforcement.

It has been mentioned many times that homelessness is not a crime. We agree. Yet, we continue to receive calls from citizens who have been victims of crime and are reluctant to support charges. Unfortunately, the fear of retribution or unwillingness to participate in the court process encumbers our ability to proceed with charges.

Since the passing of Bill C-5, there has been a fundamental shift that recognizes substance abuse use primarily as a health and social issue rather than a purely criminal matter. The principles outlined in the Bill signify a pivotal shift in the approach to criminal law, where evidence-based methods align with compassion, human rights, and community well-being. This means simple possession charges are not being supported by the courts.

In addition, there appears to be a narrative that police are not responding to encampment issues and we are taking a hands-off approach. Our statistics tell a different story. Since January, our Encampment Engagement Team has conducted 604 site visits. In addition, police have experienced a 479 per cent increase in police events mentioning "encampments" or "tents" compared to similar events in 2019.

Across the City, we have seen a 31 per cent increase in suspicious person calls, 109 per cent increase in trespassing calls, and 20.3 per cent increase in assist ambulance calls over the past five years. This is compounded by the significant rise in gun violence we have experienced this year. We continue to manage these calls on top of our daily demands for an increased focus on traffic safety and priority calls for service, including 911 calls.

I believe we are at a critical point in this journey. Complex matters like homeless encampments and the opioid crisis require a multi-faceted approach from all community stakeholders, including police. In June, we launched a city-wide project to enhance safety and reduce crime near encampment sites. Since then, divisional patrols have conducted 50 park-and-walks in these areas.

We are on the front lines every day doing our part to address the rising tide of encampment-related issues and their residual effects across the City. We stand ready to assist Council in changing the narrative around safety in our City.

Together, we can make Hamilton a safer place for everyone. Please feel free to contact me directly at [REDACTED] if you have any further questions or concerns.

Be safe. Be well.



Frank Bergen
Chief of Police
Hamilton Police Service

Together. Stronger. Safer.