

Durham City Council Statement on Community Health and Safety

Over the past 10 days, we have received over 4,000 emails calling on us to radically reimagine community safety in Durham. This outpouring of community concern is part of the larger movement against police brutality that has sparked national and international protests. The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN was the most public and recent example of a long history of brutality and racism in police departments in the United States. This must stop. We share the outrage of the people who have written us and the people who have taken their outrage to Durham's streets, and we are committed to doing our part.

The movement to transform policing may be new to some communities but it's not new to Durham. In recent years, community advocates have worked with elected officials to implement numerous reforms to our police department, including requiring written consent for vehicle searches, expanded misdemeanor diversion, expanded access to U-visas, deprioritizing misdemeanor marijuana arrests, and expanding crisis intervention, racial equity and de-escalation training.

Under the stellar leadership of Durham Police Chief CJ Davis — and in response to significant community demand— we've dramatically changed how our police respond to public demonstrations. We want to commend Chief Davis and her staff for the superb work they've done over the last two weeks during the many demonstrations that have been held in Durham to stand against police brutality. Their non-confrontational approach has been an example to the nation. We also want to thank the many organizers who helped create this new kind of response to demonstrators in Durham. And we want to thank the demonstrators themselves who have spoken forcefully against the systemic racism that plagues our community and our nation. We stand with you.

For the last year, our city council has been actively working with community members to develop a plan to create community safety institutions that don't involve police. We anticipate that these new institutions will be able to prevent violence, peacefully intervene and stop ongoing violence, and be able to take on work that is currently performed by police, including responding to crisis calls. After a robust conversation last year about whether to expand the Durham Police Department, we approved the creation of a Community Safety and Wellness Task Force. This task force will explore, research, and recommend initiatives to the council that will make our community safer. We are all committed to seeing this work move forward and to increasing investments in community safety. In this watershed moment for public safety transformation in this country, we find it necessary to take concrete and immediate action toward achieving these goals. Our police budget this year includes no new positions and no new programs or initiatives. We are also making the following commitments tonight to this critical work.

1. We are earmarking an initial investment of \$1M of funding for community safety. A small portion of this funding may be used to support work by the task force and city staff, but the great bulk of this funding will go to the implementation of task force recommendations. This is an initial investment, and we fully anticipate the need for additional and ongoing funding to ensure the success of this work.
2. We will continue to urge the County and school district to join the community safety task force that the City Council has already proposed and approved. Mental health, public health and social services are primarily functions of County government, and the school board oversees our public schools. We want them at the table. This joint task force is the best way to bring our community together around a shared set of concrete proposals for re-imagining public safety in Durham. But if we are unable to secure the participation of the County and the school district by the end of August of this year, we will move the task force forward as a city-only body.
3. We will direct our city manager to begin an evaluation of the police department operations and an audit of our 911 calls in order to identify areas of responsibility currently assigned to the police department that could be reassigned to other existing or new departments in City and/or County government. These areas of responsibility could potentially include responding to mental health crises and assisting with minor traffic incidents, among others.
4. We join Mayor Schewel's pledge to review and reform our city's use of force policies within the next 90 days, and we are appreciative of Chief Davis' and City Manager Bonfield's commitment to this as well. We also commit to ensuring that the Durham Police Department adopt and adhere to best practices in all use of force policies and practices.

We believe that the City of Durham should be safe for all people, and we are ready to work with our community to achieve that vision.