

MOTION

7. Decriminalizing Poverty and Supporting Community-led Safety Initiatives

At the Council meeting on July 21, 2020, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on Policy and Strategic Priorities meeting on July 22, 2020, in order to hear from speakers.

Submitted by: Councillor Swanson

WHEREAS

1. Officers in the Vancouver Police Department routinely respond to calls that are related to social issues, including addiction, substance use, homelessness, mental health issues, and poverty;
2. Officers in the Vancouver Police Department continue to respond to mental health calls, reporting that they responded to more than 5,000 calls related to mental health in 2019 alone;
3. The police budget for the Vancouver Police Department has grown more than \$100 million over the last 10 years;
4. There is widespread recognition that police officers are routinely attending to calls that would be better dealt with by peer-, health-, social- and community-based programming. Evidence suggests that criminalization and policing are not effective solutions or harm reduction strategies for these concerns. This evidence includes local communities, organizations, and residents who have called and are calling for support for existing and future alternative approaches;
5. A number of reports have made recommendations regarding the criminalization of Indigenous people, people who rely on public space, and people who use illicit substances, including *Red Women Rising* (Martin & Walia, 2019) and *Project Inclusion: Confronting Anti-Homeless and Anti-Substance User Stigma in British Columbia* (Bennett & Larkin, 2018);
6. Recommendations from *Red Women Rising* include:
 - a. Redirect growing municipal, provincial, and federal police and prison budgets towards solutions that increase safety for Indigenous women such as more housing, child care, income, healthcare, mental health and addictions services, and healing supports;
 - b. Repeal laws that criminalize or increase harm for women in the sex trade;
 - c. All levels of government must commit to using non-incarceration measures especially for poverty-related minor offenses. Governments must also provide sufficient and stable funding to Indigenous communities and organizations to provide alternatives to incarceration including community-based rehabilitation, diversion, community courts, and restorative justice methods geared towards Indigenous women; and

- d. Fund a Bear Clan Patrol in the DTES that is led by Indigenous residents and based on Indigenous reciprocal responsibilities of safety, security, and kinship.
7. Current policing practices disproportionately criminalize Black and Indigenous communities, as reflected in street check data, as well as rates of incarceration in provincial and federal prisons;
8. The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada *Calls to Action* (2015) calls upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to the recognition and implementation of Aboriginal justice systems in a manner consistent with the Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Aboriginal peoples, the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, endorsed by Canada (November 2012); and *Calls for Justice* (2019) resulting from the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls call for decolonizing approach to justice, including 11 recommendations specific to policing services; and
9. The City of Vancouver is committed to using an equity lens on social issues which include issues relating to police services.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council ask the police board to itemize the work they do that is related to mental health, homelessness, drug use, sex work, and the amount of money spent on it, including the number of tickets issued from enforcing related bylaws as well as the cost of this enforcement
- B. THAT Council ask staff to seek input from BLM, WISH, CCAP, BCCLA, Hogan's Alley Society, Vancouver Aboriginal Transformative Justice Services Society, VANDU, PACE, DTES Women's Centre, Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society, Battered Women's Support Services, PIVOT and the John Howard Society, and other community groups about how the city could support existing and future community-based harm reduction and safety services.
- C. THAT Council ask staff to report back as soon as possible with a plan, timeline and budget to de-prioritize policing as a response to mental health, sex work, homelessness, and substance use and to prioritize funding community-led harm reduction and safety initiatives in these areas.
- D. THAT Council directs the Mayor to inform the Vancouver Police Board that it is this Council's priority to respond to mental health, sex work, homelessness, and substance use with community-led initiatives rather than policing.

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