

Daniel Bingham

Deputation to Toronto's Executive Committee

January 26, 2022

Item EX29.1: 2022 Launch of Community Crisis Support Service Pilots and Policing Reform Updates

Good morning Mayor Tory and Council. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to you. First, may I say: Bravo! This project, next to the COVID response effort, shows Council's commitment to saving and improving the lives and the health of Torontonians, it is my belief, all Torontonians. We are so grateful for you making this project begin and hopefully succeed. So much depends on it.

My name is Dan Bingham and I'm here representing the Member Advocacy Committee (MAC), just like Roberta was, out of The Neighbourhood Group in Kensington Market. I'm also on the Toronto Harm Reduction Steering Committee.

Nine years ago, this week, I tried to end my life, diagnosed with severe depression and acute alcoholism, facing eviction for non-payment of rent, cut off from unemployment support, and afraid to negotiate the Ontario Works. I couldn't face another day. Fortunately, I entered Ossington Detox and the sober system. Through the help of many different groups, I am now strong enough to be able to add to society and to help making changes.

We have to address the systemic discrimination and other issues with policing, requiring our ongoing diligent and dedicated efforts. The areas of activity outlined provided an immediate opportunity to begin to move models that better serve marginalized communities, reallocate services and to support vulnerable people, and to improve community safety and produce better outcomes in the short and long term. Toronto is, and should, take action on them now.

Our current strategy of policing those who are homeless generates roughly 360 police interactions, generates as many as 16 thousand tickets, and hundreds of incarcerations and court hearings. These interventions create over a hundred million dollars in costs. Yet, all this does little to reduce the problems of crime.

Currently in Toronto, all 911 calls are first routed to the Toronto Police Service which determines whether the call needs to be transferred to fire, ambulance services, or retained for police response. Research suggests that the vast majority of 911 calls do not involve violent situations or necessitate the capacity for use of force that would be appropriate in at least 60 percent of all the calls.

Mental health. Policing is not an appropriate way to respond to mental health crisis. Criminalizing mental health conditions is a fundamental problem made worse by the impact policing has had on the community. Toronto Police respond to over 30 thousand calls for service specifically relating to mental health crises, making up 3 percent of police calls. But

those calls account for 11 percent of the use of force, more than twice the use of force rate for calls involving robberies and more than three times the amount involving apprehending people wanted on charges. Forty percent of all taser use is on people in a mental health crisis. The Ontario Human Rights Commission also notes intersections between Indigenous identity and increased use of force of people with mental health issues.

We have civilian-led mental health crisis responses already in place in Toronto, but they are not called on as first responders when a 911 call. The Gerstein Crisis Center, who also helped me when I was in Ossington Detox and I hold responsible for helping to save my life. The Gerstein Crisis Center answers over 40 thousand mental health crisis calls per year and conducts over 19 hundred mobile visits. They take in over 900 people who stay in facilities that include safe beds for people in crisis, hundreds more are supported through the crisis in safe beds operated by CAMH and CODA. The Distress Centers of Greater Toronto fields another hundred thousand calls, assertive community treatment.

You know, I could go on with all these different groups that are doing this, that are willing to step in and help the city help save lives and to reduce the need for police officers to respond to health issues when they could be actually spending more of their time focusing on serious physical and monetary crime.

I thank you very much for letting me speak again today, and I hope to see you soon and I hope this project works out fantastic. Thank you for your time.