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January 4, 2018

**Dear Mayor and Council,**

I write to express concerns, on behalf of Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS), with the recent budget proposal by the Victoria Police Department (VicPD), presented to Mayor and Council on October 31, 2017. We are greatly concerned that significant increases to the budget of Victoria's police department, and the number of officers deployed, would have an adverse impact on many of our clients, who already experience higher levels of enforcement by police due to addictions and complications relating to mental illness. Specifically we write to oppose two aspects of the VicPD budget proposal, the increases to the ACT Pilot Program, and the request for six additional patrol officers.

*Increases to the ACT Pilot Program*

Our organization opposes the additional funding for police on medical outreach teams, as we have not been presented with evidence which shows that greater policing is positive for the health and safety of individuals placed on ACT teams. Furthermore, our province remains the only place in Canada where individuals under a committal order pursuant to the Mental Health Act are placed under "deemed consent", where they have no ability to provide input or feedback on their treatment or medications while under a committal order. We are concerned that police on these teams are being used to enforce, violently if necessary, a legislated mental health treatment system which is questionable, and likely unconstitutional. The province's mental health laws are currently being challenged by the Community Legal Assistance Society, and they have rightly expressed in the attached article how police enforcement of the Mental Health Act must be addressed before additional resources are dedicated to projects like the Act Pilot Program.

While it is important that the VicPD is engaging in a qualitative analysis of the mental health program, which is a positive development, it is also important for Mayor and Council to hear the voices of the people who are involuntarily placed on ACT teams. In addition to the University of Victoria study being conducted on the efficacy of this program, we are aware of another study currently being conducted which will examine how police integrated ACT teams impact the clients under the ACT teams themselves. We request council wait on increasing the budget for this project until the conclusion of the qualitative research on this project, and other similar projects, which will shed more

light on how imbedding police on medical outreach teams impacts the health and safety of clients on those teams.

### *Six Additional Patrol Officers*

One of the reasons cited for an increase in the number of patrol officers is the time it presently takes police to respond to calls in Victoria. While certain events like the opioid overdose crisis have led to a greater than average amount of calls for a certain type of service, we question whether or not police need to be responding to the type of calls that have increased. The Vancouver Police Department has adopted a policy where police are not to attend an overdose call, and instead paramedics and ambulance personnel are dispatched to respond without police support. We are not aware of any issues that have arisen in Vancouver as a result of this policy, and in fact it is far more likely that people who use drugs will reach out for help in an overdose if they know it will not lead to enforcement of drug laws and ultimately arrest or incarceration.

Before adding additional officers and increasing police resources, we believe an operational review should be conducted on the amount of time police are currently spending responding to health matters like overdoses, or enforcing laws against individuals who are committing offences due to their social condition. A strategic change in the philosophy of our policing, and policies limiting police involvement in health matters, would have a much more profound impact on the allocation of resources than incremental increases in funding.

The statistics on overall calls for service, and decreases in the Crime Severity Index, also do not support the VicPD's assertion that additional patrol officers are needed at this time. Attached to this letter is an infographic from the 2016 Census showing that Victoria actually had the second largest drop in Canada in its Crime Severity Index at 12% in 2016. Decreases in the overall number of calls for service have been widely reported, and the VicPD's claim that this decrease comes as a result of less reporting of crime is not supported by any factual findings. It must also be noted that Victoria already has the second highest ratio of police officers to residents, second only to Quebec City.

Our office is concerned that extra police without a specified need will default to traditional policing techniques. Canada's major police departments still subscribe to the philosophy of "proactive policing", where police are encouraged and incentivized to proactively seek out minor criminal and bylaw offences in the hopes that increased enforcement will lead to a subsequent decrease in problematic behavior, despite little evidence supporting this conclusion. In Canada the vast majority of minor crime is related to poverty and social condition, and in our experience police tend to default to the easiest targets, who are predominantly marginalized people.

Some may argue that there is no harm to increasing a police department's budget, but to that we would disagree. Without fundamental changes to police culture and philosophies of enforcement we see the potential for real harm to the marginalized people we represent.

Sincerely,

Douglas King  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Douglas King', written in a cursive style.

Together Against Poverty Society

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