

20 November 2020

Dear Mayor Joines, Mayor Pro Tem Adams, City Council members, and City Manager Lee Garrity,

City Council and City Managers, the call to divest from the police is a call to minimize the harm done by policing in our community of Winston-Salem. In the face of protests, emails, calls, and continued public comments from community members, the City Council speaks out to voice support for WSPD, a support that has resulted in decisions to add funds to WSPD in a show of support. City Council members have even said that these additional funds are for retaining and recruiting more employees for WSPD. Furthermore, even when asked to respond to public comment, as was done by multiple community members on Nov 16th, City Council members continue to remain silent. As elected officials who oversee decisions on taxpayer dollars, this silence is unacceptable.

The harm from WSPD has never been addressed by the City Council. Mayor Allen Joines, you asked the community to exercise patience with WSPD for an internal investigation on Officer Jones slamming a 15 year old Black girl to the street just over a week ago. This brutal use of force has been seen by thousands because a community member caught everything on video. The brutality did not end with the girl being slammed to the ground: she was pressed down while two officers held their knees to her back, she was yelled at, and the door was slammed on her when she was forced inside of a patrol vehicle. More importantly: she never should have been stopped by police when she was walking with her friends.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)'s "[Reimagining the role of police](#)," "The harsh reality is that policing in communities of color looks very different than it does in wealthy, white communities." And, even with continued calls for more police training and reform, "Black people are [still arrested at a rate](#) that is almost four times that of white people." Both news media and social scientists have consistently demonstrated that increased police presence does not act as a [deterrent effect](#) and that [increased spending on law enforcement does not lead to reductions in crime rates](#). Policing, especially over-policing of communities of color, results in [more surveillance and social control](#) rather than access to emergency services. In the wake of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the local murder of John Neville, the Winston-Salem community has continued to call upon our elected officials to stop the trend of continued policing as a solution to crime and harm. In fact, in early July of this year, City Council and WSPD received multiple unanswered comments from the public calling for the dismissal of Officer J. Mitchell, who on June 30th was caught on video not wearing a mask and holding a canister of pepper spray in a large gathering. Upon further research, the community learned that Officer J. Mitchell stopped a car with a Black driver and passenger for insurance and registration violations in 2016, but upon allegedly smelling "illegal drugs," Officer J. Mitchell attempted to pull the passenger from the car, leading to an altercation in which Officer J. Mitchell was victimized and glorified by media while the driver and passenger received over 11 arrest charges. In this case of a routine traffic stop, Black community members were harmed by a white WSPD officer who never faced reprimand and continues to intimidate and use excessive force in our community.

City Council members, again when we continue to say divest from the police, we mean reduce the harm of the police in our community. You continue to want more officers, more community policing, more patrol, more surveillance, more task forces, and the list goes on. WSPD uses \$63 million of their \$78 million budget just on personnel. With 712 WSPD personnel out of a total of 2425 city personnel, this means that almost a third of city personnel are WSPD officers. City Council members, there are people among you who take money from the police union, and so we can understand why this would lead to a corruptly motivated support of WSPD in the public eye. But please take time to imagine and strategize with your community of over 250,000 taxpayers how we can better use the general fund for the community and not WSPD personnel. Furthermore, consider where the money that WSPD personnel receives goes--for example, Chief Thompson

doesn't live fulltime in Winston-Salem, so her salary from taxpayers is not being returned to the local community.

The special meeting on November 17th indicated a 1% increase in pay to public safety in 2021 and a 2% increase in pay to public safety in 2022. From 2019 to 2020, the police department budget increased by over 1% while the overall city budget decreased by 1%. The share of general fund revenue spent on policing changed from 2019 to 2021 from 35% to 36%. Spending on police is a larger share of the total city budget in FY21 than it was in FY19, and we are on track to continue this trend into 2022. This should never be the trend in our city spending, and it especially should not be the trend during this pandemic.

At the end of August, City Council held a special meeting to review the WSPD budget, but none of the information shared in this meeting demonstrated any level of scrutiny to the WSPD budget. However, the special meeting on November 17th demonstrated detailed scrutiny as well as dismissals of the community agency funding process. After the long effort taken on by the Community Investments Review Committee to recommend the use of \$1 million for anti-poverty initiatives, it is very clear that city council spends more time scrutinizing funds that would help our community than they do for funds that pay city employees to police our community.

The highest concentration of WSPD officers are in patrol (400 sworn officers, 3 civilian). By calling for the expansion of community-oriented policing and by increasing their salaries, this equates to increased presence of officers with weapons on our streets. In 2019, of over 215,000 dispatch calls responded to by WSPD patrol officers, only 6% were for high crime. WSPD still spends \$359 on average per dispatch - well above the North Carolina state average of \$282. With over 215,000 dispatch calls per year, the city should be prioritizing scrutiny over funding towards WSPD, and WSPD should be prioritizing a reduction in costly dispatch calls in an effort to save money for the city's general fund.

We also want to remind you that community members in our city engaged in a [49-day occupy movement](#) demanding that the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office remove the bent-leg prone restraint from their use-of-force policy. It was the bent-leg prone restraint, implemented by five detention officers and one Wellpath nurse, that led to the death of John Neville in December of 2019. Without any response of support from our city's elected officials, the power of people encouraged FCSO to change their policy, which will [save lives](#). On October 15th, Politico published "How One Police Chief Kept Her City From Blowing Up This Summer," which credits Chief Thompson in peacekeeping an already non-violent series of protests. On October 20th, members of Triad Abolition Project responded with "[Non-violent protests, congratulate police--Violence erupts, blame the protesters?](#)," which provides the true local narrative of the work of our Black women community leaders making transformative changes in our city, not our police nor our police chief.

In a city that prides itself on Arts and Innovation, we call upon our elected officials to respectfully and professionally respond to community members who want our city to work towards innovative solutions to local systemic racism that is perpetuated by harmful over-policing of our Black and brown community. We are disappointed in your silence, but we are not dismayed as we continue to work together towards serving our community. We are disappointed that the special meeting on November 17th did not include public comments, and that when the city council members and financial advisors confirmed that cuts to expenditures are in our city's future, there was no mention of the innovative and harm-reducing option of divesting from policing, which we know has been brought to your attention for months. We look forward to your response.

Signed,

Drum Majors Alliance
Hate Out of Winston
Triad Abolition Project